

**ELITE PERCEPTIONS OF SELF,  
NATION AND SOCIETY IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY**

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**Elite Perceptions of Self, Nation and Society in Contemporary Turkey**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **ELITE PERCEPTIONS OF SELF, NATION AND SOCIETY IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY**

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Keywords: elite, education, educated ignorance, secularism, Atatürkism, nationalism.

Based on in-depth interviews with elites who have graduated from two different elite schools, this study examines how Turkish elites socially, culturally and politically position themselves in contemporary Turkey. The narratives of the elites are historicized and contextualized in order to explore the relationship between elite education and emerging nationalism(s) in contemporary Turkey. This study argues that elite educational institutions are the most important agencies in the reproduction of the elite. The results of the research indicate that Turkish elites practice willful ignorance regarding the major political issues of contemporary Turkey. This study problematizes willful and educated ignorance and approaches the non-knowledge of the elites from an epistemological point of view and conceptualizes it within the networks of power relations. This study focuses on one of the challenges Turkish elites struggle with; the conflict between secularism and Islamism. Analyzing the feelings elites associate with the present day status of secularism in Turkey, this study aims to explore elite discourses of danger that construe Islamism and Islamists as the major threat to the Republican value of secularism. I argue that the construction of the secular elite identity is both inspired and supported by Atatürkist nationalism and try to show the clash of secular and Islamist identities through the prism of the headscarf debate in contemporary Turkey.

## ÖZET

### GÜNÜMÜZ TÜRKİYE’SİNDE ELİTLERİN BENLİK, ULUS VE TOPLUM ALGILARI

Ebru Gözaçan Özşahin

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Anahtar sözcükler: elit, eğitim, tahsilli cehalet, sekülerizm, Atatürkçülük, milliyetçilik.

Derinlemesine mülakatlara dayanan bu çalışma, günümüz Türkiye’inde elitlerin kendilerini sosyal, kültürel ve politik olarak nasıl konumlandıklarını araştırmayı amaçlıyor. Günümüz Türkiye’inde ortaya çıkmakta olan milliyetçilik(ler) ve elit eğitim kurumları arasındaki ilişkiyi anlamak için elitlerin anlatıları tarihsellik içinde irdelenerek kavramsallaştırılıyor. Bu araştırma elit okulların elitlerin yetişmesinde en önemli organlardan biri olduğunu savunuyor. Araştırma sonuçları elitlerin Türkiye’nin en belirgin politik meselelerine dair istemli bir bilmeme hali içinde olduklarını gösteriyor. Bilgi yoksunluğunun (tahsilli cehaletin) epistemolojisini yapmaya çalışan bu araştırma elitlerde gözlemediğim bilmeme hallerini sorunsallaştırıyor ve istemli cehaletin aktif bir üretim olduğunu ve iktidar ilişkileri içinde kavramsallaştırılması gerektiğini savunuyor. Bu çalışma Türk elitleri için bir mücadele alanı olan sekülerizm ve İslamcılık çatışmasına odaklanıyor. Elitlerin, Türkiye’de sekülerizmin bugünkü durumuna dair duygularını analiz ederek, İslam ve ve İslamcılar bir cumhuriyet değeri olan sekülerizme karşı en önemli tehdit olarak kurgulayan tehlike söylemlerini inceliyor. Seküler elit kimliğinin Atatürkçü milliyetçilik tarafından beslendiği ve ilham aldığını savunan bu tez, seküler ve İslamcı kimliklerin çatışmasını günümüz Türkiye’inde yaşanmakta olan başörtüsü meselesi üzerinden irdeliyor.

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*To Batuhan*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*June 2008, Graduation Ceremony, Robert College, Istanbul*

*The guest speaker Betül Mardin who is a graduate of Robert College addresses the audience:*

*“It was during the beginning of my first year at College...The tramway to Arnavutköy slowed down in front of Dolmabahçe Palace and the ticket collector rushed towards the gigantic door, stood there for a few moments and when he returned, he loudly said ‘Our Ata has slept well last night and this morning he has almost no fever.’ Everybody applauded him. This went on every day...There were different ticket collectors but the routine was the same. Then a few weeks later, he returned and said with tears running down his cheeks “He is not well at all.” In fact, soon after when we came to school, we received the bad news: We had lost him.*

*I always thought of him as a “father”. I would say “nothing bad can happen, he is there with us” or if something bad really happened then I would say “He’ll pull us out of it...He’ll know what to do”. These were good feelings...Now I would like to ask you to do such wonderful things for our country that you are thought of as a ‘father’ or ‘mother’. In fact, don’t forget that he has given the responsibility of the country to you...the young generation is to take care of the Republic of Turkey...*

*And now, most important...Let us repeat this sentence together...with Atatürk:*

*So happy to be a Turk... (Ne mutlu Türküm diyene...)*

*(Atatürk’s voice...)<sup>1</sup>*

At the end of her speech, Betül Mardin, filled with euphoria, leads the audience to sing the tenth anniversary march (Onuncu Yıl Marşı)<sup>2</sup> which has become one of the most significant indicators of the revelation of the Atatürkist identity. Mardin creates an Andersonian homogeneous empty time<sup>3</sup> of the Turkish nation by playing the voice of

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<sup>1</sup> This speech was delivered in Turkish. The translation into English and the notes in brackets belong to Betül Mardin.

<sup>2</sup> The tenth anniversary march which was composed in the tenth year of the Republic has later become a Republican symbol that has a nostalgic character and is used to silence the oppositional views and publicize the Republican ideology.

<sup>3</sup> Benedict Anderson developed the idea of "homogeneous, empty time," in which "a sociological organism moving calendrically through [it] is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily through history". Two events happening simultaneously, though in separate places, can link the people involved in those events by this precise "simultaneity;" that is, they share a consciousness of a shared temporal dimension in which they co-exist (1983 [2006]).

Atatürk delivering his historical speech on the tenth anniversary of the Republic and connects the audience to the glorious past of the Turkish nation the personifier of which is Atatürk. In order to restore the belief in nationalism and consequently evoke a nationalist sentiment, Mardin uses the image of Atatürk. She imposes a kind of nostalgia for the ‘father’ the Turkish nation has lost, a father who is capable of overcoming all difficulties, a leader who knows what to do in all circumstances and a progenitor who will eventually lead us to the ‘truth’. Since the death of the father, Turkish nation is orphaned; unable to replace the lost father. Mardin not only reminds the new graduates of Robert College how indebted they should be to their father but also induces them to be aware of their most important duty: to protect the Republic of Turkey. Hence, Mardin defines these young people through their duties to the state rather than their rights. Mardin’s imagination of Robert College graduates is more than this: she believes that the most prestigious Robert College graduates are the best candidates to be the future fathers and mothers of the Turkish nation. Mirroring conceptualizations of Turkish modernization as a top down project carried out by the modernizing elites in the foundational years of the Republic (Mardin 1962), Betül Mardin imagines Robert College graduates in positions of power within society as contemporary elites who will advance the modernity project, recreate and reproduce the homology of the Turkish nation.

Almost 130 years ago, another nation was imagined and inspired by Robert College graduates. In the initial years of the college most of the students were Bulgarian. The class of 1869 had six graduates all of whom were Bulgarian, the graduates of the class of 1871 numbered five and were also Bulgarian. All these graduates, followed by other ones, have become Bulgarian elites, and had an immense effect on the independence campaigns against the Ottoman Empire and the nation

building of Bulgaria.<sup>4</sup> The class of 1871, for example, furnished Bulgaria with two mayors, three ambassadors, four members of the national assembly, and three cabinet members two of whom became prime ministers of Bulgaria<sup>5</sup> (Monroe 1914). In short, the most prominent Bulgarian nationalists were educated in Robert College at the end of the nineteenth century.

In those times, Like Robert College, Üsküdar American Academy, has drawn its students from the numerous nationalities of the near east, and like Robert College, Bulgaria has been most largely represented in its student body, and the Bulgarian graduates have exerted the largest measure of influence. About twenty-six per cent of the total number of alumnae have been Bulgars; and many other Bulgarian women have pursued courses in the college and taken the course in the secondary school. All these women have exerted a strong influence among their people. The Bulgarian women who have studied at this Girls' College have rendered most efficient social service in their country, as teachers, nurses, and social workers. Many of them have married prominent statesmen and publicists. Üsküdar American Academy, in the beginning of the 1900s has been well characterized by Bulgarians as “the institution that trains the mothers of our statesmen and leaders” (Monroe 1914, 336).

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<sup>4</sup> Scholars who explored nationalism and the related phenomena argue that elites played a crucial role in the formation of nations (Hobsbawn 1990; Hroch 1996; Smith 1983 [1971], Nairn 1996 [1972], Anderson 1983 [2006]). Elites' role in the process of national movements is due to the influence of ideas and elites' capacity to promulgate these ideas. In Gramsci's terms, these people belong to the intellectual category of the ruling class and have a function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the ruling class (1989 [1971]). Hence, elites, and especially urban intellectuals, are nationalistic well before the rest of the territory's population (Hobsbawn 1990) and responsible for the production and diffusion of the ideas concerning the nation. Similarly, Anthony Smith remarks that “the intelligentsia do, indeed, play a definitive part in the rise of nationalist movements- everywhere” (1983 [1971], 83).

<sup>5</sup> Robert College educated three prime ministers of Bulgaria: Konstantin Stoilov (1853-1901), Todor Ivanchov (1858-1906) and Ivan Evstraitev Geshov (1849-1924) studied at Robert College along with other Bulgarian intellectuals who have served Bulgaria in various ways.

The role that Robert College and Üsküdar American Academy has played in the nation-building process of Bulgaria had been closely observed by the Ottoman statesmen. By schooling, supporting and promoting the most prominent Balkan nationalists, these institutions had thrust themselves into a subversive role in Turkish politics. In so doing, they had turned their back on the possibility of extending their influence into Turkish society for a long time. They had revealed themselves as purely Christian institutions, speaking in the name of Christian minorities in the empire and, if necessary, an active intriguer in their behalf (Greenwood 2000).

The director of Robert College George Washburn (1877-1903) and Professor Albert Long (1872-1901) were on the Ottoman government's list of political agitators. The government could have closed down the college and deport all the professors but the long dreaded Russo-Turkish war about to break and the Ottoman government was in desperate peril and decided not to take any action against Robert College (Greenwood 2000). The college survived. It had lost whatever opportunity it might possibly have to serve Turkey in the last quarter of the nineteenth century as the great internal pressures of reform were to lead ultimately to the collapse of the Ottoman government. No Turkish student was to enter Robert College until near the end of the century and it had no practical influence on westernization movements of the Ottoman Empire. Both Robert College and Üsküdar American Academy for Girls, in those days, were regarded as "traitor" institutions and had an unpleasant reputation within Turkish society.

Times have changed. Today, these institutions are perceived to be the most selective schools which educate the Turkish elites whom have the highest prestige in various fields of social, cultural and political life within Turkey and in the world. The latest and the most contested one of these elites is Orhan Pamuk who is the 2006 Nobel

Laureate in Literature. Pamuk is a Robert College graduate and one of the most prominent novelists of Turkey. His works have been translated to more than 50 languages around the world and he is the one and only Turkish citizen to be awarded with a Nobel Prize. Many Turkish people believe that his being awarded the Nobel Prize was politically motivated. New scenarios were constructed to dishonor both the Nobel Prizes and the Turkish Nobel Laureate by the Turkish mainstream media, various politicians and intellectuals. The scenarios resulted from the remarks that Pamuk made during an interview in February 2005 with the Swiss publication *Das Magazin*. In the interview, Pamuk said that “thirty thousand Kurds have been killed in Turkey and a million Armenians”. Turkish nationalists -furious with anger- started a hate campaign against Pamuk who was retroactively charged with “insulting Turkishness”. In 2006, the charges had dropped because of the international pressure put on Turkey regarding the issue of freedom of speech but the hate campaign forced Pamuk to flee his country.

Turkey could not embrace her only Nobel Laureate. Most of the Turkish people reinvented one of their best novelists as a “traitor” because of the politically loaded speech Pamuk made, and the Nobel prizes as “unworthy” and “dishonorable” awards which are “highly politicized”. Three of my professors who are graduates of either Robert College or Üsküdar American Academy have shared with me that the internal e-mails among graduates of these two colleges contributed to the hate campaign against Orhan Pamuk. Some of the graduates believed that Orhan Pamuk’s Nobel Prize was politically motivated and Turkey’s “outsider enemies” (read Western countries) had orchestrated another game in order to “humiliate” Turkey and Orhan Pamuk had been a part of this game by the speech he made, and had “guaranteed” to win the Nobel Prize. My professors’ accounts of the contents and contexts of these e-mails suggest that the

majority of these graduates adopted a purely nationalistic and narrow approach to the issues of both Orhan Pamuk and Nobel Prizes. The professors have signed out of these e-mail groups. The discussion and the hate campaign still continue. Orhan Pamuk is still not on the honor list of the “firsts” of Robert College’s web page (see page 11). I have learned that the literature teachers of both colleges are reluctant to include his works in the curriculum. What has changed from the time Robert College and Üsküdar American Academy were treated as “traitor schools” for schooling and educating Bulgarian intellectuals to the present time when some intellectual graduates of these schools, motivated by nationalistic sentiments, can undoubtedly and unhesitatingly label a prominent novelist of Turkey as a “traitor” because of the speech that he made and downgrade one of the most prestigious literature awards<sup>6</sup> in the world?

Sylvia Walby suggests that nation building is a continuous process which operates with ‘rounds of restructuring’. For Walby, “rather than one critical period of ‘nation formation’ it is more appropriate to talk about “rounds of restructuring” of the nation state” (1996, 246). In order to understand the current round of restructuring of nationalization process in Turkey, it is necessary to elucidate the changing political conditions that Turkey had been going through since the 1990s. I agree with Ümit Cizre

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<sup>6</sup> Needless to say that Orhan Pamuk has won many other literature awards before and after he made “the controversial speech”. Some of these awards are: 1983 Orhan Kemal Novel Prize (Turkey) for his novel *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları*, 1984 Madaralı Novel Prize (Turkey) for his novel *Sessiz Ev*, 1990 Independent Foreign Fiction Prize (United Kingdom) for his novel *Beyaz Kale*, 1991 Prix de la Découverte Européenne (France) for the French edition of *Sessiz Ev : La Maison de Silence*, 1991 Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival (Turkey) Best Original Screenplay *Gizli Yüz*, 1995 Prix France Culture (France) for his novel *Kara Kitap : Le Livre Noir*, 2002 Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger (France) for his novel *My Name Is Red : Mon Nom est Rouge*, 2002 Premio Grinzane Cavour (Italy) for his novel *My Name Is Red*, 2003 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (Ireland) for his novel *My Name Is Red*, 2005 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade (Germany), 2005 Prix Médicis étranger (France) for his novel *Snow : La Neige*, 2006 Washington University’s Distinguished Humanist Award (United States), 2006 Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (France), 2008 Ovidius Prize (Romania), 2010 Norman Mailer Lifetime Achievement Award (USA).

and Menderes Çınar (2003) who argue that no major element of Turkish politics at present can be understood without reference to the February 28, 1997 when military-dominated National Security Council (NSC) issued the coalition government of Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) and True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi) with a list of measures designed to nullify the supposed Islamization of Turkey and fortify the secular system. Subsequently, the coalition government collapsed in June 1997. The plan of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) during the February 28 process was to refashion Turkey's political landscape along Kemalist lines and ensure the continuity of the basic assumptions of the Kemalist model the guiding vision of which is a Westernizing/civilizing ideology whose inconvertible maxims are secularism, a modern/Western identity and life-style, and the cultural homogeneity and territorial unity of nation.

Before the February 28 process, the Islamist movement argued that the Westernizing elite of Turkey was preventing people's moral development and singled out secularism as the main focus of its criticism (Cizre and Çınar 2003). This Islamist stance against secularism was the main constitutive element that (re)constructed the perception of threat by the Turkish secular public who construed Islamism and Islamists as symbols of potential danger to the republican values and Western life-styles. Among these Islamists, a reformist faction separated itself and eventually formed the Justice and Development Party (AKP) under the leadership of Tayyip Erdoğan and came to power in the elections of 2002, won a second term in office with a clear victory in 2007. Today, the rising power of AKP which has Islamist roots disturbs secular middle and upper-middle classes to such an extent that "two Turkeys" continue to push their competing visions for the country's future. One broad camp comprises supporters of

secular republican tradition founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, while the other is made up of those who want to reshape the Republic, chiefly along Islamist lines (Baran 2008).

This trajectory of Turkish political life shaped the discussions of this research. I think that the current polarization of Turkey along the aforementioned two different lines is very important in understanding the responses of my interviewees. A working understanding of the political landscape of contemporary Turkey is necessary to make unfailing and effective assessments on the perceptions and feelings of my interviewees. This study, therefore, aims to analyze the positioning of the contemporary Turkish elites in the current round of restructuring of the nation state, and asks: what does it mean to be a graduate of an “elite” school? What is the role of elite schools in the formation of elites? How do the elites socially position themselves in contemporary Turkey? How are social distinctions generated, enhanced, legitimated? What kind of nationalism(s) are emerging in contemporary Turkey and how do the elites internalize and/or idealize these nationalism(s)? What is the role of the elites in the discursive reproduction of secular identities and how do they realize their secular and national selves?

One of the arguments that inform this study is that there is a structural homology between elite schools and “space of positions” (Bourdieu 1996) elites occupy. In an attempt to study perceptions and manifestations of “self” and the “other” from the perspective of individuals who belong to the upper-middle class –that is the “elite” of contemporary Turkey- I have interviewed the graduates of two “elite” schools; Robert College and Üsküdar American Academy. This study has an “upward gaze” in the words of Sarah Neal (2009), aiming to analyze how contemporary elites socially position themselves and examine the structures that shape their social attitudes. It is also



an attempt to contribute to the gap in Turkish scholarly literature on the formation, reproduction and conceptualization of the Turkish elites.

### **1.1. Why Study Elites?**

In a study to explore the cultural engagement of contemporary British elites, Wande and Bennett argue that there are striking similarities in British elites' tastes both by way of norm and practice. All read, all like classical music, almost all go to orchestral concerts, more significantly, almost all are regular visitors to the opera which plays "a central role in the mobilization, organizations and connections of this stratum" (2008, 243). Almost all frequently visit art galleries, concerts and theatres which form a part of the regular social rhythms and expectations of their professional lives. Following Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization and terminology, Wande and Bennett argue that British elites endow marks of distinction (a specialty, a manner, a life-style), and represent high-class *habitus*. These authors portray a picture of significant involvement of elite members in the governance of culture and show that elites are not an aggregate but a cohesive group which has its own norms and practices.

These patterns of cultural consumption, as well as cultural governance, show that elites have a significant role in the reproduction of the cultural field. Within this context, I understand cultural consumption to be the engagement of the elite in exclusive activities, marking their separation from other groups in society by their prestige and refinement. Cultural governance, on the other hand, is a control technique to secure and maintain this separation (Wande and Bennett 2008).

I argue that looking into the structures and systems that create the involvement and governance of elites in various fields is fundamental to understanding the social

dynamics of change. I agree with Castells who argues that “the fundamental form of domination in our society is based on the organizational capacity of the dominant elite that goes hand in hand with the capacity to disorganize those groups in society which, while constituting a numerical majority, see their interests partially (if ever) represented only within the framework of the fulfillment of dominant interests” (quoted in Savage and Williams 2008, 2).

Who, then, are the elites? How do they become elite? What is the mechanism that reproduces the dominance of a few selected individuals? How does the selection process occur? What is the role of these individuals in cultural, social and political life? In order to find answers to these questions, social scientists need to study “up” for “the quality of life may depend upon the extent to which citizens understand those who shape attitudes and actually control institutional structures” (Nader 1973, 284).

From an anthropological point of view, Laura Nader argues that anthropologists may gain new perspectives by studying up as well as studying down (1973). Observing the abundant literature on the poor, the disempowered and the disadvantaged, she problematizes the tendency to study only down. However, this one sided approach to power relations, she suggests, may prevent the anthropologist to capture the whole picture within which not only the non-elite but also the elite are active agents capable of regenerating new questions that may enhance the scientific adequacy of any analyses on networks of power. In other words, a double-sided approach to power relations may enable the social scientist to attain a working understanding of power in terms of the processes that generate any form of social action, relationship or order.

It is the invisibility of the elites in social sciences that has initially invigorated me to study up. Recognizing the prominence of elites in the global order, I argue that

scrutinizing few distinguished individuals who exercise power over the many, is fundamental to understanding the dynamics of contemporary social change. However, it should be noted that, although my research takes the unit of observation as individuals, the key to the task of problematizing power relations is not to be found in the elites themselves but in the broader systems, processes and structures of which they are part. Hence, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms, this study aims to explore the "space of positions" which is occupied by the elites (Wacquant 1993). In other words, I will try to problematize the politics of power by studying "up" rather than studying "down".

## **1.2. The Characteristics of Elite Schools**

What are the characteristics of these educational institutions that are called the "elite schools"? What makes these schools exceptional by the standard of most public schools? Apparently, they not only provide education but also "serve the latent function of acculturating the members of the younger generation, especially those not quite to the manor born, into an upper style of life" (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009, 1091). According to Gaztambide-Fernandez, who is an education specialist, elite schools can be discussed along five dimensions. (1) Elite schools are typologically elite: they are independent schools. The characteristics of an independent school can be defined as: "self-governance, self-support, self-defined curriculum, self-selected students, self-selected faculty and small size" (2009, 1100). (2) These schools are scholastically elite: "based on both the expansive and sophisticated curricula they offer and their particular pedagogical approaches" (ibid, 1093). (3) Elite schools are historically elite, based on the role of elite social networks in their historical development. (4) They are geographically elite, based on their physical character and location. (5) Elite schools are demographically elite, based on the population that attends them. A discussion of the

pre-eminence of RC<sup>7</sup> and UAA<sup>8</sup> as elite schools along these five dimensions is presented below.

### 1.2.1. Robert College (RC)

*Typologically elite:* RC was established in 1863 in the era of *Tanzimat* (1839-71). Like the other missionary schools in Istanbul, RC was the offspring of the Ottoman Empire's attempts to "modernize" which was conceptualized as "westernization". It has been governed by a self-perpetuating board of trustees and has self-supported itself by fundraising since then. Since 1926, it has been obliged to implement the curriculum defined by the Ministry of Education. However, with the exceptional rights granted to it by the Lausanne Treaty (1923), like all other missionary schools, RC (and other foreign private schools) has the privileged advantage of managing the national curriculum in a more flexible way, more than any Turkish private or minority school can.<sup>9</sup> Students are admitted to RC on the basis of a highly competitive national examination. As a general rule, new students are drawn from the top 5% of those taking the examination.

*Scholastically elite:* The statement of purpose of RC is; "Today, RC seeks to graduate young men and women with the skills, insights, and determination to function as leaders and contributing citizens in a wide range of social and cultural roles, both locally and internationally" ([www.robcol.k12.tr](http://www.robcol.k12.tr)). To satisfy these goals, RC offers sophisticated courses of study which can also be evaluated by the success of the graduates in different

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<sup>7</sup> On Robert College see John Freely, *A History of Robert College*, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2000; *A Bridge of Culture: Robert College and Boğaziçi University*, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2009; Keith M. Greenwood, *Robert College: The American Founders*, Boğaziçi University Press, 2000; Hester Donaldson Jenkins, *Robert Kolej'in Kızları*, Dergah Yayınları, 2008; Mary Mills Patrick, *Son Sultanların İstanbulu'nda*, Dergay Yayınları, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> On Üsküdar American Academy see Fay Linder, *The History of Üsküdar American Academy 1876-1996*, SEV Printing and Publication, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that Ministry of National Education is the centralized body in Turkey which makes all the decisions regarding the educational issues mentioned here. I am not saying that RC is free to define its own curricula but rather has the autonomy to act with less restrictions compared to other type of schools.

areas of life. “Robert College is proudly responsible for the first female college professor, the first chief delegate to the U.N., the first novel written in English by a Turkish author, the first Turkish actress to perform on American and English stages, the first Turkish ambassador to China, the first TV director, the first Minister of Culture, the first Turkish playwright on Broadway, the first female Turkish piano virtuoso, the CEO of the largest Turkish non-government bank, the CEO of the largest Turkish industrial company...”(www.robcol.k12.tr).<sup>10</sup>

*Historically elite:* RC is the first missionary school founded in Turkey. Its initial purpose was to provide higher education. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, higher education institution facilities of RC were donated to the Turkish government and Boğaziçi University was founded. How RC perceives itself as a historically elite school is worth noting: “Robert College graduates have had, and continue to have, a remarkable influence on the Republic of Turkey and its role in the society of nations. No time is more critical than the present to support the mission of this historic institution: to educate Turkey’s brightest young people- its future leaders- who will determine the path of this nation of enormous strategic importance” (www.robcol.k12.tr).

*Geographically elite:* RC’s location and physical character suffice to define it as a geographically elite school. It sits on a 65 acre wooded campus overlooking the Bosphorus on the European side of Istanbul, home to both historic and modern buildings, centennial trees and a rich fauna. The setting and the facilities is a very unique one compared to all other high school campuses in Turkey and is much better equipped in many ways even when compared to university campuses in Turkey. The

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<sup>10</sup> The first Nobel Prize winner is not mentioned on the website.

campus is situated in one of the highest socio-economic neighborhoods of Istanbul, between Ulus and Arnavutkoy.

*Demographically elite:* Because of its high tuitions, only families with high income can afford sending their children to RC. However, in an effort to work against the presumption of elitism, RC is working hard to claim that the demographics of their students are more inclusive than they actually are. RC is granting scholarship to “bright” students from Anatolia and trying to change the face of its student body.

### **1.2.2. Üsküdar American Academy (UAA)**

*Typologically elite:* UAA was founded in 1876 in Bahçeçik by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. It has been governed by the American Board of trustees and self-supported itself by fund-raising until The Health and Education Foundation (SEV) was founded. SEV was established in 1968 by the graduates of the American Board Schools, namely, the American Collegiate Institute in İzmir, the Tarsus American College and the Üsküdar American Academy and some foreigners. The property of the schools was gradually transferred from the foreign owners to SEV and in the 1980s foreigners resigned because the new law on foundations did not allow foreigners to serve on the board of directors. Today, SEV owns and governs UAA without the support of the American Board. In 2010, SEV took the decision of leaving its status of being a foreign school and applied to the Ministry of Education to operate as a Turkish private school. The application was accepted. The results of this decision and the new status are yet to be seen. The school is obliged to implement the curriculum defined by the Ministry of Education. Students are admitted to UAA on the basis of a highly competitive national examination. As a general rule, new students are drawn from the top 5% of those taking the examination. UAA selects its own teachers and administration.

*Scholastically elite:* Üsküdar American Academy aims to pursue “excellence in education” in a time of rapid change within the Turkish culture. UAA’s immense experience in education supports it in providing sophisticated and challenging courses to its student body. Until UAA became a co-educational institution in 1990, its objective was to “help Turkish women through knowledge, skills and aptitude, to bridge the gaps between the traditional role of women that was called for by a modern, changing world, with emphasis on serving mankind” (Linder 2000, 126). The teaching environment at UAA is very demanding both personally and professionally. Teachers need to possess qualities such as sensitivity, tolerance, and flexibility. Further, they need to have sound teaching skills, which are challenged on a daily basis. If the prospective candidate understands these special attributes of the school, then he or she could be a valued addition to the faculty.

*Historically elite:* UAA is one of the first missionary schools founded in the lands of the Ottoman Empire. It started its mission as an Armenian Girls’ Schools which in those days provided an exceptional education for girls in Bahçeçik (Bardizak is the original Armenian name) and later in Adapazarı. Gradually, it became an international school located in Constantinople welcoming all national groups and teaching them in English and Turkish. After the Republican reforms, it became a completely secular institution with an emphasis on the training of the “Turkish women of the future”.

*Geographically elite:* The current campus of Üsküdar American Academy is situated on a hill in a residential district of Üsküdar. The school campus includes 8 buildings sited on 18,000 square meters. Currently a long-term renovation program is in place to modernize the physical plant. The UAA is best known for its beautiful gardens with lovely trees and flowers.

*Demographically elite:* UAA, like RC, serves a very small portion of the student population in Turkey. It aims to select the “best” students whose families can afford high tuitions. The selection procedure and high tuitions imply also the selection of families with social, cultural and economic capital as well as the disposition to recognize the unique advantages that this institution can transmit the students.

### **1.3. Research Design**

The purpose of this study is to examine the views of individuals who belong to the middle-upper class in contemporary Turkey. These individuals, having graduated from elite schools and occupying positions of power within social institutions and systems, will be taken to be representatives of the Turkish elites. However, this study is not interested in particular events or individuals but rather in the political values, attitudes and beliefs of the elites. Hence, it aims to examine important parameters that guide the elite’s definition of problems and their responses to them. In other words, it is a study about the shared *habitus* of the elite; an attempt to access to the embeddedness of perceptions, feelings, thinking and situatedness of the elites. I am aware of the fact that a *habitus study* cannot be conducted solely on interviews. Therefore, I have incorporated my own experiences and observations into the research. However, this study still remains limited but hopefully it will provide a ground for other researchers who can utilize for carving out space for elite-based research in Turkey.

In order to gauge the subtle aspects of elite views of contemporary Turkey, I have conducted semi-structured and open-ended interviews with 19 elites who have graduated from Robert College and Üsküdar American Academy (see Appendix). My interview questions covered the following areas:



- 1) Life Story: Family information, school experience, education, occupation and profession
- 2) Nation and nationalism(s)
- 3) The Kurdish question
- 4) The Armenian question
- 5) Ataturkism and Atatürk
- 6) Rise of Islamism, secularism, Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the headscarf controversy
- 7) Perceptions and feelings about the future of Turkey.

The interviewees whose privacy I have attempted to protect in the following pages were randomly selected. Out of 19 interviewees 12 are women and 7 are men. Having middle or upper-middle class families, the group of people I have interviewed value education above everything else. They are all competent at least in one Western language. All of them are professionals who have expertise in one or more areas and occupy leading positions with prestigious careers. They either run their own businesses or work as highly qualified professionals for the leading domestic or international companies/institutions/organizations in Turkey. They all belong to high socio-economic class. Both their houses and work places are located in the most prestigious neighborhoods of Istanbul. Most of them have spent long periods of time in USA and/or Europe either studying or working or both.

Elite interviewing –like other interviews- has some methodological challenges and difficulties. Some scholars argue that the basic challenge of elite interviewing is the methodological difference between “studying up” and “studying down”. “Studying up” is an inquiry on the elite who are in positions of power whereas “studying down” is concerned with “ordinary, powerless people” (Neal and McLaughlin 2009; Morris 2007; Conti and O’Neill 2007; Smith 2005; Kezar 2003; Neal 1995; Cormode and Hughes 1999). Margaret Desmond, who problematizes elite interviews, suggests that “working in an elite field poses major difficulties which stem from the challenges of

researching up, which are quite different to those encountered in studying down” (2004, 262). It is assumed that when studying down, the power imbalance between people who are researched and the researcher is basically in favor of the latter. Studying up, on the other hand may reverse this power imbalance because of the tendency of the elites to manipulate and/or take control of the interview. Sarah Neal voices this challenge of having an “upward gaze” during her doctoral research by arguing that power very much seemed to reside with her research participants rather than herself and any attempt to flatter research relationship was not only difficult but also inappropriate (1995).

Do we need such an up/down distinction at all? Aren't *all* interviews based on relations of power? Is it possible for the researcher to control all the outcomes of any interview in the so-called “easier” field of studying down? Relationships of any kind can embody power dynamics; this difficulty should not necessarily be confined to the context of elite-based research but rather should be tackled as a methodological challenge in qualitative research. Matt Bradshaw argues that the up/down distinction has at least two difficulties: “first, it implies that power is held by one individual, who is powerful, in relation to, who is powerless; and second, it suggests that one set of rules can be used to research up, while another can be used to research down” (2001, 204). I agree with Bradshaw and, following Foucault, perceive power as a potential rather than always possessed (1990). This view treats power as something which is “exercised but not appropriated” (Desmond 2006, 645). Power is exercised through different modalities such as coercion, seduction, domination, manipulation, etc. but the person who exercises it may be changing constantly. This is the reason why I preferred to look into the structures of domination rather than individuals who seem to possess power. Transferring this view to the interview space, I think that neither the researcher nor the

researched is consistently powerful and interview is not a power game but a ‘negotiation process.’ “All participants in a research collective possess power. Research may be largely initiated by one powerful actor (the researcher), but it is then translated and transformed with others (research participants), differently powerful. In short, research is a fundamentally negotiated project” (Bradshaw 2001, 204).

To conclude, the methodological approach of this thesis was not based on an understanding that seeks to protect the vulnerable researcher against the all-powerful elites who may manipulate or take control of the interview. It is rather based on a realization that complex modalities of power which are embedded in every interview situation exist. All kinds of inequalities such as social status, gender, age, ethnicity etc., are part of our lives and all interview situations. My aim as a researcher was to navigate between and negotiate these different modalities of power.

I also want to highlight some practical insights on elite interviewing: *Gaining Access*: One initial challenge of the researcher of the elite is the difficulty in gaining access to the elite. (Neal and McLaughlin 2009; Morris 2007; Conti and O’Neill 2007; Smith 2005; Desmond 2004; Lilleker 2003; Kezar 2003; Berry 2002; Cormode and Hughes 1999; Marshall 1984; Zuckerman 1972; Smigel 1958). When studying the elite, the researcher is dependent on the cooperation of a relatively small number of people who are not accessible without the help of intermediaries. I have reached the elites through my friends, relatives and business environment.

*Presentation of the research*: Harriet Zuckerman who has done an extensive research on the Nobel laureates, whom she calls ultra elites, provides insight about the attitudes of the elites toward the prospect of being interviewed (1972). First of all, the request of the interview should be legitimate and legitimacy is judged by the researcher’s affiliations.

In other words, the content of the interview and the nature of the research project should be acceptable by the standards of the elites. I tried to give a succinct explanation of the research project to the prospect respondent. Also, I tried to be ready to answer all the questions about confidentiality and anonymity. Most of the respondents I have interviewed, openly declared that they would consent to interview only if confidentiality and anonymity is guaranteed.

*Style of questions:* Open-ended questions provide a greater opportunity for the respondents to organize their thoughts within their own framework (Aberbach and Rockman 2002, Stephens 2007). However, one should be aware that the elites constantly evaluate the performance of the researcher and “detect whether questions are standardized or tailored to their interests and histories. They resent being encased in the straightjacket of standardized questions (Zuckerman, 1972). Hence, I tried to conduct a conversational mode of interview which was shaped by both the researcher and the respondent. In this mode, I tried to effectively listen both to the voices and silences of the respondent and acted upon what s/he hears without standardizing the interview.

*Time constraint:* Organization of the research becomes a critical issue in elite interviews because elites are busy people who have very little or no time for the researcher. Most of the times, a second interview is impossible, as it was in my case. Hence, I paid utmost attention to the productivity of the interviews in the limited time that is offered to me because managing time in elite interviews may have crucial implications on the research project (Neal and McLaughlin 2009; Morris 2007; Conti and O’Neill 2007; Smith 2005; Lilleker 2003; Kezar 2003; Berry 2002; Cormode and Hughes 1999; Marshall 1984; Smigel 1958).

## 1.4. Chapter Outlines

In the first chapter, I examine the elite perceptions of “us” and the “other”. I try to provide a theoretical overview of social distinctions and how these distinctions are generated, enhanced and legitimated. With an attempt to come up with a working definition of “elite”, I examine how elites are reproduced. I study the elites I have interviewed within a Bourdieusian framework and focus on key concepts of Bourdieusian theory such as distinction, habitus, cultural capital and symbolic power.

In the second chapter, in an attempt to study “educated ignorance”, I problematize the practices of “not knowing” among the elites. I ask questions about the underlying motives and reasons in the production of educated ignorance. I inquire into an epistemology of ignorance and ask how elite privilege is constituted in Turkey through an epistemology of ignorance. I argue that willful ignorance of the elites is an active production and should be conceptualized within the networks of power relations. Tracing ignorance in the two controversial issues of Turkey, namely Kurdish and Armenian questions, I try to show that willful ignorance serves the latent function of sustaining elite positions.

In the third chapter, I look into secular/anti-secular polarization in Turkey and try to examine the (re)construction of secular elite identity and the nationalistic discourses that inspire or are supported by this identity. I analyze the headscarf debate through the prism of secular elite discourses and problematize assertive, authoritarian secularism. I attempt to show that the discourse of Atatürkist nationalism the elites tend to internalize and/or idealize generates a politics of anxiety and fear which deepens the polarization in Turkey.

## CHAPTER 2

### ELITES AND SOCIAL DISTINCTIONS

How do the Turkish elites socially position themselves in contemporary Turkey? This is one of the main questions of this research. The questions I posed during the interviews I had with elites shaped our discussions around the axis of Turkey's central issues, such as the Kurdish and Armenian questions, rise of Islamism and the headscarf controversy, around perceptions and manifestations of freedom and democracy and, around feelings like anxiety and fear. These were all believed to have vital importance in shaping Turkey's future and none of the elites were disinterested. On the contrary, they were highly motivated to share their views sincerely and openly with me. However, I have observed that, whatever was discussed, the elites are socially distinct, culturally different and politically distant to the issues we have elaborated. Each and every narrative, in their own way has the tendency to mark a difference between "us" and "them", and the desire to remain distant to "them". İdil (35) sums up this attitude by saying that "this is not my life, I do not live my life around these things. They don't affect me in any way. They are not a part of my life, my being and presence".

The established distinctions of the elites are reinforced by positioning themselves "above" or "outside" of central issues in Turkey, the implications of which will be discussed in Chapter 2. In order to secure the established distinctions, the elites "label" the "other" so that "we" can be properly named. This self-acclaimed authority to speak in the name of others is a by-product of "educational qualifications" which enables and empowers the elites to discern "us" from the "others". Seher (60), for instance, who has been to the east and southeast part of Turkey many times because of her occupation, thinks that Kurds are "*gariban*" (wretched) who have been oppressed

by both poverty and the tribal system “which in itself has created a kind of compulsory slavery”. Kurds are “underdeveloped” (Melike-30), “backward” (Dilek-60), “ignorant” (Murat-36), “uneducated” (Ahmet-66), “not ready for full democracy” (Filiz-49), and “have nothing to lose” (Gülsen-69). Silva (71) who is an Armenian-Turkish labels the Armenians living in Anatolia as *bayat Ermeniler* (stale Armenians) whereas Sevim (28) who is also Armenian believes that Armenia is full of *ayı* (bear) which, in Turkish slang is used as an adjective signifying “those” who lack manners, prestige and refinement. She adds to her remarks that the Eastern Turkey is very similar to Armenia in the sense that Kurds are also lacking “distinctive” qualities.

As for minorities, e.g. Armenians and Jews, Ahmet (66) believes that “they have no *real* practical problems about living in Turkey, the discrimination discourse of minorities is an invention of the West which is best known for its hostility towards Turks and Turkey” (Ahmet-66). But again, Armenians are “traitors and liars”, they “betrayed us” (Serap-58). “It is true that decisions with unpleasant consequences were taken” (Gülsen-69) such as the deportation of Armenians in 1915, but “there was no other way, The Armenians had revolted against us” (Sarp-35). “Even if there has been *minor* Armenian casualties during these events” (Defne-25) the “barbarian Turks” (Seher-60) are responsible for them. Present-day Turks are believed to have no accountability in these events, therefore “making an apology for 1915 events a useless, unnecessary and an inappropriate behavior” (Murat-36).

Remarkable examples of otherization narratives can be multiplied. Otherization engenders distinctions, distances and differences, and seeks ways to legitimize the internalized systematic opposition to other classes and ethnicities. The purpose of this chapter is to theoretically analyze how social distinctions are generated, enhanced and

legitimated. The arguments that inform this analysis are a) elite educational institutions are one of the most important agencies of class reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) and b) the enhancement of distinction and legitimation of culture is secured and sustained through the attainment and possession of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capitals.

## **2.1. Who are the Elite?**

With a view to obtaining an initial overview and clarification of the concept of “elite”, I shall start with consulting *New Keywords: a Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, where Tony Bennett provides the following definition. “Elite implies a process of selection- which maybe natural, social or cultural- through which a few are distinguished from the many. [...] When the term is applied to social sciences, there is a further connotation that the few are not just distinguished from, but exercise some form of power over the many” (2005, 99).

Viewed historically, the concept of the “elite” was developed in the eighteenth century by the aspiring French bourgeoisie as a democratic rallying cry in the struggle to break the hegemony of aristocracy and clergy (Hartmann 2007, 2). However, a review of the literature reveals that the term elite was not widely used in social and political writing until 1919 when Vilfredo Pareto defined the concept of the elite in order to emphasize the inequality of individual endowment in every sphere of social life (Bottomore 1993; Hartmann 2007). Both Pareto and another Italian social scientist Gaetano Mosca (1939) saw the nature of elites as fundamental to understanding the characteristics of their societies. However, their main concern was to reveal the structural differences of the “governing elite”, or the “political elite” or the “ruling class” (terms which are used almost interchangeably) as compared to the masses: the



non-elite. Hence, within these major works of elite theory proposed by Pareto and Mosca, it is not possible to talk about the “plurality of elites” but rather a single category of elites which we may term as the political elites who are in a position of influencing the exercise of political power. Also, this contrast between the elite and the masses creates a dichotomy where power is regarded to be fixed and always in the hands of the minority of political elites (Bottomore 1993; Hartmann 2007).

In contemporary societies, it is neither possible to define the elite as only those exercising “political” power nor to divide the whole society into two main strata: the ruling minority and the ruled majority. “There are only functional or sectoral or sub elites whose members are distinguished from the rest of the population by the top positions they hold in various sectors of society, and which give them a decisive influence on the development of the society” (Hartmann 2007, 3). Individual performance becomes an important parameter in attaining power positions. Moreover, the mobile nature of the present day elites requires breaking up with the essentialist thinking and adopting a relational mode of thinking which allows us to grasp simultaneously different forms of power acknowledging the plurality of elites. It is possible to analyze different forms of power through the political, bureaucratic, managerial, military, judiciary, intellectual, economic, business, media, culture, sporting, religious elites each of which can be historicized in the development of a given society.

## **2.2. Reproduction of the Elite**

Can all social groups become elite depending on their individual performance? What are the mechanisms that produce and perpetuate power? What are the conditions under which elites reproduce themselves? C. Wright Mills, in *The Power Elite* (1959)

examines the “real” centers of power in the USA. For him, real centers of power are those who are ruling large economic, political and military organizations and he calls this group of people the *power elite*. He argues that becoming elite is not only a matter of meritocracy. Individual performance is necessary to access these positions but it is not sufficient. Social origin, for Mills, is an important parameter in becoming elite, gaining access to elite positions requires one to be a representative of the upper class. Moreover, his studies on American power elite show that, schooling plays an important role in the reproduction of the elite. Mills argues that the elite schools are “the most important agencies for transmitting the traditions of the upper social classes, and regulating the admission of new wealth” (1959, 64-65).

Similarly, in *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (1989), Pierre Bourdieu carries out extensive research on the French school system, mainly on *grandes écoles* which are educational establishments outside the mainstream public university system. He argues that elite schools provide the basic condition for the reproduction of the elite. In an interview with Wacquant, Bourdieu explains the role of the elite schools as follows: “There exists a structural homology between *grandes écoles* and what I call the ‘field of power’, and that the originality of these *grandes écoles* consists not in the mere fact that they reproduce the ruling class by ensuring favored access to positions of leadership for the children from this class, but that their main function is to reproduce a structure, that is, a system of differences and distances” (1993, 19). He claims these children to be consecrated. “The *grandes écoles* produce individuals who are perceived to be –and who perceive themselves to be– of a different kind, of a superior essence, that is separate in absolute terms, in terms of ascription: no matter what they do, what they do is different” (28).

The argument that western educational institutions are one of the most important agencies of class reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1989; Anderson 1991) implies that rather than acting as "social mobility escalators" for the "more talented" members of ethnic/racial minorities and the white working and middle classes, the educational system has a strong tendency to reproduce the existing social order by devaluing the cultural capital of dominated groups. "By judging, classifying, and tracking students from dominated class fractions on the basis of the alien standards of the dominant, schools perpetuate the extant status hierarchy" (Allen and Anderson 1994).

Ali Arslan (2004) who has conducted research on the educational backgrounds of contemporary Turkish elites argues that the quality and type of education obtained in Turkish elite schools and universities has significant influence in achieving elite positions. Without problematizing the power relations in contemporary Turkey, Arslan supports his argument by a detailed analysis of those in power positions and their educational background.

A more detailed study on the changing parameters of educational field and class relations in Turkey is provided in *Reproducing Class* (2009) by Henry J. Rutz and Erol M. Balkan. Rutz and Balkan observe a significant polarization within the middle classes in Turkey since the 1980s. The emergence of a new middle class with a struggle for distinction, according to the authors, was fueled by the new neo-liberal landscape, characterized by commodification, financialization, and privatization. This new middle class aimed to distinguish itself from the others in terms of work and life-styles.

Alongside the privatization of education, schooling, in this period, increasingly appeared to be an important field of social distinction. The study of Rutz and Balkan is

mainly concerned with the relationship between the formation of a new upper middle class and transformations in elite education. They argue that, the formation of a privileged class in Turkey is reinforced and constituted by the neo-liberal state, market, and family. The neo-liberal state reshapes the educational hierarchy with the help of educational reforms that “institutionalized and legitimated the values and practices of a new middle class” (p. 39). These reforms set the rules and regulations to be able to attend to or “win” the most “prestigious” schools. These schools promise a “comfortable material and social future life” since the graduates of these schools have higher chances in succeeding in national university entrance examination and accessing to “prestigious” universities the diplomas of which are etiquettes and tickets for top positions in the job market.

New middle class families that are eager to send their children to prestigious high schools seek to ensure that their children will establish for themselves a secure and privileged place in the newly emerging educational hierarchies of the neoliberal era. Hence, according to Rutz and Balkan, the family, surrounded by the rising tide of the market and neoliberal restructuring of the state, remains a vital institution for reproducing new middle classes in Turkey.

### **2.3. A Theory of Distinction**

Using observation and survey data collected over many years, Pierre Bourdieu attempted to reveal that the regularities of taste within life-styles are produced by social regularities which always have the potential to generate effects of cultural demarcation or distinction. For Bourdieu, cultural practices are markers of underlying class distinctions and cultural differences serve as markers of class differences. Class differences find expression in status distinctions that rank individuals and groups on

scales of social honorability rather than in terms of economic interest only. He writes, “social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed” (1984, 6).

Cultural practices are engendered by the same general dispositions, *habitus*, as eating preferences, dress styles, sporting interests, and other facets of day to day culture. The sense of distinction, which is the hallmark of legitimate culture, is a form of cultural capital that is transmitted both by the family and by the school. Schooling, according to Bourdieu, plays a central role in inculcating the acknowledgment of superiority, or elite standards of taste. Cultural knowledge derives its value from its potential to generate acts of cultural distinction or demarcation. Elite preferences express systematic opposition to those of other classes. Preferences and tastes are legitimated in that they appear to originate from qualities of charisma, knowledge, and aptitude rather than from distance, from necessity. Bourdieu argues that all symbolic forms function to generate social distinction with a claim of legitimate culture and acknowledgement of superiority.

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu introduces the term “habitus” which helps in explaining the mechanisms that produce and perpetuate power (1977). He sees a person’s habitus as mediating between this person’s position in social space and his or her life style. Habitus is a system of dispositions, a general, basic stance which determines a person’s perception, feeling, thinking, behavior and which more than anything else, marks the boundaries drawn for every individual by his/her social origin and position. In an interview Bourdieu outlines these boundaries as follows: “A

person, who has for example, a petty bourgeois habitus, simply has, as Marx says, boundaries in his brain which he cannot cross. He for this reason finds certain things simply unthinkable, impossible (quoted in Hartmann 2007, 48).

In this sense, habitus for Bourdieu is “structured and a structuring structure” (quoted in Maton 2008, 51). It is “structured” by one’s past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences. It is “structuring” in that one’s habitus helps to shape one’s present and future practices. It is a “structure” in that it is systematically ordered rather than random or unpatterned. This structure comprises a system of dispositions which generate perceptions, appreciations and practices (Grenfell 2008; Swartz 1997). Bourdieu writes “the habitus is a system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices” (quoted in Harker, Mahar and Wilkes 1990, 11). These dispositions or tendencies are durable in that they last over time, and transposable in being capable of becoming active within a wide variety of social actions. Habitus has a differentiating dimension in that dispositions are markers of social positioning.

The relational analysis of Bourdieu on high-class habitus and educational institutions is worth noting. The schools, he argues, take the habitus of the dominant group as the natural and only proper sort of habitus and treat children as if they had equal access to it. “The culture of the elite is so near to that of the school that children from lower middle classes [...] can only acquire with great effort something which is given to the children of the cultivated classes –style, taste, wit- in short, those attitudes and aptitudes which seem natural in members of the cultivated classes and naturally expected of them precisely because they are the *culture* of that class” (quoted in Harker 1990, 87).

In this way, the dominant habitus is transformed into a form of cultural capital that the schools take for granted and which acts a most effective filter in the reproductive processes of a hierarchical society. Poor achievements of some students and success of others, then, is not something inherent in cultural differences, but is an artifact of the way the schools operate. Those with the appropriate culture capital are reinforced with “success” while others are not (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes 1990; Maton 2008).

Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital focuses on the social value of cultural habits, dispositions, and skills. Working with various colleagues, he developed the concept of cultural capital in order to help address a particular empirical problem—namely, the fact that “[e]conomic obstacles are not sufficient to explain” disparities in the educational attainment of children from different social classes (Bourdieu & Passeron 2000, 8). Bourdieu argued that, above and beyond economic factors, “cultural habits and...dispositions inherited from” the family are fundamentally important to school success (Bourdieu & Passeron, 14). In doing so, “he broke sharply with traditional sociological conceptions of culture, which tended to view it primarily as a source of shared norms and values, or as a vehicle of collective expression (Lareau and Weininger 2003).

Economic capital (wealth, income, and property), according to Bourdieu, is not the only field of power struggles. Cultural capital (knowledge, culture and educational credentials) is also a resource of power unequally distributed among social classes. For Bourdieu, cultural capital exists in three forms. First, it refers to the ensemble of cultivated dispositions that are internalized by the individual through socialization, thus cultural capital exists in an *embodied* form. The accumulation of cultural capital in its

embodied form begins in early childhood. It requires investment of time by the parents and other family members. It sensitizes the child to cultural distinction. In its “embodied” form, cultural capital is a “competence” or skill that cannot be separated from the person who holds it. The acquisition of cultural capital necessarily presupposes the investment of time devoted to learning and/or training (Swartz 1997).

The second form of cultural capital exists in *objectified* form, referring to objects like books, works of art, and scientific instruments that require specialized cultural abilities to use. The third of is *institutionalized* capital by which Bourdieu means the educational credential systems. As the aforementioned study of Rutz and Balkan shows, cultural capital along with economic capital is becoming more and more the new basis of social stratification. In the third chapter the significance of cultural capital in the struggle for distinction will be discussed and emphasized in relation to the Islamist-secularist conflict.

#### **2.4. The Symbolic Power of Atatürkism and Atatürk as Symbolic Capital**

My interview with Silva (71) who is an Armenian-Turkish was based upon questions of being or becoming Turkish, and what represents, signifies and symbolizes Turkishness. What does it mean to *be* Turkish for an Armenian citizen, or to *become* Turkish for a Kurdish citizen? The fact that Turkey is currently going through the intellectual and political labor and the process of “denationalizing the citizenship” –to borrow the paraphrase from Ayşe Kadioğlu (2010) - agitated her so much that she totally refused the idea that Turkishness can be, let alone should be reconstituted or even re-visited. For her, any demand of political and cultural recognition of Armenians, Kurds or Islamists lacked “innocence” and was regarded as a betrayal to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his reforms.



The driving impulse of this refutation was Silva's adoration and respect for the personhood of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. At one point during our conversation, Silva started crying for Atatürk, mourned the loss of a cult figure: for her, the loss implied both a physical one and also the loosening of Atatürkist ideas that have not yet been fully embraced and understood. Silva expressed her Atatürkism "in the domains of excessive emotion, waves of feeling for a central signifier of contemporary Turkish identity, or reverence for a personified image of state" (Navaro-Yashin 2002, 193). Both for Silva and other elites I have interviewed, what does Atatürkism stand for? What is the relation between Atatürkism and the cult figure of Atatürk? How and when was this relation established? What does the personhood of Atatürk symbolize for Turkish elites? Theoretically put, what is the relationship between symbolic representations and social structures of power?

Bourdieu emphasizes the role of symbolic forms and processes in the reproduction of social systems. He believes that the principal mode of domination in most societies has shifted from overt coercion and the threat of physical violence to forms of symbolic manipulation. For him, there is symbolic power as well as economic power. Symbolic systems, for Bourdieu, perform in three related but distinct functions. 1) Symbolic systems are "structured structures": a means for ordering and understanding the social world. Therefore, symbolic systems are related to cognition. 2) These systems are "codes" that channel deep structural meanings shared by all members of a culture, they function as instruments of communication and as instruments of knowledge. Thus, they have a communicative function. 3) Symbolic systems function as instruments of domination; that is they serve to sustain the established distances and differences between classes (Bourdieu and Passeron 2000).

According to Bourdieu, symbolic systems are classification systems built upon the fundamental logic of inclusion and exclusion. All symbolic systems follow this fundamental classification logic of dividing and grouping items into opposing classes and hence generating meanings through the binary logic of inclusion and exclusion (Shwartz 1997, 84). Bourdieu writes,

“All agents in a given social formation share a set of basic perceptual schemes, which receive the beginnings of objectification in the pairs of antagonistic adjectives commonly used to classify and qualify persons or objects in the most varied areas of practice. The network oppositions between high (sublime, elevated, pure) and low (vulgar, low, modest), spiritual and material, fine (refined, elegant) and coarse (heavy, fat, crude, brutal), light (subtle, lively, sharp, adroit) and heavy (slow, thick, blunt, laborious, clumsy), free and forced, broad and narrow, or, in another dimension, between unique (rare, different, distinguished, exclusive, singular, novel) and common (ordinary, banal, commonplace, trivial, routine) brilliant (intelligent) and dull (obscure, grey, mediocre) is the matrix of all commonplaces which find such ready acceptance because behind them lies the whole social order” (1984, 468).

## 2.6. Turkey Divided

Turkey’s political and social landscape has changed since the 1990s. With the rise of Islamist movements, the deepening of the Kurdish question and with the impacts of globalization, a new version of Kemalism<sup>11</sup> was inspired. This political, social and cultural revitalization which can be called neo-Kemalism (Erdoğan 2009) or Atatürkism<sup>12</sup> (Navaro-Yashin 2002) is structured upon the structure of Kemalism with an emphasis on Western, secular and national re-conceptualization of Turkey (Yeğen 2009) and acts upon the binary oppositions of secular/anti-secular, republican/enemy of

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<sup>11</sup> Mesut Yeğen argues that there are historically three periods of Kemalism. According to him, the first period is between 1927 and 1937 when Kemalism was constructed. The second period starts in 1950s with the defeat of the Republican People’s Party in the elections. The third period starts in 1990s and continues to this day and attempts to revitalize Kemalism.

<sup>12</sup> The elites I have interviewed used the term Atatürkism to define their stance, therefore I will be using the same term.

the republic, *çağdaş* (up-to date)/backward, Kemalist/non-Kemalist and neo-nationalist (*ulusalçı*)/separatist (Erdoğan 2009).

Accordingly, Ataturkism becomes a social and political positioning against the emergence of “other” positionings, which in total represents a struggle for the preservation of a life-style which is perceived to be under threat. According to the elites I have interviewed, Ataturkism is “a system of thoughts not an ideology” (Bora-25), “a life-style, a means to understand the social world around us” (İpek-31), “a world-view that paves the way for progress, scientism, *çağdaşlık* and civilization (Defne25). Although the definition of Ataturkism varies among the elites interviewed, I have observed that Ataturkism or being an Ataturkist was perceived to be and practiced as a dividing line between elites and counter-elites. Ataturkism creates a fundamental logic of symbolic distinction that operates socially, politically as well as culturally; it functions to differentiate and legitimate inegalitarian and hierarchical arrangements among individuals and groups. It acts as a symbolic power that orders social life in binary oppositions. It has its own language, performs as an instrument of knowledge and communication in defying other knowledges that seek ground for communication.

The symbolic capital of Ataturkism is Atatürk himself. Symbolic capital, according to Bourdieu, is a form of power that is not perceived as power but as legitimate demands for recognition, deference, obedience, or the services of others. Bourdieu sees symbolic capital (e.g. status value attached to a person, prestige, honour, the right to be listened to) as a crucial source of power. “It is a collective belief, a capital of trust that stems from social esteem” (Shwartz 1997, 92). The depiction of Atatürk, in the narratives of the elites, positions him as an eternal symbol of various values that have to be protected.

“For me, Atatürk is the representative of freedom, whether national freedom or individual freedom” (Melike-30).

"There are certain principles which Atatürk established while trying to preserve this country. I deeply respect him in his struggle to keep the country together and draw a meaningful whole out of it. An incredible success it is; he was incredibly foresighted. There is no one who has this power of foreseeing now." (İdil-37)<sup>13</sup>

“I think even just the secularism principle alone has changed this country entirely. I am grateful to him; if it weren't for him we would be in a very different situation now”. (Murat-36)<sup>14</sup>

“I do respect Atatürk so much for what he did, for what he managed to do those days and for his world view. I esteem him very highly, love him and I believe with all my heart and soul that he should be preserved. He achieved the impossible; of course, he didn't do it all by himself but as the mastermind of the case, he achieved something impossible. I find the criticisms against him very unjust. It's a very rare thing that his words and his values are still valid after all these years. Atatürk made tremendous changes, but after him the steps were not taken at the same level. Therefore, it's apparent that certain things weren't digested, and now we are here at this point. If only he had lived longer, it would have been much better I guess...” (Filiz-49)<sup>15</sup>

“Were we Ataturkists? [Back at RC] Of course, we were Ataturkist, it's a way of life. Ataturkism is not static... it was a way of life and I had believed that, our ultimate goal was to become a Westernized society. I think, this was also Atatürk's ultimate goal. What does a westernized society mean? People who can think, who are responsible, self-confident... an equal Western [*batılı*] community... There is no need for rubbish such as as privileged, underprivileged etc... I am equal to you brother, like it should be. One should never forget, and we were also aware of it back then. Atatürk had defeated the West for us.

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<sup>13</sup> “Atatürk’ün bu ülkeyi korumaya çalışırken ortaya koyduğu bir takım prensipler var. Ülkeyi bir araya toplama çabasına ve bundan anlamlı bir bütün çıkatabilmesine büyük saygı duyuyorum. İnanılmaz bir başarı, inanılmaz ileri görüşlü. Bugün bu ileri görüş kimsede yok”

<sup>14</sup> “Tek başına laiklik ilkesinin bile bu ülkeyi baştan sona değiştiren bir şey olduğunu düşünüyorum. Ben müteşekkirim Atatürk’e, o olmasaydı bambaşka bir yerde olabilirdik”

<sup>15</sup> “Atatürk’ün yaptıklarına, o gün için yapmayı başarabildiklerine, dünya görüşüne inanılmaz saygı duyuyorum, değer veriyorum, seviyorum ve korunması gerektiğine canı yürekten inanıyorum. İmkansız başarmış, tabii ki tek başına yapmadı ama fikir babası olarak inanılmaz birşeyi başardı. Bugün ona yapılan eleştirileri çok haksız buluyorum. Bu kadar yıl sonra söylediği sözlerin, vermeye çalıştığı değerlerin hala bu kadar geçerli olabilmesi çok sık rastlanan birşey değil. Atatürk müthiş değişiklikler yaptı ama ondan sonra atılması gereken adımlar aynı seviyede atılmadı. Dolayısıyla, belli ki birşeyler hazmedilmedi, işte bu günlere vardık. Keşke biraz daha yaşasaydı Atatürk, çok iyi olurdu sanki...”

Atatürk was important for anyone who studied in that school [RC]. On top of everything else he did, he was the man who defeated the West” (Özkan-69).<sup>16</sup>

Depictions of Atatürk as a symbol of love, respect, success, freedom, pride as well as nostalgia, uniqueness and distinction can be multiplied. I agree with Esra Özyürek (2006) who argues that Atatürk represents and embodies both the nation and “the man” that the Republic in the foundation years aimed to create and today aims to preserve. The rise of Islamist movement compelled Atatürkists to emphasize the image and portrait of Atatürk at every opportunity as a kind of logo (Bora 2003). Turkish state is personified and imagined through the symbolisms of Atatürk (Navaro-Yashin 2002). The narratives of the elites I have interviewed illustrate how through the symbolization of Atatürk, a life-style is both defended and protected. Atatürk becomes the most distinctive symbol of the elite habitus because of the Western and secular “man” he represents, and because of the values of the nation he has imagined (Nazlı Ökten, 2008).

Ataturkism, from this perspective, is a “*worldmaking* power” –in the words of Bourdieu- for it involves the capacity to impose the legitimate version of the social world and its divisions. It is this very capacity of Ataturkism which makes it inclined to the exercise of *symbolic violence*. Symbolic violence is a manipulative, non-physical form of violence which has “the capacity to impose the means for comprehending and adapting to the social world by representing economic and political power in disguised,

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<sup>16</sup> “Biz Atatürkçü müydük? Tabii ki Atatürkçüydük, it’s a way of life. Atatürkçülük dediğiniz şey statik birşey değil ki.... yani o bir hayat tarzıydı ve şuna inanmıştım ki, bizim nihai hedefimiz batılı bir toplum olmaktır. Ben Atatürk’ün de nihai hedefinin bu olduğunu düşünüyorum. Batılı toplum ne demek? Düşünen, sorumluluğunu bilen, kendine güvenen, yani eşit bir batılı toplum... yok öyle “imtiyazlı imtiyazsız” falan palavralar değil. Doğru dürüst, seninle ben eşitim kardeşim. Şunu hiç unutmamak gerekiyor: o gün de farkındaydık sanıyorum. Atatürk bizim için batıya galip gelmiş bir adamdı. O mektepte [Robert College] okuyan her insan için Atatürk önemliydi. Yaptığı tüm şeylere ilave olarak, farklı olarak, o adamları yenmiş adamdı Atatürk.

taken-for granted forms” (Swartz1997, 89). To go back to Özkan’s love and hate relationship with the West, it is possible to see how the idealization of Atatürkist nationalism sets forth conditions for democratic values such as equality. His narrative implies that “we” will all be equal *only* if “all” of “us” are westernized (read secularized).

Atatürkism is not viewed as a “*worldmaking* power” by all the interviewees. Without problematizing the personhood of Atatürk, Sarp argues that Atatürkism in many respects resembles fascism in the sense that it struggles to impose a legitimate version of the social world and its divisions as mentioned above.

“For my part, it is a big mistake that whatever Atatürk said is still being repeated by rote. If you ask me, if Atatürk had lived today he would have sworn at us, he would have said, "Come on, can't you still get over me?" Well, Atatürk was really great, I do remember him with respect too, but we have to get over him. We indoctrinate each other with Atatürk. There is no point in it. We cannot get over anything like that. We live like we are stuck in 1938. Let us say new things. Atatürkism can change, Atatürk can change, so what? Everything changes. Didn't Atatürk change the ones preceding him? And now we can change Atatürk in turn. Societies progress, cultures progress. The age we are living is changing, and so does our way of life... So we must say new things. It doesn't mean whatever Atatürk said was wrong, worthless or meaningless for those times. But things may have changed till today. Likewise, this goes for everything that has happened in the past. It goes for both the Bible and the Koran. It goes for what Atatürk said. Everything should be interpreted in the context of its time. What you call Atatürkism today is something going towards fascism. People who stick by the ideal of a country where only the Turks live consider themselves as Atatürkists (Sarp-35).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ben Atatürk'ün dediği her şeyin bugün böyle ezbere ezbere tekrar ediliyor olmasını çok yanlış olduğunu düşünüyorum. Bana sorarsan, Atatürk şimdi yaşıyor olsa, küfür ederdi bize: “ulan beni aşamadınız mı?” derdi. Tamam, Atatürk gerçekten çok büyük bir insandı, ben de çok saygıyla anıyorum ama Atatürk'ü aşmamız lazım..... yani Atatürk'ün bize gösterdiği yol bu değil ki. Biz böyle takıldık kaldık, Atatürk onu demişti, Atatürk şunu demişti, Atatürk bilmem ne..... sürekli böyle Atatürk'ün dediği sözlerle böyle kendimizi şey yapıyoruz, birbirimizi indoctrinate ediyoruz. Bunun hiçbir anlamı yok. Birşeyi aşamıyoruz ki o zaman, 1923'te kalmışız veya 1938'de kalmış halde yaşıyoruz o zaman. Yeni birşeyler söyleyelim. Değişir, ne olacak ki herşey değişir. Atatürk kendinden önce gelenleri değiştirmedim mi? Biz Atatürk'ü de değiştirebiliriz. Toplumlar ilerliyor, kültürler ilerliyor, yaşadığımız çağ değişiyor, Atatürk'ün devrimlerinde ne bilgisayar vardı, ne birşey vardı..... yani yaşam şeklimiz de değişiyor..... onun için, yeni şeyler söylemek lazım. Bu demek değil ki, Atatürk'ün söylediği şeyler yanlıştı veya değersizdi veya o zaman için anlamsızdı. Bazı şeyler bugün için değişmiş olabilir. Bu, böyle tarihte olan herhangi birşey için aynı şekilde geçerli, İncil için de geçerli, Kuran için de geçerli, Atatürk'ün

Among the elites I have interviewed, Sarp is the only one who perceives Ataturkism as a form of fascism. As I mentioned in the introduction chapter, the reason why most of the elites I have interviewed constructed their political identity on some kind of Ataturkism should be explored through the prism of political polarizations currently taking place in Turkey. Most of the elites believe that, if Ataturkism is not safeguarded in Turkey, this country will eventually have to confront the possible dangers of fundamental Islamism which allegedly has the potential to destroy the main pillars of the Turkish Republic.

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söyledikleri için de geçerli. Herşey gününe göre yorumlanması lazım. Zaten, bugün Atatürkçülük dediğin faşistliğe doğru giden bir şey. Sadece Türklerin yaşadığı ülke idealiyle yaşayan insanlar kendilerini Atatürkçü görüyorlar.

### CHAPTER 3

#### POLITICS OF IGNORANCE

*“Ignorance of all things is an evil neither terrible nor excessive, nor yet the greatest of all; but great cleverness and much learning, if they be accompanied by a bad training, are a much greater misfortune.”*

*Plato*

*"Bu kadar cehalet ancak tahsille mümkün olabilir."*  
*Sakallı Celal*

After a long day of interviews, I received a phone call from one of my interviewees Filiz (49), who is a Turkish Jewish graduate of Robert College (RC-1980). As I was contemplating about the interview I had with her, it was interesting to hear from Filiz that the contemplation was both sided. In a very self-critical and self-reflexive manner, she told me that the interview was very confrontational for her in the sense that she realized how “ignorant” she was concerning the burning political issues of contemporary Turkey. She told me that it was shocking for her to see that for someone like her who is “highly” educated and values education above everything else, her knowledge was very limited and imperfect on certain issues concerning Turkish social, cultural and political life.

This lack of knowledge that Filiz allowed herself to accept was not only about contemporary Turkey but also about the years she spent at RC. Being a graduate of 1980 -the year of one of the most violent military coups of Turkey, the year that changed the life of most of the people living in Turkey- Filiz, when asked what she went through before and during 1980 said that: “I didn’t go through anything, it was like we were not affected by the changes that occurred in Turkish political life”. After a long silence, she added: “We were the RC students; we were the top of the top”. This



“top of the top” position of the graduates of both RC and Üsküdar American Academy (UAA) is very common in the self perceptions of the graduates. This chapter aims to inquire the relation between this self-perception and the particular practices of “not knowing”.

Throughout almost all my interviews, as we delved into the highly loaded issues like the Kurdish or Armenian questions, I observed my informants uneasily confronting their remoteness and disconnectedness from some of the central issues that shape contemporary Turkish political, social and cultural life. Some, like Filiz, confronted this apathy and distance with sincerity and astonishment and some unconsciously and/or in silence. By positioning themselves “above” or “outside of” the issues that Turkey is struggling with internally and externally and by viewing life from the “top of the tops”, the elites somehow engendered partial, incomplete knowledges.

An example of these partial, incomplete knowledges or *unknowledges* is provided by Nazan (37). When explaining why she felt more nationalistic when she lived in Europe for almost five years, she states that Turkey and Turkish people are not well “known” in Europe. According to her, European people have a misconception about Turkey. Nazan explains this misconception as the “ignorance” of the European people.

**Question:** [In Europe] What was it that made you feel more a nationalist as compared to here? Why did you become more nationalist there?

**Answer:** You know, when you are there, you are like... I guess minority psychology has something to do with it. There, you are few, and people before you don't recognize you. The state of telling, expressing yourself makes you a little more nationalist probably. And also, Turkey is conceived different there, misconceived.

**Q:** Misconceived how, do you think?

**A:** In fact, when I say misconceived, I mean there is this lack of information. The ones who went there from Turkey are not city cultured people, they are from the towns of Turkey and in the eyes of the Europeans, Turkey is just these towns. Of course, the way they see Turkey is in fact the way they see these towns; they perceive Turks like these

burghers. So I think that the “perception” [*sic*] of Turkish people there is kind of a little... incomplete. Turkey is neither just these towns, nor just Istanbul, Etiler, Beşiktaş, but a blend of all these. I do not represent Turkey as a whole, and just like this, Europeans, being people in that culture level should have understood that the Turks in Europe do not represent Turkey either. I’ve said “cultural level” but I should have said “income level” instead. [In Europe] Annual gross national product is very high. Now that we attribute most of the problems in Turkey to financial stuff, then far more better off Europeans’ being ignorant is less venial, compared to Turkey. [...] People with high income levels are supposed to have less excuse for ignorance.<sup>18</sup>

Nazan’s understanding of economic and cultural capital is intertwined; she chooses to correlate the intensity and depth of knowledge to the level of economic income and argues that those who have a higher economic income should be more knowledgeable and less ignorant. Leaving aside her economic determinism, Nazan’s perception of a period of her life spent in Europe, points out a struggle against the misconception of her “Turkishness” which she conceptualizes as a consequence of unjustified ignorance of the Europeans. I agree with this conceptualization that calls attention to looking into practices of not knowing for a group of people who are equipped with economic and cultural capital. Throughout this chapter, I will turn the mirror from “others” (such as Europeans) to “us” (specifically Turkish elites) and

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<sup>18</sup> S: Avrupa’da seni buraya nazaran daha milliyetçi hissettiren şey neydi? Neden orada daha çok milliyetçi oldun?

C: Orada şeysin tabii...Azınlık psikolojisi sanırım etkili oluyor. Orada azsın ve karşıdaki insan seni tanımıyor. Kendini ifade etme, anlatma durumu insanı herhalde biraz daha milliyetçi yapıyor. Bir de Türkiye farklı tanınıyor, yanlış tanınıyor.

S: Nasıl yanlış tanınıyor sence? Avrupa deneyimin daha çok olduğu için, Avrupa’da ne yönde yanlış tanınıyor Türkiye?

C: Aslında yanlış tanınıyor derken onların da bilgi eksikliği var. Gidenler de şehir kültürü alıp gitmiş insanlar değil, kasabadan gitmiş insanlar ve Türkiye onların gözünde bu kasabalar. Tabii, onların Türkiye’ye bakışı aslında bu kasabalara bakışı, kasabalılar nasılsa Türkleri de öyle algılıyor. O yüzden de oradaki Türk perception’ı biraz daha bence.... eksik. Türkiye ne sadece bu kasabalar, ne sadece İstanbul, Etiler, Beşiktaş değil, bunun hepsi bir harman ama nasıl ben Türkiye’nin hepsini temsil etmiyorsam, oranın da temsil etmediğini artık o kültür seviyesindeki insanların anlıyor olması gerektiğini düşünüyorum. Aslında o kültür seviyesi demeyeyim, o gelir seviyesindeki insanların. Avrupa’da kişi başına gayri safi yurt içi hasılası çok yüksek. Madem, birçok Türkiye’deki problemleri maddi şeylere bağlıyoruz, oradaki maddi durumu çok daha iyi insanların bilgisiz olması Türkiye’ye göre daha az affedilir birşey.

attempt to a) theorize ignorance, b) trace the areas where ignorance is produced in Turkish social and political life, and c) lay out the implications of what I will call *willful ignorance*.

### **3.1. Theorizing Ignorance**

Ignorance is generally defined as lack of knowledge, information, or education. However, a careful examination of the concept reveals that ignorance has many forms. Sometimes, what we do not know is not accidental but consciously produced or unconsciously generated. In other words, sometimes, ignorance is an active social production that is shaped by the social location of the knower. It is this form of ignorance this chapter is going to focus on and nowhere is it truer than in the case of race and racism. Charles W. Mills, in his essay “White Ignorance”, outlines racialized ways of knowing which he identifies as an epistemology of ignorance, necessary to maintain white privilege in the context of commitments to formal equality (2007). Because of structural privileges and situated identities, the whites have a positive interest in “seeing the world wrongly” to paraphrase Mills. He argues that on matters related to race, there is an “inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites in general will be unable to understand the world they themselves have created” (quoted in Bailey 2009, 80). Here, ignorance is not understood as a neglectful epistemic practice but as a substantive epistemic practice that differentiates the dominant group. “A central feature of white ignorance is the ability to ignore people without white privilege. White ignorance is a form of not knowing (seeing wrongly), resulting from the habit of

erasing, dismissing, distorting, and forgetting about the lives, cultures, and histories of people whites have colonized” (ibid, 85).

Following Mills and others, I understand ignorance to have an epistemological character and thus include it in the epistemologies of knowledge and try to be attentive to both knowledge and ignorance. However, my purpose is not to carry out an epistemological inquiry. I do not aim to explain what knowledge is, or what we know, or how knowledge is acquired, or how we know what we know. I am not seeking out for a theory of ignorance that may lead us to a universally accepted justified true belief model. Rather, within the context of my research, I am trying to understand how and why ignorance regarding major political issues is actively and socially produced by the elites who have all the resources and means to access information. Why does a group of selected people with the “best” possible training to learn not activate their accumulated capacity in order to grasp a fuller understanding of the current affairs of the Turkish social, political life? How can educated ignorance (*tahsilli cehalet*) be explained? What constitutes willful ignorance among the elites? How is elite privilege constituted in Turkey through an epistemology of ignorance? How can we elucidate this knowledge-ignorance paradox?

Among the elites I have interviewed, there are well known lawyers, doctors, physicists, economists, bankers, NGO specialists, computer engineers, art specialists, civil engineers, education specialists, business people, managers, visionaries and entrepreneurs. After graduating from RC or UAA, most of these people had undergraduate and graduate degrees from the most “prestigious” universities in Turkey and/or in the world. Hence, their commitment to knowledge and acquisition of technical, specialized skills allowed them to climb to the top of the ladder of the

educational hierarchy, marking their separation from other groups in society by their prestige and refinement. Having listened to entrepreneurial and inspiring life-stories of the Turkish elites, I observed that they do have a persistent effort to examine any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the evidence that supports it. They are perfectly competent in utilizing their knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning, and have brilliant skills in applying these methods. They think open-mindedly and creatively within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences. In other words, the group of elites I have interviewed are trained to be critical thinkers destined to accomplish success stories. Paradoxically though, they have hidden unknowledges engendering poor, single or restricted vision of contemporary Turkish social, political life. Elites' trained mind operates only in particular ways of knowing which are privileged over others as Mills points out in "White Ignorance".

Educated ignorance is contextual: it operates within contexts that mark the difference of the space of position the elites occupy. By aligning the practices of not knowing to the hegemonic discourses<sup>19</sup> that reinforce the sustainment of the dominant position of the elite within the society, educated ignorance has a structural and strategic character. It is structural because it is dependent on the location and position of the knower vis-à-vis the known and it is strategic because it is historical, always used as a

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<sup>19</sup> According to Michel Foucault, the concept of discourse involves the production of knowledge through language, that is, discourse gives meaning to social practices. For Foucault, discourse regulates what can be said under determinate social and cultural conditions and discursive formations are regulated maps of meaning or ways of speaking through which meaning is acquired. Therefore, discourse imposes a particular way of thinking. It organizes the field of knowledge and hence directly related to power. "Discourse allows us to describe: the self-evident and commonsensical are what have the privilege of unnoticed power and this power produces instruments of control.... a kind of power that generates certain kind of questions, placed within systems that legitimate, support and answer those questions, a kind of power that, in the process, includes within its system all those it produces as agents capable of acting within them." (Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, 1989, 45)

means to internalize the habit of erasing, dismissing, distorting, and forgetting about the lives, cultures, and histories of “the others”, as will be exemplified below through the Kurdish and Armenian question of contemporary Turkish political life.

Educated and willful ignorance is not a simple lack, a gap or an omission. It is not a consequence of the limitedness of human knowledge. It is intentional not knowing. It is not a presupposition but a social fact that can be deduced, observed and explained. It is a kind of refusal to know only specific things. Ignorance is not passive. It is cultivated, sustained and allowed. Like knowledge, ignorance is socially constructed, maintained and disseminated (McVeigh 2004, Ortega 2006, Smithson 1985, Tuana 2004, Ungar 2000). I argue that ignorance is an active production, and thus related to power. In other words; like knowledge, ignorance has to be conceptualized within the networks of power relations.

In his studies on prisons, mental institutions, clinics and hospitals Michel Foucault argues that knowledge is (re)produced by power. By relating knowledge to power, Foucault claims that power generates and preserves its rationality through the dominant state of “knowledge” at the time. Hence, without some form of legitimization which must be endorsed by what is “known” at the time to be “true” or “correct”, no system of power can maintain itself. In other words, knowledge is not to be found outside the networks of power relations. Foucault explains the power-knowledge neologism as follows:

"Perhaps, too, we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests. Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit, rather, that power produces knowledge [...] that power and

knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations [...] In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge" (1995, 27-28).

Involving the politics of ignorance in social and political analyses may allow us to reveal the role of power in the construction of what is known, and understand which knowledges are seen as valuable, important or functional. Which knowledges are shadowed by the production of ignorance of the elites? What kind of knowledges are rejected, omitted or refused and what kind of discourses are produced in order to marginalize and/or hinder other knowledges the elites I have interviewed tend to ignore?

### **3.2. Positioning Ignorance**

My oldest informant in this research was 71 years old and the youngest was 25. In the almost 50 years between these generations, the Turkish social, political life has inevitably changed and evolved in many ways. However, ignorance among the elites I have interviewed seems to be a cross-generational production. It is possible to detect willful not-knowing in almost all the interviews I have conducted. In this section, I aim to trace the two main issues of Turkish social and political life in which ignorance manifests itself most in the narratives of the Turkish elites. The first one is the Kurdish question which has been one of the most controversial issues in Turkey since the foundation of the Republic. The second one is the Armenian question which has turned out to be a tug-of-war between various actors the most prominent of which is the Turkish state who denies the Armenian genocide and the Armenian Diaspora who builds a community around the struggle of the recognition of the genocide. Through an

analysis of elite perceptions of these two contested issues of Turkish political life, it is possible to see how the production of ignorance eliminates, disregards and shadows other knowledges.

### 3.3. Kurds and Kurdishness in the Perception of the Elites

*Personally, I've never seen this discrimination stuff since my childhood, either in my family or around me. Now let me put it this way, Kurdish people living there, for example... yes, they are economically poor, but so are the Turkish people living there. I mean they have shared the same thing, it wasn't like Turks were better off, but the Kurds were deprived of certain things. It wasn't like there were job opportunities but Kurds were denied of them. East has always been poor. Southeast has been poor and unsettled since the Ottomans. I don't think they have lost anything, because they didn't have any... They didn't have much to lose. (Gülşen).<sup>20</sup>*

Ignorance as an active production is linked to hegemonic knowledges, doubt, mistrust, silencing and uncertainty. The Kurdish question with all its complexities and controversies is a fruitful area to study the production of ignorance. The elites I have interviewed were asked how they define and perceive the Kurdish question, what their views are on the “Kurdish opening” (which is an effort ever made by Justice and Development Party to find a peaceful political resolution to the long-festering Kurdish question) and how they think the problem can be resolved. The definition of the Kurdish problem is crucial because the success or the failure to resolve the Kurdish question rests upon how the problem is defined. It is possible to claim that the elites I

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<sup>20</sup> “Ben çocukluğumdan beri, şahsen, ne ailemde ne çevremde hiçbir ayrımcılık şeyi görmedim. Şimdi şöyle diyeyim size, oradaki Kürtler mesela, evet ekonomik şartları zayıf, fakir insanlar ama orada yaşayan Türkler de öyle. Aynı şeyi paylaştılar, yani Türkler daha iyiydi de, Kürtler mi bunlardan, işten mahrum edildi? Orada iş imkanları vardı da onlara kullanılmadı diye birşey olmadı. Her zaman doğu fakirdi. Osmanlı'dan beri Güneydoğu fakirdi, karıştı. Birşeylerini kaybettiklerini zannetmiyorum ben, zaten yoktu..... kaybedecek fazla birşeyleri de yoktu.”



have interviewed have a consensus of what the Kurdish question is. If the question is not dismissed totally –and maybe sincerely- in the way banker Selim (49) did by saying that he “never really tried to understand and conceptualize what constitutes the Kurdish question”, most of the informants believe that the question has been “recently constructed” by the “deemed to fail” Kurdish opening<sup>21</sup> initiated by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the intervention of the “outsiders”. The belief that the Kurdish question has been recently constructed is apparent in almost all narratives of the elites included in my research.

My oldest informant Silva (71) who is a retired Armenian-Turkish believes that “until *today*, there was no distinction or difference between a Turk and a Kurd and Kurdishness was not a problem that needed to be addressed”. When asked with whom he had studied at Robert College for Boys, Law Professor Özkan (69) replies: “It didn’t even cross our minds to think like this one is Jewish, this Armenian or Rum... You know, I always think that they are people just like you and me... I was neutral, it didn’t mean anything... Maybe there were people of Kurdish origin who came to be famous later, but we didn’t know it. Sure there were people from Diyarbakır for example, but whether they were Turk or Kurd or Laz wasn’t an issue. There was no such a notion, can I make myself clear?”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Filiz (49) tells me how surprising it was for her to “witness that one of her classmates -after all these years- *enunciated* that she had a Kurdish origin after a fierce debate among a group of old friends on Kurds and the

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<sup>21</sup> See Cengiz Çandar (2010), Levent Köker (2010), Murat Somer and Evangelos G.Liaras (2010) for discussions of the Kurdish Opening.

<sup>22</sup> Bu Yahudi, bu Ermeni, bu Rum gibi birşey aklımızın köşesinden geçmiyordu... yani işte sizin, benim gibi insanlardı diye düşünüyorum... yani ne müspet, ne menfi bir şeyi yoktu, etkisi yoktu... belki bu sonradan moda olan Kürt kökenliler de vardı aramızda ama onları bilmiyorduk... yani Diyarbakırlı insanlar vardı, bu adamlar Kürt müydü, Türk müydü, Laz mıydı? Yoktu öyle bir kavram, yoktu yani anlatabiliyor muyum?”

Kurdish opening”. Until today, according to Filiz, “that identity had remained invisible and had not been pushed to the surface as a difference”. I think that this “non-existence” of the Kurdish identity in the memories of the elites is *partly* a proximity issue. Since the probability of Kurds’ attending to elite schools such as RC and UAA is low because of the socio-economic conditions of the Kurds, graduates of the older generations might have no acquaintance with them in their closest social network.<sup>23</sup>

One might think that due to the recent scholarships granted to “bright” students from Anatolia by the two elite schools studied in this research, the younger generations may have more acquaintance with Kurds compared to the older ones. However, this is not the case. None of the informants of the younger generation can recall a Kurdish friend whereas they remember boarding students who came from the southeastern region. Whether these students have a Kurdish origin is not known and has never been an “issue”. Needless to say, the homogenizing effect of these schools had dismissed the emergence of these identities. There is only one exception to this generalization. Actually, it is not an exception but an ironic example to emphasize my point from a different angle. Defne (25) who is a visual communication designer entered RC at the age of 15 after spending her primary school years in the closed community of a well-known private Turkish school where students went to school with “chauffeurs instead of school buses”. Her first year at RC was a “nightmare” for her. Her misery was a consequence of the alienation she felt at RC.

“I was enrolled in Robert College, it was like another world because there were many scholarship students there. There were people from cities I had never been, people who played *saz* ... that I had never met before... So I was utterly unhappy in my preparatory year, I was always like “I don’t to want to go to this school”.. [...] Therefore it was real bad, my prep year. I cried all the time, saying

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<sup>23</sup> See Füsün Üstel and Birol Caymaz, *Seçkinler ve Sosyal Mesafe*, 2009 for a similar observation, p. 25.

“I’ll leave the school”, “I won’t study here, I can’t put up with these people.” I couldn’t love that diverseness. I couldn’t get used to it. It felt weird, it felt weird. Than this feeling was over after a while, because I got used to there... But I had never been one of those students who adored Robert College, never.”<sup>24</sup>

Today, Defne evaluates her first years at RC as a learning process which enabled her to understand the unifying power of education and as a gateway to accept and appreciate the differences among people. However, the present day emphasis of Defne on the student playing the Turkish folk instrument *saz* is a signifier of regional differences between the east and the west, of disparities between the rural and the urban and of the high class consciousness embedded in her. Later on, I learned that the student playing the *saz* was an *Armenian from Istanbul*. The way Defne positions herself within the environment that she lives in constructs such distances and differences that production and reproduction of ignorance becomes a powerful disruptive mechanism that engenders misjudgments, misconceptions and consequently, damages social integration.

In the perception of the elites’ Kurdish question a complex absence exists: the absence of the Kurd and Kurdishness. Analyzing this complex absence only as a proximity issue would be incomplete (see above). I argue that this absence or non-existence of the Kurds in the narratives and lives of the elites is a part an embodied discourse, a chapter in the tale of power-knowledge/ignorance nexus. As the above quotations illustrate, the elite perceptions of the Kurdish question are based on a denial

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<sup>24</sup> “Robert Kolej’e geçtim, tamamen başka bir dünya çünkü Robert Kolej’de çok fazla burslu insan var. Hiç gidip görmediğim illerden insanlar var, saz çalanı var.... daha önce hiç karşılaşmadığım.... O yüzden benim Robert Kolej’de hazırlık dönemim tamamen mutsuzluk üzerine geçti, ben bu okulda okuyamayacağım diye.. [...] Hazırlık benim için çok kötü geçti o yüzden. Ben her seferinde “bu okuldan gideceğim” diye ağladım, “okumayacağım ben bu okulda, yapamayacağım ben bu insanlarla” diye. Sevmedim o farklılığı. Alışamadım. Tuhaf geldi, tuhaf geldi. Geçti bir müddet sonra çünkü alıştım....ama ben hiçbir zaman Robert’i çok seven bir öğrenci olmadım, hiçbir zaman olmadım”

of any “problem” regarding different identities. The elites I have interviewed insist that having an ethnic/cultural identity other than Turkishness has not constituted a problem “until recently”. Embedded in these narratives, there is also a self-acclaimed authority to speak in the name of “others”, as in the case of the Kurds. To elaborate this point, I will refer to Melike and her perception of the Kurdish question.

After graduating from RC, Melike (30) goes to USA to attend to one of the “most prestigious” liberal arts colleges where she gets a major and a minor degree. She accepts to work as a management consultant for a leading company in the USA. As an appreciation of her invaluable services, the company grants her a scholarship to get an MBA degree from Harvard University. Later on, because of her “sensitivity to societal issues” Melike makes a change in her career path and decides to work for civil society. She is now working as a member of the administrative team of a well-known NGO in Turkey. She frequently visits the southeastern part of Turkey and has the chance to observe and examine the region where Kurdish population is the highest. This is how Melike defines the Kurdish question:

“Kurdish question is a snowballing problem in a region which has not been developed enough, which has not been provided with enough services. Why does not it develop, because you cannot provide it with services. And the people there, you cannot raise their awareness. A family has 10 kids for example. And regarding it mathematically, this only serves to nurture the current problem. When I say “problem” I mean people’s living under inhuman conditions, their not making use of proper services, their not having necessary means enough to lead decent lives. I see it from a humanistic perspective. This problem is not only about Turks or Kurds or Middle East, it is about people living there and the problems they encounter when they try to lead the beautiful lives they deserve, to see different things, to learn things. [...] It is an economic problem, more of economic problem [...] In general, I think that most of the problems are about economy. I think, the extreme of everything stems from a deprivation of something and generally this deprivation proves to be an economical one. [...] I don’t think that things can change unless people are helped to reach a welfare

level. I don't see the problem as a problem of Turks, Kurds, Lazs, Circassians, Afrikans, Serbs or whatever. I see it as a problem of humanity in general.”<sup>25</sup>

The first thing to note about this view is that it excludes the Kurdishness of the Kurdish question. To put it in Mesut Yeğen's words, the *Kurdishness* of the Kurdish question is *silenced*<sup>26</sup> in the narrative of Melike. The Kurdish identity and any identity related claims of the Kurds are excluded in her attempt to explain the problem. Secondly, the problem is defined as a developmental issue. According to Melike, this issue is partly in the responsibility of the state because it is obliged to promote social and economic welfare and partly in the responsibility of the Kurds living in that region. The Kurds are not cognizant either of their conditions or means of improving them. Moreover, they resist to reform initiatives by keeping the traditional/tribal way of living<sup>27</sup> which in Melike's words is giving birth to 10 children without being able to provide better life standards. The perceived incognizance of the Kurds leads to *mistrust* in them and *doubt* about the possibility of the resolution of the Kurdish question. By connecting the Kurdish question to lack of development and regional backwardness,

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<sup>25</sup> “Kürt meselesi, yeteri kadar kalkındırılmamış bir bölgede, yeteri kadar hizmet gitmemiş bir bölgede daha da çığ gibi büyüyerek giden bir sorun. Büyümesinin nedeni de hizmet götüremiyorsunuz. İnsanları da bilinçlendirilemiyor. Bilinçlendiremiyorsunuz. 10 tane çocuk yapıyor bir aile. Bu da matematiksel olarak baktığımızda mevcut sorunun sadece büyümesine yol açıyor. Sorun derken, o insanların insani şartlar altında yaşamaması, düzgün hizmetlerden faydalanamaması, o insanların güzel bir hayat sürmeleri için gerekli, yeterli imkanların olmaması..... ben bunu anlıyorum. İnsani boyutta bakıyorum. Türk'ün ya da Ortadoğu'nun ya da Kürt halkının meselesi gibi değil, orada yaşayan insanların her birinin hakkı olan güzel bir hayat sürebilmeleri, değişik şeyler görmeleri, birşeyler öğrenmeleri için önlerine çıkan bir sorun. [...] Ekonomik bir sorun, daha çok ekonomik bir sorun. Ben birçok sorunun ekonomik sorun olduğunu düşünüyorum genelde. [...] Herşeyin aşırısının bir yerdeki yoksunluktan kaynaklandığını düşünüyorum ve bu genelde ekonomik yoksunluk oluyor. [...] İnsanlar refah seviyesine ulaştırılmadan, imkanlar verilmeden çok birşey değişeceğini sanmıyorum. Ben o Türk, Kürt, bilmem ne, Laz, Çerkez, işte Afrikalı, Sırp bilmem ne sorunu diye görmüyorum. Genel olarak insanlık sorunu gibi görüyorum.”

<sup>26</sup> Mesut Yeğen, “The Kurdish Question in the Turkish State Discourse”, p.555, 1999.

<sup>27</sup> This point is interesting: Mesut Yeğen (2007) notes that Kurdish resistance against any reform (islahat) initiatives dated back to the first day of Young Turk Revolution when an Ottoman Army officer stated in Diyarbakır that “The Kurds have a unique problem: it is ignorance” (quoted in “Turkish Nationalism and the Kurdish Question”, p.123). Similarly, Melike and many other elites make reference to the ignorance of the Kurds because of their reactionary attitudes towards modernization/westernization. It wouldn't be wrong to analyze this point as the continuation of the Young Turk mentality. See Şükrü Hanioglu (2009) for a detailed analysis of the mentality of the Young Turks and its implications for today.

this view emphasizes the “the lack of integration between the region and the national economy”.<sup>28</sup> In other words, the problem is simply “lack of economic integration”. It is in no way an ethnic or a national question. As a result, any endeavor to approach the Kurdish question by recognizing the ethnic and national aspect of it is dismissed by somehow silently continuing the assimilation mentality of the Republic. Accordingly, the Kurdish opening is a “doomed to fail attempt” (Seher-60), has paved the way for the “vilification of the other” (Esra-25), “created sociopolitical polarization” (Filiz-49). It is nothing but an “empty package that is devoid of any substance” (İpek-31) and it is simply “wrong” (Serap-58), because, “we don’t have a Kurdish problem, we never had one” (Ahmet-66).

The tendency of the elites to perceive the Kurdish question as a historyless or “recently constructed” problem and the elimination of the ethno-political aspect of it is where ignorance is produced. This view is the internalized version of a part of the Turkish State discourse which identifies the Kurdish question as a product of backwardness of the regions inhabited by the Kurds.<sup>29</sup>

By silencing the Kurdishness of the Kurdish question, by eliminating and/or rejecting the production of any other discursive formation by the Kurds (such as Kurds’ political and identity related claims<sup>30</sup>) and by internalizing the discourses of the Turkish State, the elites reproduce ignorance and sustain the hegemonic discourse that “enunciates the exclusion of Kurdish identity” (Yeğen 1999, 555). Hence a) the relationship, if any, of the Turkish elites with the Kurds is a relationship of exclusion

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<sup>28</sup> Mesut Yeğen, (2007), “Turkish Nationalism and the Kurdish Question”, p. 132.

<sup>29</sup> See Mesut Yeğen (1999, 2007, 2009) for detailed analyses of the Kurdish question and the Turkish State’s historical discursive formations on the question.

<sup>30</sup> For understanding Kurds’ political and identity related claims, see the report “*A Roadmap for a Solution to the Kurdish Question: Policy Proposals from the Region for the Government*” (2008) released by TESEV.

that is based on a politics of denial of the Kurdish identity, and b) elites' sense of self develops as the Kurds are categorized as the "other" because of their "insistence" on tribal ways of living, "resistance" to westernization/modernization, their "backwardness" and "ignorance" as opposed to the "enlightenment" of the "westernized/modernized" elites, and c) patterns of structural differentiation in society can conceal the information that is needed to develop an accurate diagnosis of the Kurdish question that confronts the Turkish society as a whole. In other words, the group identity and the space of position that the elites occupy vis-à-vis the Kurds disallows the elites to consider the Kurdish question in its own context, and structural ignorance deeply rooted in the narratives of the elites (re)produces the categorization of the Kurds as the "other", eliminating the formation of other discourses than the hegemonic ones.

### **3.4. Otherization through the Armenian Question**

The Armenian question constitutes of embedded nationalistic discourses that formulate, reconstruct and reproduce the category of the "other" for both the Armenians and Turks (Akçam 2008; Göçek 2006). As a result, what happened to Armenians in 1915 is highly politicized and any discussion of the Armenian deaths and massacres of 1915 tends to reflect the nationalistic visions of these historiographies. Fatma Müge Göçek suggests that "nationalism polarized the Armenians and the Turks and caused them to challenge the other's existence" (2006, 115). Accordingly, the dominant nationalistic discourses on the Armenian question either recognize or deny the deaths and massacres of the Armenians. Moreover, the term "genocide" used to define what happened to Armenians toward the end of the Ottoman Empire is still being contested and is "sacred to Armenians and taboo to Turks" (Akçam, 2006, 9). As Halil Berktaş

observes “There is an intensely violent polarization of political attitudes. One of the polars is the ‘policy of genocide confirmation and registration’ and the other is the ‘policy of genocide denial’. In this atmosphere of polarization which leads to intellectual terror, it becomes impossible to talk in middle grounds” (2001, 95).

During my interviews with the elites, I have experienced this difficulty of not being able to talk about the Armenian question without falling into this terminological trap of identifying the question only in relation to genocide denial or genocide confirmation. As Michel–Rolpf Trouillot rightly argues “terminologies demarcate a field, politically and epistemologically. Names set up a field of power” (1995, 115). Despite my efforts to discuss the Armenian question within its historical and social context, and without falling into the terminological trap, the narratives of the elites are clearly characterized by genocide denial or genocide recognition (only by two Armenian informants), hence the power fields are demarcated and nationalisms are produced.

My purpose is not to reproduce more nationalism(s) by rotating around genocide, non-genocide claims but to analyze the question beyond the terminological traps and define how the elites position themselves with respect to the Armenian question.<sup>31</sup> Just like the Kurdish question, Armenian question is a political and epistemological field of producing ignorance fueled by uncertainties, mistrust and silencing.

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<sup>31</sup> Among others, see Taner Akçam (2006, 2008), Hamit Bozarslan (2008), Halil Berktaş (2001, 2004), Selim Deringil (2010) and Fatma Müge Göçek (2006) for an account of 1915 events and the Armenian question concerning these events.



The 1915 events are regarded as an “unknown” in the narratives of the most of elites I have interviewed. *An “unknown” that the elites want to take no responsibility of:* “Of course, it must be done, but I didn’t have a look at the history books, but I think that both Armenia’s and Turkey’s and other countries’ archives should be opened up and this should be discussed by the historians. It is not the government members who should discuss it; a scientific committee, an entirely scientific, independent committee should discuss this question...” (Esra-25).

*An “unknown” that creates uncertainties and mistrust:* “You were in the middle of a war. And while the whole country was at war at different fronts, there are documented facts [sic] that Armenians have rebelled against and killed a lot of civilians, and they don't have to be civilians, they could have killed soldiers... the reaction shown is out of scale and unnecessary. Both sides have massacred each other.. I don't know what it is called.. but if you ask the Turks, they say "Armenians, did this, did that to us". If you ask the Armenians, they say Turks did this, did that to us.” (Sarp-35)<sup>32</sup>

*An “unknown” that constructs a defense narrative against the Armenian “other”:* “You united with the Russians. There was a war going on and your people have fought against us along with the Russians. What happened? Deportation. It is not

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<sup>32</sup> “Zaten bir savaşın ortasındasın. Bütün ülke değişik cephelerde savaş halindeyken, Ermenilerin orada ayaklandığı ve bir sürü yine sivil insanı öldürdüğü -sivil olmak zorunda değil, askerleri de öldürmüş olabilirler- bunlar da documented şeyler..... onun karşılığında gösterilen tepki, bence ölçsüz ve gereksiz. İki tarafta birbirini bir şekilde katletmiş.... artık adı nedir bilmiyorum.... ama Türklerle konuşsan, “Ermeniler bize şöyle yaptılar, böyle yaptılar” diyor. Ermenilerle konuşsan “bize şöyle yaptılar, böyle yaptılar” diyor.”

only us who did that. This was done out of necessity. These are all reasons to put Turkey under pressure (Gülşen-69).<sup>33</sup>

*An “unknown” that silences the claims of the “others” and unearths the secret fears of the powerful elite against the many “others”:* I would reject something that has not been proven that it happened, I believe anyone would do the same as a defense mechanism. I think we, as Turkey, are not strong in the international arena and because of this, I believe we are manipulated. The games of big powers -and when I mean powers, I am not talking about countries anymore. These are a handful of people, a group of very powerful people [sic]. I think that, due to the agendas of these people, - and not so small agendas but big hidden agendas, some plays are being staged. (Melike-30).<sup>34</sup>

An “unknown” that legitimizes and reproduces ignorance by way of hiding things “we” do not want to know. But, why do “we” ignore? Why do “we” not want to know? Let’s hear İdil’s response to these questions:

“[...] Am I doing anything regarding these issues? (being more attentive to the historical and social contexts of the Kurdish and Armenian questions) No. I have other things in my life. Like I said... in essence these issues do not have a context that affect me. Maybe, if it affects me in any way, then I will realize some facts. If some of my privileges are taken away from me.. Maybe then, I

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<sup>33</sup> “Siz Ruslarla birleştiniz. Orada harp oluyordu ve sizin milletiniz bizlere karşı Ruslarla birlikte savaş verdiler. Ne yapıldı? Tehçir yapıldı. Bunu yapan tek biz değiliz, bu mecburiyetler karşısında yapılmış bir şey. Tamamen Türkiye'yi baskı altına almak için çeşitli sebepler bunlar.”

<sup>34</sup> “Olduğu kanıtlanmayan birşeyi ben reddederdim, savunma mekanizması olarak herkes yapar gibi geliyor bana..... Bence biz Türkiye olarak yeterince güçlü olmadığımız için uluslararası arenada maşa olabiliyoruz. Büyük güçlerin oyunları ..... güçler derken de bu artık ülkeler falan değil yani, bunlar a handful of people, a group of very powerful people, onların bazı ajendaları üzerinden bazı hesaplamalar - küçük hesaplamalar değil, büyük hesaplamalar- bazı oyunlar sahneleniyor olabilir diye düşünüyorum.”

will react.. But now, I say ‘the snake that does not touch me can live a thousand years’. I have to admit it, that is how it is for me at the moment. I can't lie.”<sup>35</sup>

There is always a tendency to remember the past in terms of its significance for the present. This is exactly the case regarding the “burden of Armenian memory in Turkey” (Neyzi 2010, 15). Speaking of a past suppressed in the public sphere for decades requires one to delve into the tricky field of agency where one has to break into silence, listen actively, confront and take responsibility of the past.

Elites’ willful ignorance is that it is a means to sustain their power positions. Anything that is not directly threatening the space of positions that the elites occupy can be erased, dismissed, distorted or forgotten because their established privileges are reinforced by these habits. Ignorance, just like knowledge, produces power; power to construct the “other” so that the distances and differences between the elite and the masses can better be demarcated and consequently elite positions shall be maintained. As Paulo Freire writes:

“We have a strong tendency to affirm that what is different from us is inferior. We start from the belief that our way of being is not only good but better than that of others who are different from us. This is intolerance. It is the irresistible preference to reject differences. The dominant class, then, because it has the power to distinguish itself from the dominated class, first, rejects the differences between them but, second, does not pretend to be equal to those who are different; third, it does not intend that those who are different shall be equal. What it wants is to maintain the differences and keep its distance and to

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<sup>35</sup> “Bu konularda herhangi birşey yapıyor muyum? Hayır. Hayatımda başka şeyler var....Dediğim gibi aslında... temelde bana dokunan bir tarafı yok ki. Belki dokunduğunda ayılacağım bir durum olur. Elimdeki bazı imkanlar benden alınırsa.... Ancak o zaman tepki göstereceğim gibi geliyor. Şu anda bana dokunmayan yılan bin yıl yaşasın gibi bir durum var....itiraf edeyim, durum böyle.... yani şimdi yalan söylemeyeyim”.

recognize and emphasize in practice the inferiority of those who are dominated” (1998, 71).

Another reason why the elites actively produce ignorance is because “in cases where knowledge induces culpability or responsibility for actions, ignorance may confer innocence or unaccountability” (Smithson, 1985, 169). In other words, not-knowing is sometimes equal to not being accountable or responsible for any action taken or not taken that has political and social consequences. I argue that the unaccountability argument has an explanatory power in explaining the educated ignorance of the elites. Not knowing is an innocence claim, but not so innocent in itself because it allows the knower to be exempt from the consequences of actions taken. The veil of ignorance hides not only knowledge but also the knowers.

### **3.5. Education and Ignorance: Are they really opposite concepts?**

When we were discussing the Armenian question, Selim restlessly made a remarkable observation about the dependent relationship between education and our knowledge practices. This painful narrative highlights an urgent necessity to analyze and transform our educational practices and the nationalist ideology inculcated in these practices.

“I think this is [the Armenian question] probably the most troubled case of the Republic of Turkey. And it shapes the country’s future to a great extent. Back then, when we were in the university, it was troubling even to talk about it. Then, as far as I observed in the media, there was this *stigma of traitorship*, constantly. To talk about... I mean if we prevent talking about it by ourselves that much, then we multiply the possibility of only outsiders’ talking about it by a hundred. Because here noone can produce ideas on it, we cannot discuss it by ourselves. Thus, this kind of... *I think that the Republic of Turkey, by creating an atmosphere in which not all kinds of ideas can be discussed, has shot its own foot for years, and still doing the same thing. I think there’a self-harming understanding here.* Did it happen? (meaning the Armenian genocide) You know, as far as I’ve read.... When I read Taner Akçam... of course we were never aware of it, we’ve never read anything... I mean on this subject... *what on*

*earth can I comment on? Sure enough, they never taught us anything like that at schools. A country which doesn't not allow its own people's ideas to come into leaf, unfortunately, digs both its own grave and its people's graves. I tend to think that by doing so, it lays a heavy burden on the people. And this is where the biggest trouble lies, I mean it's more important than whether it actually happened or not... Because there are many subjects like this which cannot be discussed somehow<sup>36</sup> (italics are mine).*

Educational institutions are considered to be one of the most effective apparatuses in constructing and reconstructing nationalist ideology (Altınay 2004, Bora 2003, Copeaux 1988, Gellner 1983, Eley and Suny 1996, Hobsbawn and Ranger 2009, Kancı 2008, Kaplan 2008). RC and UAA is not free from this nationalizing aspect of education since these two institutions are obliged to follow the curricula of the Ministry of Education which inculcates nationalistic ideology into education. National education ideology, with its hegemonic character and centralizing tendencies, does not allow any impetus that may engender an oppositional view to the national-ness of education. The national educational institutions are thus the most effective apparatuses in dismissing any in depth inquiries into the controversial issues that are rendered to be national and in securing the reproduction of nationalistic ideology since the foundation years (Copeaux 1988; Kancı 2008; Kaplan 2008).

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<sup>36</sup> Bence Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin herhalde en sıkıntılı davası bu [Ermeni Meselesi]. Geleceğini de önemli bir ölçüde şekillendiriyor. Bu konuyu konuşmak bile çok sıkıntılıydı bizim okulda olduğumuz dönemlerde. Daha sonra, medyadan gözlemlediğim kadarıyla sürekli olarak bir *vatan hainliği damgası*. Bu konuyu konuşmak.. yani bir konunun konuşulmasını biz bu kadar engellersek kendi içimizde, o zaman tek konuşanın dışarıdan olması ihtimalini yüzle çarpıyoruz zaten. Çünkü bu konuda hiç düşünce üreten bir insan olmuyor, tartışmıyoruz kendi içimizde. Dolayısıyla, bu tipte... yani her türlü fikrin tartışılmadığı bir ortamı yaratmış olan Türkiye Cumhuriyeti kendi ayağına kurşun sıktı bence yıllarca ve devam da ediyor bu. Kendi kendisine zarar veren bir anlayış var burada diye düşünüyorum. Var mıydı? (Ermeni soykırımı için soruyor) Yani benim de okuyabildiğim kadarıyla... Taner Akçam'ı okuduğum zaman..... tabii ki hiçbir zaman farkında değildik ki biz, hiçbir şey okumadık ki biz.... yani bu konuda.... ne konuda yorum yapabilirim ki ben? Hakikaten bize okulda hiç böyle birşey anlatılmadı. Kendi insanının fikirlerinin yeşermesine izin vermeyen bir devlet, ne yazık ki kendi kuyusunu kazıyor ve o insanların da kuyusunu kazıyor. Çok büyük bir yük yüklüyor insanların üstüne diye düşünüyorum. En büyük sıkıntı orada yani olup olmamasından daha önemli..... çünkü buna benzer bir sürü konu var konuşulamayan bir türlü.

Given this imperfection that the nationalist education has produced in our learning practices, Selim finds it hard to cope with the new information he obtained about the Armenian question simply because we are not taught to critically deal with heavily loaded concepts but on the contrary, our education “functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity” (Freire, 1987). Willful ignorance of the elites, I think, is closely related to this non-critical, non-reflexive and non-transformative function of education which Theodor Adorno calls half-education (*halbbildung*).

Tanıl Bora, in his article “Tahsilli Cehaletin Cinneti” (The Lunacy of Educated Ignorance) refers to Adorno’s half-education theory and correlates the development of half-education to the economic crisis. When social conditions deteriorate and economic differences become more marked, it is difficult to promise a liberal education. For Adorno, education is free and dynamic. It is not instrumentalized or fixed towards any goal. Lack of education is pure naiveness, pure not knowing; hereby it allows for an unmediated relationship with the objects. Therefore, it provides a starting point where the education can be started. As for half- education, it does not precede education, but follows it; it has been fixed and instrumentalized by being tied to a cultural or social goal. What is half-understood or half-learned is not the fore step of education but its mortal enemy (Bora 2006).

If comprehensive education reflects the idea of developing merely the practical and technical capacities of individuals, providing the kinds of cultural experiences which foster the desire to think critically, then behind half-education lies the desire to

divide up culture and teach only aspects of it. "Half-education is which is left when the conditions of autonomy are neglected and integration and conformity become the central focus" (Maddock, 1998, 6). Education, then, is reduced to fostering conformity and suppresses the capacity for reflection.

It is intellectualism (related to half-education) and anti-intellectualism (related to non-education) that destroys the capacity for reflection and judgment. Half-education does not reject the intellectual, but it strips the intellectual of his/her critical and reflective potential. Education encourages individuals to imagine that they are members of a higher, more comprehensive world. It provides the credentials which allows one to have a say, however restricted, to act like an expert, to support, to belong. Education is a means of integration. The feeling of belonging, however false it might actually be, frees individuals from the need to question, this is the true telos of half-education (Bora, 2006, 38-40).

Maybe, it is not the ignorance of the *masses* but the ignorance of the *elites* that we should attentive to; willful ignorance does not grasp the unity but works rather upon divided particulars, separate phenomena and partial relations. It is a power that divides rather than unites, it seeks out conformity rather than autonomy. As Paulo Freire says, "For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" and true education is "the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world."

## CHAPTER 4

### CONTESTED MEANINGS: TURKISH ELITE'S SECULAR IDENTITY, RISE OF ISLAMISM AND POLITICS OF ANXIETY & SECURITY

*I think at the moment lots of things are going very wrong. I think they are going very, very wrong. In Turkey, there are fears that are really alive, fears that are kept alive. You know... What we call anxiety is something else: It is a state of mind in which, in the future you will be able exist or not (Seher-60).<sup>37</sup>*

With the inception of the new *Radikal* newspaper into the Turkish media in 2010, the readers have been introduced to a newly shaped discussion on the middle and upper-middle classes of Turkey. The discussion was initiated by the chief editor of the new *Radikal* Eyüp Can, who presented the new columnist of the paper and political scientist Binnaz Toprak as an *anxious modern* (endişeli modern). Toprak's latest research titled *Being Different in Turkey: Religion, Conservatism and Otherization* was amply discussed in Turkey in 2009 when it first came out. The research embodied the concept of "neighborhood pressure" introduced by Şerif Mardin. This concept was quickly picked up by a wide range of political parties and intellectuals to define a particular kind of discrimination taking place in Turkey. The purpose of the research was to examine the relationship between religiosity and conservatism in order to determine whether persons with different identities or preferences in Anatolian cities were faced with repression and "otherization" related to religion and conservatism (Toprak, Bozan, Morgül and Şener 2009). In other words, the research focused on the question if those with secular identities faced social pressure and concluded that they

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<sup>37</sup> "Ben şu anda çok şeyin çok kötü gittiğini düşünüyorum. Çok çok kötü gittiğini düşünüyorum. Türkiye'de gerçekten yaşanan, yaşatılan bazı korkular var..... biliyorsun. Endişe dediğin olay başkadır; o, kafanın içinde ilerde yaşayıp yaşayamayacağın yerdur."



did face social pressure. Binnaz Toprak and her colleagues were then accused of using incorrect methodological techniques in their investigation and some regarded the research to be invalid.<sup>38</sup> Since then, regardless of her previous studies which concentrated on discrimination based on religious belief and practices<sup>39</sup>, Binnaz Toprak was mostly regarded as voicing the anxieties of the secular segment of the society.

The term “anxious modern” was first introduced by Tarhan Erdem who is also a columnist of *Radikal* and the founder of KONDA Research and Consultancy Firm which conducts surveys on political and social life in Turkey. On 10 September 2009, Erdem introduced and defined the term “anxious modern” in his column. According to him, approximately 10% of Turkish people constitutes of what he refers to as "anxious moderns". Basing his claims on the surveys he conducted, he asserted that the most important republican value of anxious moderns is secularism which engenders a categorical opposition to AKP and its policies.<sup>40</sup>

Later, in an interview, basing his observations on The Constitutional Referendum Survey that his firm had conducted before the referendum on 12 September 2010, Erdem claimed that 10 % of those who voted against the constitutional amendments were the “anxious moderns”. “The anxious moderns believe that AKP wants to impose a system based on religious rules. In 2002, this was only a suspicion [...] Frankly, I had such a suspicion back then, but now this suspicion among the anxious moderns, let alone decreasing, became a conviction. They do not argue whether it is like this or like that. "AKP will bring the shariah rule, full stop. It will turn Turkey into Iran. Full stop [...] I think we should call them "determined cowards" from now

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<sup>38</sup> Etyen Mahçupyan, “Hangi Mahalle Baskısı”, *Taraf*, 26.12.2008

<sup>39</sup> See Binnaz Toprak, *Islam and Political Development in Turkey*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1981; Binnaz Toprak, “Islam and Democracy in Turkey”, *Turkish Studies*, Volume 6, Issue 2, June 2005, 167-87.

<sup>40</sup> Tarhan Erdem, “Ceza”, *Radikal*, 10.09.2009

on.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, in the view of Tarhan Erdem, within one year, the “anxious moderns” had been transferred from being anxious to being fearful, from skeptics to cowards. To put it differently, “anxious moderns”, according to Erdem, had moved along a line which was initially guided by reason but later –as AKP secured its place as the one and only political actor in Turkish political realm- rationality was replaced by futile and irrational feelings which engendered incompetence to discern the democratic achievements of AKP.

Moving along the same vein, the term “anxious modern” was immediately adopted by Binnaz Toprak and her first article in her new column was titled as “*Why am I anxious?*” Her definition of the term was quite different from Erdem’s. Hers implied that she was in no way categorically in opposition with AKP, or living with the fear that Turkey may turn into a country like Iran. On the contrary, she praised the performance of AKP on certain political issues. Why, then, was Toprak anxious?

“I am anxious because democracy is being used for populism and domination of the majority, while the minorities are marginalized. I am anxious because those who criticize the government are labeled as pro-coup d'etatist, pro-militarist, nationalist, secularist and these labelings silence the critical mind. This process of silencing the oppositional voices do not support the idea of democratization for me. [...]. AKP is likely to rule Turkey by itself or through coalitions for a long time and I find its discourse of democratization troublesome. It is drawing the developing democratization process to a populist line. This discourse which hails public support and puts majority's votes in the center of democracy's definition, is hiding our democracy's "illiberal" dimensions. As Eyüp Can phrases it, the impression that AKP has on "the anxious moderns" like myself is that we are against a power that is willing to use its executive and legislative power to the very end.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Neşe Düzel, Interview with Tarhan Erdem, *Taraf*, 20.09.2010

<sup>42</sup> Binnaz Toprak, “Neden Endişeliyim?” *Radikal*, 17.10.2010

This dissident voice of Toprak is echoed by the Turkish elites that I have interviewed *all* of whom are anxious about Turkey’s future. Unlike Tarhan Erdem and similar to Toprak, they do not regard this anxiety as an impertinent or irrational feeling but as an essential state of somehow restless alertness against the allegedly undesirable effects of the in-and-still rising power of AKP as the conservative governing party. The Turkish elites are constituted of the so-called “anxious moderns” whose political and social standing is antagonistic to conservatism and religious ideologies which they believe to be crystallized in the mentality of AKP.<sup>43</sup>

In this respect, Turkish elites believe that AKP’s increasing and deepening power is a threat to the secular structure of the state because of the belief that AKP has “hidden agendas” to change the secular character of the state “when the times are ripe”. The elites’ insecurities and anxieties about Turkey’s future focus basically on secularism which is a central tenet in Turkish political and social life. The danger is the rise of Islamism which is “construed and presented as the most major threat to the integrity of the state in Turkey” (Navaro-Yashin 2002, 7).

The post-Cold War world is partly characterized by the demand for political recognition of the Islamic identities and the crisis of multiculturalism. The resurgence of religious movements has caused –and is still causing– anxiety not only in Turkey but also in the world. During the 1990s, the post-Cold War world has frequently witnessed the emergence of varying claims to religious identity and politics which in the beginning of the millennium reached its peak with what is now known as the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the USA causing thousands of casualties, and bringing about human

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<sup>43</sup> The examination of the mentality, ideology and structure of AKP as a political party is beyond the scope of this research. See İlhan Özgel and Bülent Duru (eds), *AKP Kitabı: Bir Dönüşümün Bilançosu*, 2009 and Nuh Yılmaz “İslamcılık, AKP, Siyaset”, 2005 for detailed inquiries into AKP.

misery and tragedy (Keyman 2007). The recent developments in many European states, such as the headscarf debate in France (Göle 2010, Scott 2007), the increasing intolerance and discrimination against different religious identities in Germany and Netherlands<sup>44</sup> similarly informs the ambiguity and ambivalence embedded in the connection between religion and secular European modernity (Keyman 2007).

All these recent developments have invigorated the view that Muslim societies, due to the alleged anti-modern and fossilized nature of the Islamic tradition, are incapable of adapting to modern values, secularism in particular (Hashemi 2010). The idea that Islam is incompatible with secularism as the main feature of European modernity has fed upon the anxieties and fears of the secular identities<sup>45</sup> and stimulated the view that secular European modernity has to be protected against the rise of Islamism. In return, religion has responded to the challenge of secularism with a vigorous defense of its appropriate role as an essential player in public life.

Another outcome of the latest developments concerning the connection between religion and secularism is the conviction among some scholars that the classical “secularization thesis” is challenged (Gülalp 2002; Keddie 1997, 2003; Taylor 2010). The scholarly literature that informs the connection between religion and secularism has generated new readings of secularism which have posed a great challenge to the traditional secularism thesis and paved the way for what we may call post-secularism. “The secularization thesis is a research program with, at its core an explanatory model which asserts that the social significance of religion diminishes in response to the

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<sup>44</sup> See the report “Addressing Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims: Education and Youth”, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/documents/39017>.

<sup>45</sup> Secular identities are the “laikler” of Turkey. Secularism in Turkey defines not only a “regime” but also individual people. I understand “secular identity” as a cultural and political identity in the making. “Laikçi”, *secularist* is also a term used to define this identity. See Navaro Yashin, 2002.

operation of modernization” (Keddie 1997). In other words, the secularization thesis emphasizes a linear progressive viewpoint of modernization: the more modernized a society is, the more secular it becomes, hence the decline of religiosity. The challenge of the secularization thesis is, however, in explaining why religion did not go away.

An alternative to the secularization thesis came from Charles Taylor who “engages a complex reading of the interconnections and re-compositions of the religious-secular divide that ends up, according to him, by their mutual fragilization in the present stage” (Göle 2010). Taylor refrains from the dualistic and simplistic thesis of opposition between religion and secularism and rejects the linearity and universality of the secularization thesis. Briefly put, basing his arguments on Western modernization, Taylor states that a) modern secularization does not necessarily result in a decline in religiosity and b) rather than conceptualizing and situating the secular European modernity as a universal given, he problematizes European modernity and secularism as “ideal” and universal” types. In search of a democratic reconciliation between secular and non-secular identities in the Western context, Taylor adopts a view of secularism without negating it to religion and aims to comprehend multiple modernities rather than a singular view of an all-encompassing modernity.

After historicizing and defining secularism in Turkey, this chapter, in the light of the aforementioned views, attempts to examine a) the construction of the secular elite identity, b) the nationalistic discourses that inspire or are supported by this identity, c) how the notions of identity and nationalistic discourses frame the context of debates (e.g. headscarf debate) in contemporary Turkey.

#### 4.1. The Multiple Histories of Secularism: How to Define Secularism?

Secularism is a complex concept the meaning of which is deeply contested (Keddie 2003; Taylor 2010). The ambiguity of the concept is ingrained in the two different dominant models of secularism that have been bequeathed to us from Euro-American tradition of political thought. These models are Anglo-American secularism and French secularism or *laicism* (Hashemi 2010, Kuzu 2007, Taylor 2010). These different models have evolved under different historical circumstances which entailed the formation of different secularisms. As Nader Hashemi writes, “the different histories of political secularism are a by-product of the unique political experiences and debates over the relationship between religion and state and controversies over the role of religion in emerging democracies” (2010, 328). Similarly, Ahmet Kuzu argues that secularism cannot be studied outside the contexts of historical conditions and ideological struggles that determine the mode of secularism a state adopts during the state building process (2007).

The difference between these two models of secularism mentioned above is based on whether the state policies toward public visibility of religion are inclusionary or exclusionary. Anglo-American model which pursues inclusionary state policies experiences “passive secularism” which “requires that the secular state play a passive role in avoiding the establishment of any religions, allows for the public visibility of religion” (Kuzu 2007, 571). The French model, on the other hand, experiences “assertive secularism” which “means that the state excludes religion from the public sphere and plays an assertive role as the agent of a social engineering process that confines religion to private domain” (ibid.).<sup>46</sup> What determines the mode of secularism

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<sup>46</sup> See Charles Taylor, “Modes of Secularism” in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. by Rajeev Bhargava, 1998.

a state enforces, therefore, is dependent upon the historical conditions and ideological struggles during the nation building process. In the light of this fact, we can define secularism as follows:

Nikki Keddie has listed three ways in which secularization is commonly understood today: (1) “an increase in the number of people with secular beliefs and practices”; (2) “a lessening of religious control or influence over major spheres of life”, and (3) “a growth in state separation from religion and in secular regulation of formerly religious institutions and customs” (2003, 16).

Similarly, José Casanova adopts a tripartite categorization of secularism. He makes a distinction between “secularization as differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, secularization as decline of religious beliefs and practices, and secularization as marginalization of religion to a privatized sphere” (quoted in Hashemi 2010, 327).

Finally, in more recent intervention, Charles Taylor -providing similar definitions of secularism to those mentioned above- has argued that secularism is not a bulwark to religion or public visibility of religious identities. He writes “one of our basic problems in dealing with ... problems is that we have the wrong model, which has a continuing in our minds. We think that secularism (or *laïcité*) has to do with the relation of the state and religion, whereas in fact it has to do with the (correct) response of the democratic state to diversity” (2010, 25). In this respect, he favors a secular regime which is neutral to religious or non-religious viewpoints. For him, “the pluralism of society requires that there be some kind of neutrality, or ‘principled distance’ to use Rajeev Bhargava’s term” (2010, 23). The point of “principled distance” of the state is precisely to avoid favoring or disfavoring not just religious positions, but any basic position, religious or non-religious.

All these discussions remind me of one of my interviewees who was quite concerned about whether people around her would keep a “principled distance” if she disclosed her stance as an agnostic. Defining herself as a non-religious person, she had kept her long and contemplative journey toward agnosticism secret because of the fear that she might have been marginalized. The significance of Taylor’s intervention to the debate on secularism is striking not only from the point of view of religious identities - who seem to be discussed more in Turkey- but also from the point of view of non-religious identities.

My analysis of secularism in Turkey will thus be situated within the framework of a pluralistic understanding which appreciates diversity, and which problematizes both assertive secularism and its fetishization. This approach neither questions that certain practices of political Islam may embody possible threats to secularism, nor renders these possibilities less “real”, but in an attempt to inquire into the secularist mentality of the elites, this approach aims to examine how the secular identities manifest themselves in social relations in contemporary Turkey. It is about scrutinizing meanings attached to and feelings associated with secularism by the secularist elites, and exploring the implications of these current meanings and feelings.

#### **4.2. Situating Secularism in Turkey<sup>47</sup>: The Historical Legacy of Atatürk**

After the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his colleagues, the rapid process of secularization began with the abolishment of the caliphate in 1924. This act was the first attempt to mark a sharp difference between the religious state of the Ottoman Empire and the secular state of the Turkish Republic. Other secularizing reforms continued: in 1925, the religious shrines

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<sup>47</sup> I agree with Davison (2003) that the practice of secularism in Turkey is better understood with the concept of laicism than with the concept of secularism. Nevertheless, in order not to complicate the narrative, I have chosen to use ‘secularism’ in reference to Turkey’s *laiklik*.



(*türbe*) and dervish convents (*tekke*) were closed down, and in a symbolic act that epitomized the breaking of links with the Ottoman past, the fez, a must wear accessory for all adult Muslim men in the country was declared illegal. A new law required all men to wear western-style hats.

In 1926, the Sharia and the *medrese* system (traditional schools where the basis of instruction was religion) were abolished and the European calendar was adopted. The Swiss Civil Code that regulates matters of marriage, inheritance, divorce etc. was introduced in the same year. In 1928, with abolishment of the Arabic alphabet, the Latin alphabet and script was adopted. In 1936 the Muslim Sabbath, Friday, was dropped in favor of Sunday. Henceforth, Saturday and Sunday would be the weekend according to the new calendar. Secularism became a principle of Turkish constitution in 1937. With all these reforms, secularization pushed the Islamic faith out of the public domain and marked a major rupture with the Ottoman past (Ahmad 2003, 2005; Zürcher 2007).<sup>48</sup>

Turkish secularism has a distinctive characteristic that separates it from Western models. “Secular reforms in Turkey never aimed at complete separation of religion and state, as Islam was put under the straight control of through the establishment of *Diyanet*” (General Directorate of Religious Affairs) (Gürbey 2009, 314). Accordingly, “Islam was not disestablished: it was differently established” (Davison 2003, 341). Through the *Diyanet* “the state produces knowledge about a particular conception of Islam as a part of the project of nation-making, hence exercising a theological function” (Gürbey 2009, 314). Turkish secularism puts religion into the domain of the secular by the establishment of *Diyanet* as an apparatus that embraces the policy of providing

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<sup>48</sup> This is not to suggest that secularization attempts were initiated with the establishment of the Republic. On the contrary, the modernization/westernization projects of the Ottoman Empire included a secularist vein. See Ahmad 2003, 2005; Zürcher 2007; Kushner 1977; Lewis 2002; Mardin 1962; Karpas 2008; Hanioglu 1995, 2001 for documentations of the secularization attempts of the late Ottoman Empire.

Muslims the “true knowledge” of Islam. Islam, then, becomes the “national” religion of the modern Turkish nation which employs a particular conception of religion that is in line with the goal of westernization/modernization. “The state control of religion was needed in order to attain the goal of elevating Turkey to the level of contemporary civilization, i.e. westernization. Hence, secularism not only became a set of policies leading to state control of religion but also ensured that Islam would not get in the way of the larger goal of westernization” (Kadıoğlu 2010, 494).

The nation building process of the Turkish Republic was largely characterized by “a singular and unitary definition of Turkism that was based on a radical break from the former religious definition” (Yıldız 2001, 139). Secularization was the project that informed the construction of Turkish national identity. In this respect, secularism “did not accompany modernization, but, rather, became a project in order to realize the goal of becoming western” (Kadıoğlu 2010, 490). This point is crucial, because elites’ perception of the status of secularism in Turkey today, is largely assessed by whether the goal of “becoming western” has been achieved or not. For them, like the Kemalist elites in the formation years of the Republic, becoming western/modern have two unconditional prerequisites: having a secular identity and believing in the principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, that is being/becoming Atatürkists. They think that those who pursue another route by way of an affiliation to construct politically religious identities as opposed to the secular identities depart from the path of modernization.

In the eyes of the Turkish elites, just like it was in eyes of the Republican elites, secularization is a project to fulfill the goal of modernization and Westernization (Kadıoğlu 2010). Back in the foundation years, secularization was a top-down, constructed and tightly controlled project. Today, according to the Turkish elites, it has

to be reconstructed in the same way it was constructed before, and should be kept under strict control because the project has not been fulfilled yet. The challenge of Turkish secularization project, from the beginning, is in articulating secular subjectivities that are very much caught up in the discourses of modernization, Westernization and nationalism. Turkish secularism is entrapped in an amalgam of these discourses that fail to accommodate religious identities and thus turns into an exclusivist, assertive discourse. Consequently, secularism in Turkey becomes the management of the fear of religion and the religious. I argue that in contemporary Turkey, secularist discourses are closely related to and intertwined with certain nationalist discourses. In order to understand the discursive field in which Turkish secularism realizes itself and by taking the headscarf debate as a reference point, I will attempt to inquire into the emerging nationalism(s) that Turkish elites are inclined to internalize and/or idealize.

### **4.3. Secularism and Nationalism Alarmed**

There are two kinds of fears that the secular elites experience in contemporary Turkey. The first kind of fear stems from the “outsiders”, those who are not in the circles of the elites. It is the fear of the possibility of a forced change of elite life-styles. The power that AKP as the governing conservative party employs and the fact that the majority of the people in Turkey vote for AKP construct the fear that the western and secular life-style is under threat (see the discussion below). The second type of fear stems from the “insiders”: those who are believed to be “one of us”, who have a western and secular life-style, those who have been educated in elite circles and those who have an elite *habitus*. What generates fear in the case of the “insiders” is the possibility that these “insiders” may “betray” the defining principles of Atatürkism which operates as a very effective symbolic power in elite circles.

An example of betrayal can be illustrated in the case of the last film *Mustafa* that journalist and writer Can Dündar shot. The depiction of Atatürk in this film, that he is a smoker, he was fond of women and he drank too much, is believed to harm the image of Atatürk in these “uncanny” times. Both the film and the film-maker are perceived to be “disloyal” to Atatürk as a symbol and cult figure.

“Atatürk wasn't someone we are impressed by for his private life. You know, he saved the country. He was a successful commander. Then again, he founded the republic, it was a great revolution. He guided us forward, towards *çağdaşlık* (up-to-dateness), towards the west. I don't see anything to niggle in it. Why should I meddle into his private life? Why should it be the subject of films? Whether he drank or not, whether he smoked or not? Why should I concern myself with it? Whether he was too fond of women or not? I am not interested in these aspects of him... I mean, if they want to talk about it, let them talk. But it is not a proper subject for me to talk about. Why do people try to dishonor him like that, what has it got to do with it?”<sup>49</sup> (Gülşen)<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, İpek (31) argues that “because this film was shot by somebody who was perceived to be an Atatürkist”, the whole issue of defending and protecting the values of the Republic becomes even more urgent”. The sense of urgency is fueled by the perception that “insiders” are gradually becoming “outsiders” and betraying the basic principles of what is regarded as “sacred” and “valuable”, the principles of Atatürkist nationalism. Liberal democrat journalists who support AKP’s efforts to bring to the center the traditionally invisible periphery –that is, Kurds and Islamists- are also

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<sup>49</sup> It is worth noting the similarity of this Atatürkist argument with the Islamist argument raised against the recent TV series *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (The Magnificent Century) the director and the script-writer of which is being accused of “inappropriately” depicting the private life of Süleyman the Magnificent.

<sup>50</sup> “Atatürk bizi özel hayatıyla etkileyen bir adam değildi ki. Ne bileyim, memleketi kurtardı. Kumandan olarak başarılı bir adamdı. Sonra cumhuriyeti kurdu, büyük bir devrimdi. İleriye, çağdaşlığa doğru, batıya doğru bir yön gösterdi. Şimdi bunların irdelenecek bir tarafını görmüyorum. Şahsi hayatına niye beni karısayım? Niçin filmlere konu oluyor? Yok içermiş, içmezmiş, sigara içermiş, içmezmiş. Beni ne alakadar ediyor? Kadınlara düşkünüm, değilmiş. Beni ne alakadar ediyor? Ben bu yönüyle meşgul değilim ki Atatürk'ün.... Buyurulsun, konuşulsun, yani isteyen konuşur ama benim konuşacağım bir konu değil. Niçin bu tip konularla Atatürk'e leke sürülmeye kalkılıyor, ne alakası var?”

perceived as “inside outsiders” and “traitors”. Ahmet Altan the chief editor of *Taraf* newspaper, and most of *Taraf* columnists are accused of “digging Turkey’s grave” (Dilek-60) by supporting AKP and its policies.

To sum up, either because of the “outsiders” or the “inside outsiders”, or both, secularism is perceived to be under threat. The sustainability of the secularist structure of the state becomes a security issue from the perspective of the elites. The “securityness of secularism”, as Pınar Bilgin (2008) phrases it, is the main source of anxiety of the elites I have interviewed. This deeply rooted anxiety shapes the political and social standing of the elites all of whom define themselves as having secular identities. I have observed that elites’ perception of threat against secularism manifests itself as “*discourses of danger*” – the set of validity claims through which someone or something is represented as under threat or in need of safeguarding” (Bilgin, 2008, 594). Taking secularism as a security referent “rests upon the premise that danger is not an objective condition but is socially constructed” (ibid.). Studying the insecurity and anxiety of the elites, therefore, implies an examination of the social construction of the “discourses of danger” they tend to (re)produce.

#### **4.4. The Headscarf Debate**

The stipulation on dress codes in Turkey bans women from veiling in universities and public places. The women who demand to be admitted to universities with headscarves argue that it is a basic civil liberty whereas the higher courts of the Turkish state that issued the ban argued that 1) veiling restricted women’s liberties, 2) it was a symbol of opposition to the Republic, 3) it would lead to unequal treatment and 4) veiling implied the threat of organizing the state according to the dictates of Islam (Arat,

2001). Over the past three decades, Turkey has witnessed heated debates about the acceptability of the veil in public institutions.

The headscarf debate has been the defining marker of secular/anti-secular polarization in Turkey. Veiling and what it symbolizes is the negation of the being, life, presence and identity of the secular elites. It is the “other” of the symbolic power -that is Atatürkist nationalism- the elites construct their secular identities upon. Veiling as a symbol is perceived to be the end of a modern and secular social imaginary. It is a catastrophe, the worst thing that can happen to Turkey as Özkan (69) anxiously prophesizes while negating the symbolism of veiling to his identity “I am a secular person. I believe hundred percent in it, thousand percent... I think that otherwise, it will be Turkey's disaster, thus may come the civil war, thus and so may it come only”. As Casanova asserts headscarf debate “certainly was perceived as a blasphemous affront against the secularist constitutional principles of the state” (quoted in Keyman 2007, 227).

#### **4.5. Muslim identity versus Islamist identity: The Construction of “Turkish Islam”**

One of the arguments posed by the elites in defense of secularism focused on what kind of an identity veiling represents and to what extent this identity is acceptable by the norms of Turkish secularism. Özkan (69) who has a religious as well as a secular individuality explains the difference of a Muslim and Islamic identity as follows:

“I am a religious man. I never leave home without completing my morning prayers, never. I used to go to Friday prayers in the past, tried not to miss it. Once, many years ago, during the Cyprus war, at Rüstem Paşa Mosque, a man came up for the sermon and he said “our topic today is the war”. I don't forget, I was contemplating he would talk about unity, togetherness, forgetting about old separations. I heard him saying "your real enemies are the Mustafas and Ismets".... I left, I could not argue against him there but I could not endure that either. It was a very difficult experience for me. I do not go to mosques after

that. I know, I have to go but I don't. I do not want to experience something like that once more, but other than that, I am a religious person. For me, it is not Islam being practiced in most of Turkey but it is Islamism. It is to achieve economic gain using religion. If I am praying, if I am going to pilgrimage, these are not against secularism. These are the conditions of Islam. Nobody can say I am an Islamist because I do these. The real people, the real people of faith do these and do not boast about it".<sup>51</sup>

The differentiation of Özkan between the religious and “pseudo-religious” identities is based upon the Republican assertion that religion is a private matter, hence should be kept in private domains of life. In public places, as well as in mosques, if religion and religious identities are politicized and/or publicized, secular norms are endangered. This view entails a dividing line between a Muslim identity and an Islamist identity. The former expresses a religious identity whereas the latter refers to a social movement that through which Muslim identity is collectively re-appropriated as a basis for an alternative social and political project (Göle 2002). The Muslim identity is perceived to be in harmony with the secular norms whereas the Islamic identity is a “swaggering” identity that embodies potential threats to secularism.

A similar argumentation on the differentiation of identities is presented also by Filiz (49) who is exceptionally pessimistic about Turkey's future. She fears for herself and the Jewish community she belongs to and regards that the recent developments in

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<sup>51</sup> “Ben dindar bir adamım. Sabah namaz kılmadan evimden çıkmam. Hiç böyle birşey baki değil... eskiden Cuma namazına da giderdim, onu da kaçırmazdım ama bu Rüstem Paşa Camii'nde, vaktiyle çok sene evvel, Kıbrıs Harbi sırasında, bir Cuma namazına gittim. Hutbeye bir adam çıktı, “konumuz savaş” dedi. Ben de unutmuyorum... içimden geçen... yani bu savaşta artık ayrılıkları unutam... birlik, beraberlik diye söyler, diye düşünürken..... "senin asıl düşmanların Mustafalardır, İsmetlerdir" diye hutbeden o adamın lafını duydum ben ve çıktım çünkü karşı çıkamazdım orada... ama ona da tahammül etmek mümkün değildi. Bana çok ağır geldi. Çıktım oradan, çıktım... ondan sonrada camiiye gitmiyorum, camiiye gitmiyorum. Gitmem lazım, onu da biliyorum ama gitmiyorum. Bir daha böyle birşeye muhattap olmak istemiyorum... ama onun dışında dindar bir insanım. Bence Türkiye'nin büyük bir kısmında yapılan din değildir, dinciliktir. Yapılan dini kullanarak ekonomik rant sağlamaktır. Şunlar laikliğe aykırı değildir: ben namaz kılıyorsam, ben Hacca gidiyorsam, bunlar laiklik karşıtı değil...ya bunlar Müslümanlığın icabı zaten... bunu yapıyorum diye kimse beni dinci falan saymasın. Zaten doğru dürüst adamlar, doğru dürüst riayet edenler bunları yapıyorlar ve bunların fiyakasını yapmıyorlar.”

Turkey embody an immense threat to both the current secular regime and Atatürkist nationalism. For her, the Muslim identity had a “balancing power” in Turkey for those who are non-Muslim. “The Republican and Turkish interpretation of Islam” had been in compliance with other religions and religious identities living in Turkey whereas the Islamic identity –promoted by AKP- has an “imperious” character that has the potential to harm non-Muslim communities, Jews in particular.

“I am Jewish. I am a Turk. And I am very happy of being a Turk..... Let me say, it was my first awakening to not being accepted as much as a Turk in Turkey, despite my feeling as a Turk. Being aware of the conditions that Jews have gone through in history, I do not want to stay in a place where I am not wanted as a Jew. I do not want to go. This is where I was born. This is where all the people I have know all my life are. This is where all my values come from. Today, it is the religious aspect being questioned. It is not that religion did not exist here before, or people had difficulty in practising their faith. Everybody practised what they wanted but his was what defined you. I feel there is a more hardcore Arabic type of Islam being imposed. This is what I interpret from what I see. Arabic type of Islam fosters Jewish hatred, so much as to saying "it is a right to kill a Jew" in the interpretations of the religious book.”<sup>52</sup>

The above argumentations of a secular Muslim Turk (Özkan) and a secular Jewish Turk (Filiz) depart from different contexts but arrive at a similar conclusion which questions the use and abuse of religion. Secularism, for both, is a means to protect their being, presence, and life-styles which are allegedly endangered by the emergence of Islamist identities as opposed to Muslim identities who tend to regard

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<sup>52</sup> “Yahudiyim. Türküm. Türklüğümde de son derece mutluyum..... Benim kendimi Türk hissettiğim kadar, Türkiye'de o derecede Türk kabul edilmiyor olabileceğime uyanıyorum. Yahudilerin tarih içinde yaşamak durumunda kaldıkları olayları da bilince, ben bir Yahudi olarak istenmediğim yerde kalmamaktan yanayım. Gitmek istemiyorum, burası benim doğduğum yer. Bütün çevrem olduğu yer. Bütün değerlerimin örtüştüğü yer. Bugün, din boyutu çok körükleniyor. Eskiden burada din yok değildi ki, eskiden burada insanlar dini vecibelerini yerine getirmekte bir sıkıntı mı yaşıyordu? Herkes ne istiyorsa yapıyordu ama bu ön kimlik olarak ortaya çıkan birşey değildi. Bugün daha Arap tarzı bir Müslümanlık damardan verilmeye çalışılıyor gibi bir hissim var benim. Gördüğümü öyle yorumluyorum. Arap tarzı Müslümanlık Yahudi düşmanlığını körükleyen bir tarzdır ve dini kitabın yorumlamalarında da -Yahudi öldürmek haktır'a kadar giden, öyle yorumlanan taraflar vardır.”



religion as a non-political and private matter. Religious identities, for both, should be aligned to the norms of Turkish secularism. In this sense, secularism is the defining principle that organizes life and the chief principle of *Ataturkist nationalism* which emerged in the 1990s as a secular reaction to the rise of Islamism is secularism (Bora 2003) In this nationalist discourse, secularism has been modified and codified with an effort to “nationalize” the religion. With the attempt to align religion to the secular norms of Ataturkist nationalism, a “Turkish Islam” was created (Bora 2003, 440), the Turkishness of which is construed as the public identity and Islamic as the private identity. “Turkish Islam” conceptualization is not only hostile to public representations of Islamist identities but also “expresses its opposition to the Arabs which Ataturkist nationalism reduces to a symbol of political Islam” (439). The “Arab-like” religiosity as opposed to “Turkish Islam” is disparaged and disliked (Serap-58, Melike 30) and perceived to have nothing in common with the concept of Turkishness embedded in Ataturkist nationalism (Esra-25).

#### **4.6. Veiling: A Symbol of Piety or Politics?**

Elite discourses of danger are constructed around the axis of the reconstitution, reformulation and construction of Islamist life practices the secular speculations of which are the use of public space across gender and wearing of Islamist headscarf (Navaro-Yashin 2002). Veiling for *all* elites is a symbol of politics, sincerity of which can be questioned.

“Headscarf is a political symbol. It can not be considered within the context of religious freedom. I do not believe in its sincerity. Our people in Anatolia is covered. Go to the villages, women are covered. Nobody has anything against that kind of covering, we do not find it strange. [...] Because I am a deeply secular person, deeply believing in secularism and I have no interest in

headscarves, religions, I do not want to see people with headscarves in the universities”. (Gülsen-69).<sup>53</sup>

The politicization of Islamic headscarf is what triggers the emergence of mistrust towards the Islamist identities. Veiling is perceived as an Islamist uprising and an Islamist definition of self as opposed to the “Anatolian style of covering” which is not appropriated as a political symbol but a disinterested one. As Nilüfer Göle succinctly observes “many will say that they are not against grandmother’s headscarf, that on the contrary they remember it with affection and respect. This is certainly true to the extent that “grandmothers” either sat in their corners at home and didn’t step into the sites of modernity or took off their headscarves as they walked out from indoors. Such behavior is in conformity with the scenario of national progress and emancipation of women, key elements of modern social imaginary” (2002, 181).

Stepping into the sites of modernity damages the boundaries of distinction elites construct themselves upon; it disturbs the sense of distances and differences built on the possession of cultural and social capital. “I feel strange -even bad I should say- when I see people in complete black veils in Ulus, Etiler, Arnavutköy and Bebek...thinking, what are they doing here? Then, they say these people are being paid.. to create this feeling in you. They are in fact are not living here but are being told "here is money, wear your veil, get on the bus and just wander around in Ulus, Etiler. I do believe it is so” (İpek-31). Ulus, Etiler, Arnavutköy, Bebek all being expensive and fancy neighborhoods are reserved for the visibility of modern, *çağdaş*, fashionable, elegant,

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<sup>53</sup> Başörtüsü siyasi bir simgedir. Din özgürlüğü kapsamında ele alınamaz. Samimiyetine inanmıyorum. Bizim Anadolu örtülüdür, biliyorsunuz. Köylere gidin, örtülüdür. Kimsenin o örtü takma biçimine itirazı yoktur, biz yadırgamayız. [...] Çok derinden, çok laik bir insan olduğum için, laikliğe çok inanan bir insan olduğum için ve böyle başörtülerle, dinlerle falan ilgim olmadığı için, ben üniversitelerde başörtülü insan görmek istemiyorum

stylish and classy outfits representing emancipated, secular and Republican women. In a similar vein, Filiz (49) multiplies the sites of distinction.

“We went to a concert in Nişantasi on Saturday evening. Four women completely veiled in black are continuously walking around in the concert hall. Everybody is sitting down and these women are touring around. None of us is in need of touring around. We are in a concert hall. They go from one side of the hall to the other. It happened like four times, what does this mean? If you ask me, they were given 50TL each just to tour around, this was their mission. Go and say “we are here at the heart of Nisantasi in our black veils”, tell them “we are also here” and let them be irritated. These are exercises of "getting us used to", are these girls really like this because of their faith?” (Filiz-49).<sup>54</sup>

Concert halls as well as fancy neighborhoods, as sites of representation of distinction and taste for the owners of cultural capital, define the boundaries of exclusion and inclusion. Islamic outfit is excluded in these sites, Islamic women are not recognized. Elite’s perception of the Islamic attire is an issue of recognition which “arises when the “other”, perceived as different, becomes closer in proximity- spatially, socially and corporeally. Recognition of difference is possible only when one finds similitude and commonality with the other” (Göle 2002, 186). In the aforementioned narratives, İpek and Filiz do not discern the “concrete other” and do not tolerate difference as part of a social bond. “Overpoliticized definitions of identity and arguments of conspiracy exclude the possibility of finding semblance and familiarity: indeed they reinforce the demoniacal definitions of adversary” (ibid).

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<sup>54</sup> Cumartesi akşamı Nişantaşı'nda bir konsere gittik. Dört tane siyah çarşafli kız konser başlamadan bir o yana gidiyorlar, bir bu yana..... herkes oturuyor salonda, o siyah çarşaflılar biri oradan bağlı, biri buradan bağlı, biri buradan bağlı, herkes oturuyor, hiçbirimiz kalkıp tur atma ihtiyacında değiliz. Konser salonundayız, bir o yana gidiyorlar, bir bu yana gidiyorlar. Dört kere falan oldu bu, şimdi bu ne? Bence bir 50'şer lira aldılar, bu turu atın görevi verildi onlara. Nişantaşı'nın göbeğinde siyah çarşafarla “biz buradayız” yapın ve oradaki kesimler bundan bir rahatsızlık duysun. Alıştırma çalışmaları yani, bu kızlar inançlarıyla mı böyleler?

I have observed that adversarial definitions of veiled women are much more emphasized in the narratives of elite women than elite men. Secular elite women perceive veiled woman to be “subservient to man”, enslaved to the “inferior” status Islam has designated for them. During the foundational years of Turkish Republic, veiling was a question of civilization. In the 1940s and 1950s, it was associated with rural Turkey and singled out as a matter of underdevelopment, poverty and tradition. In the 1980s and 1990s veiling became a matter of public confrontation with the state authorities as well as secular segments of society (Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu 2008). During the same period, as Cihan Aktaş argues veiling had been “reinvented” as the mark of urban, modern, well educated identity of the Islamist activist women and became an inevitable sign of Islamic revivalism (2006).

“Their [veiled women] core values, way of life and view of life are not the same with me. I do not want to live religion in such an obsessed way. For me, religion is not just about formalities [such as veiling]. I cannot accept people who live it like that. I cannot imagine women who are like that can have an open mind "about anything". How can one be such closed-minded, formal about one thing and be open minded in another? I cannot comprehend this. This has nothing to do with faith. Then, what does woman believe in? Does she believe that she is an element of seduction? She is a a creature that seduces man? Does she cover herself up because of this? Is this her belief? If a man sees the strings of her hair, he would not be able to function? Is this her belief? Freedom of belief... Freedom for this? What do we define freedom for? I do not understand, what is freedom of belief? This irritates me, this irritates me a lot. I pity them. I am a woman. The man next to me will do whatever he wants and me, as a woman, will cover myself with those ugly, unaesthetic clothes. How can you force women to something like this? How can this be possibly anything to do with Allah? When I see these people on the Bosphorus, Bebek or Arnavutköy, I just want to ask them "My dear beloved sister, daughter, why are you condemning yourself like this? Isn't it a pity?"<sup>55</sup> (İpek-31)

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<sup>55</sup> Alt yapı, yaşayış, hayata bakışları benimle aynı değil. Ben dini bu kadar takıntılı bir durumun hakimeyeti altında yaşamak istemiyorum. Benim için din şekilden ibaret değil. Böyle yaşayan insanları kabul edemiyorum. Böyle düşünen kadınların açık fikirli olabileceğini -herhangi konuda- tasavvur edemiyorum. Bu kadar şekilci, bu kadar kapalı düşünebilen, başka konuda nasıl çok açık fikirli olabilir,

This furious narrative of İpek allows us to analyze the question of veiling in the realm of habitus, cultural codes and life-styles. İpek’s anger towards veiled women is not really about subservience to men, inferiority of women or individual choices, not at all about fashion or trends but an indicator of much more complex relations of distinctions, stratification, and power. Veiling has become the sign of a different modernity. It has a symbolic power that turns veil in to a symbol of high class to reorganize the available symbols of class and distinction (Navaro-Yashin 2002). It has become a significant marker of difference and becomes legitimate as veiled women start occupying the same space of positions the elites occupy. All symbolic forms function to generate social distinction, veiling, as a symbolic form has started to generate its own distinction as veiled women started acquiring cultural capital. This is why Gülsen in the aforementioned narrative argues that she does not want to see veiled women in universities. Veiled women began to obtain the same cultural capital in the same universities that the elites do, they have become visible and recognizable carving out their own counter-elite positions. As Ahmet İnel argues “the instinctive reactions and fears of the laicist elite [...] have their source mainly in the anxiety of losing a hegemonic position” (2003, 299).

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anlayamıyorum. Bunun dini inançla çok bir alakası yok. O zaman kadın neye inanıyor? Kadın bir tahrik unsuru olduğuna mı inanıyor? İnsanları tahrik eden bir varlık olduğuna mı inanıyor? Buna inandığı için mi kapanıyor? Bu kadının inancı bu mudur? Benim saçımın bilmem ne teli görünürse, adam işini yapamaz hale gelecek, beni görecektir bir hal olacak adama... Buna inandığı için... Bu mu yani inanç? İnanç özgürlüğü... Buna mı özgürlük? Neye özgürlük tanıyoruz? Anlamıyorum, nedir inanç özgürlüğü? Beni rahatsız ediyor, beni çok rahatsız ediyor. Acıyorum onlara. Ben bir kadını, yanımdaki adam istediği gibi hareket edebilecek ama ben bir kadın olarak o çirkin, estetik hiçbir tarafı olmayan örtülerle kapanacağım. Ben kadın olarak neden çirkinleştirileyim? Niye çirkin olmaya mahkum olayım? Benim bir yüzüm var, Allah beni böyle yaratmış, anlayamıyorum. Nasıl kadınları böyle birşeye mahkum edebilirsin? Bunun Allah'la ne alakası olabilir? Bu insanları Boğaz'da, Bebek'te ve Arnavutköy'de gördüğüm zaman, içimden şöyle yapmak geliyor bazen: “canım kardeşim, kızım neden kendini buna mahkum ediyorsun? Yazık değil mi?”

Veiled woman does not represent conservative and religious women but a conservative-religious modernity (Aslan 2009) which has created new hybridizations between tradition and modernity, religion and secularism, community and religion (Göle 1997). Viewed from a Bourdieusian framework, this means that lifestyles are caught up in a social struggle; a struggle for “distinction”. The educated (elites) are powerful in virtue of the official legitimacy of their (educated) culture and they use their power to maintain its legitimacy. Veiled women, on the other hand, are trying to develop cultural peculiarities which mark them out from the others. They strive to have a distinct culture –hence distinction. These differences, in the case of the headscarf controversy in Turkey, has become a focus of symbolic struggles (struggles for distinction) in which members of each group seek to (re)establish both the superiority of their peculiarities and an official sanction for them. These symbolic powers struggle to have control over the knowledge that is valued, sanctioned and rewarded within the education system in particular and society in general.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This study was inspired by my own experiences and observations of power relations in Turkey. In many aspects, it is a self-study; an attempt to question the world around me. It is an endeavor to come into terms with myself; an effort to understand my distances and differences. In this respect, I am grateful to all the people I have interviewed. Some were my friends, some became my friends after hours of sharing. At the end of my interview with Gülsen, as I was packing my stuff, she paused for a minute and said “I wish I could interview you, I am really curious about your views on the questions you asked me, I couldn’t decide what you may be thinking about all these issues we have discussed.” Gülsen had openly shared her views with me feeling that we had a shared habitus. Similarly, another friend of mine told me to be cautious about the impacts of this study among the group of people I have interviewed. He thought that “we” were not accustomed to being mirrored by “one of our own”. However, I believe that it is necessary that we restore to ourselves the meaning of our actions, the positions we take and the feelings we generate. This is simply what I have tried to do in this research.

In order to understand how Turkish elites socially, politically and culturally position themselves in contemporary Turkey, I have interviewed 19 graduates of Robert College and Üsküdar American Academy. I argued that schooling plays a significant role in the reproduction of the elite. Basing my arguments on the reproduction theory of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, I tried to show that educational system has a strong tendency to reproduce the existing social order which clearly demarcates the line between the dominant and the dominated. Schooling, in the world and in Turkey, increasingly appears to be an important field of social distinction.

In order to understand how social distinctions are generated, enhanced and legitimated I defined and used some of the concepts of Bourdieu, which are habitus, cultural capital and symbolic capital. Bourdieu's theorizing of power relations has mostly shaped the discussions of this study. I inquired into the symbolic power of Ataturkism and tried to show how Ataturkism orders social life in binary oppositions with its own language, and argue that it performs as an instrument of knowledge and communication in defying other knowledges that seek ground for communication.

A way to defy, or shadow, or marginalize other knowledges is to ignore them. Through an inquiry into an epistemology of ignorance, I argued that educated and willful ignorance is not a simple lack, a gap or an omission or a consequence of the limitedness of human knowledge, but it is intentional not knowing. I questioned how elite privilege is constituted and/or sustained through an epistemology of ignorance. I tried to trace ignorance in the two socially and politically significant issues of contemporary Turkey; the Kurdish and Armenian questions. I argued that willful ignorance is an active production that engenders the otherization practices and is rooted in what Adorno calls half-education. The idealization of education for a better future –a theme that I have discussed by referring to the immense efforts to acquire cultural capital- has turned education to an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity not autonomy.

Under what circumstances the conformity of the elite is challenged in Turkey? I tried to explore the conflict between secularism and Islamism through the feelings elites associate with the present day status of secularism in Turkey. I analyzed discourses of danger that construe Islamism and Islamists as the major threat to the republican value



of secularism. I argued that the construction of the secular elite identity is both inspired and supported by Ataturkist nationalism and tried to show the clash of secular and Islamist identities through the prism of the headscarf debate in contemporary Turkey.

APPENDIX  
LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

NAME	AGE	SCHOOL	OCCUPATION
Silva	71	RC	Retired
Gülşen	69	UAA	Businesswoman
Özkan	69	RC	Law professor
Ahmet	66	RC	Businessman
Seher	60	UAA	Philanthropist
Dilek	60	IAA	Education specialist
Serap	58	UAA	Education specialist
Filiz	49	RC	Student
Selim	49	RC	Banker
Nazan	37	UAA	Manager
İdil	37	UAA	Economist
Murat	36	RC	Doctor
Sarp	35	RC	Physicist/Computer Engineer
İpek	31	RC	Lawyer
Melike	30	RC	Managing Director
Sevim	28	UAA	Contracts Administrator
Bora	25	RC	Engineer
Esra	25	RC	Lawyer
Defne	25	RC	Visual Designer

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