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## Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries

*Nilüfer Göle*

Islam has acquired new forms of visibility over the last two decades as it has made its way in the public avenues of both Muslim and European societies. New faces of Muslim actors using both secular and religious idiom are appearing in public life; the terms of public debate are being transformed by the eruption of religious issues; Islamic films and novels are becoming popular subjects of cultural criticism; new spaces, markets, and media are opening up in response to the rising demands of recently formed Muslim middle classes. Islam carves out a public space of its own as new Islamic language styles, corporeal rituals, and spatial practices emerge and blend into public life. On the one hand, public Islam testifies to a shift in the orientation of the Islamic movement from macropolitics toward micropractices, and on the other hand, it challenges the borders and the meanings of the secular public sphere.

As Islam makes a move into national public spheres, the consensual principles and homogeneous structure of the national public spheres are unsettled, but so are those of the Islamic movement. Indeed two different phases of contemporary Islamism can be distinguished.<sup>1</sup> The first phase, starting at the end of the 1970s

1. In speaking of Islamism, we are differentiating between *Muslim*, which expresses religious identity, and *Islamist*, which refers to a social movement through which Muslim identity is collectively reappropriated as a basis for an alternative social and political project. Thus Islamism implies a critique and even a discontinuity with the given categories of Muslim identity; it is an endeavor to rename and reconstruct Muslim identity by freeing it from traditional interpretations and by challenging assimilative forces of modernism.

and reaching its peak with the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979, is characterized by mass mobilizations, Islamic militancy, a quest for an Islamic collective identity, and the implementation of a political and religious rule. In the second phase, the revolutionary fervor declines, the ideological chorus gives way to a multiplicity of voices, and a process of distancing and individuation from the collective militancy takes place leading to an “exit from religious revolution.”<sup>2</sup> In this phase, after the assertion of a collective and exacerbated form of difference, Muslim identity is in the process of “normalization.” In the “second wave” of Islamism, actors of Islam blend into modern urban spaces, use global communication networks, engage in public debates, follow consumption patterns, learn market rules, enter into secular time, get acquainted with values of individuation, professionalism, and consumerism, and reflect upon their new practices. Hence we observe a transformation of these movements from a radical political stance to a more social and cultural orientation, accompanied by a loss of mass mobilization capacity, which led some researchers to pronounce the end of Islamism and the “failure of political Islam.”<sup>3</sup> But a more cultural orientation does not mean a less political one. Indeed, instead of disappearing as a reference, Islam penetrates even more into the social fiber and imaginary, thereby raising new political questions, questions not addressed solely to Muslims but concerning the foundational principles of collective life in general.

An analytical concern at the level of ideologies (such as Islamism) or of political formations (such as the state) cannot explain this process of interpenetration and dialogical relation. The public visibility of Islam and the specific gender, corporeal, and spatial practices underpinning it trigger new ways of imagining a collective self and common space that are distinct from the Western liberal self and progressive politics. Exploring these Islamic makings of the self and the micro-practices associated with it will lead us to understand new social imaginaries and the transformations of the public sphere in a non-Western context.

### Non-Western Publics

Although the idea of the public is Western in its origins and its basic features are understood as universal access, individualism, equality, and openness (*Öffentlichkeit*), it circulates and moves into contexts other than the West. The ways in which these concepts, ideas, and institutions travel and are adopted in non-

2. Farhad Khosrokhavar and Olivier Roy, *Iran: Comment sortir d'une révolution religieuse* (Paris: Seuil, 1999); Fariba Adelkhah, *Etre moderne en Iran* (Paris: Karthala, 1998).

3. Olivier Roy, *L'échec de l'Islam politique* (Paris: Seuil, 1992); Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: Expansion et déclin de l'Islamisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000).

Western contexts depend on local agencies and cultural fields. The experience of colonization in India, for example, or voluntary modernization in Turkey have shaped the ways in which the public sphere is imagined and institutionalized. Studying the adoption of modern concepts at the level of language, their entry, translations, and transformations—namely the history of concepts (*Begriffs-geschichte*)—can reveal the diversity of meanings and trajectories and hint at the particular conjunctions between the universal definitions of the public sphere and homegrown practices and idioms.<sup>4</sup> The articulations and tensions between two different cultural codes, modern and indigenous, intervene in distinguishing and defining public and private spheres, interior and exterior spaces, licit and illicit practices. Sometimes they are simply juxtaposed in mutual indifference, sometimes they compete with each other, and sometimes they engage in a dialogue that produces interpenetrations and displacements. Conception of the exterior space, civility in the European sense of order and discipline can therefore take on a different meaning and form in non-Western contexts. To indicate the differences between a Brahmanical concept of cleanliness and purity and a Western concept of hygiene, Sudipta Kaviraj describes how the exteriors of houses in India are abandoned to an intrinsic disorderliness, while the interiors are kept impressively clean.<sup>5</sup> The interior, intimate, gendered space is similarly valorized and highly disciplined in Muslim societies, leading to different conceptualizations and institutionalizations of the modern public and city life. Although the cultural program of modernity has a great capacity to influence and circulate, the encounter between the two cultural codes leads not to a simple logic of emulation or rejection but to improvisations in social practices and cultural meanings. Studying the public sphere as a social imaginary may offer new clues to map out these improvisations in a non-Western context.

The social imaginary is, as Cornelius Castoriadis tells us, “the creation of significations and the creation of the images and figures that support these significations.”<sup>6</sup> There is an “essential historicity of significations: apparently similar ‘institutions’ can be radically other, since immersed in another society, they are caught up in other significations.”<sup>7</sup> Institutions are not to be conceived as external

4. On the history of concepts, see Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985); originally published as *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979).

5. Sudipta Kaviraj, “Filth and the Public Sphere: Concepts and Practices about Space in Calcutta,” *Public Culture* 10 (1997): 98.

6. Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 238.

7. Castoriadis, *Imaginary Institution*, 367–68.

to social imaginaries and social practices. There is no institution without signification, but the signification is not legitimate without shared practices. Although the “original” European code of modernity has constituted the crucial starting point and continual reference point, it is continuously and creatively appropriated and altered; consequently these distinct cultural foundations and institutional formations should be analyzed, as Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and Wolfgang Schluchter remind us, “not only in terms of their approximation to the West but also in their own terms.”<sup>8</sup> An analysis of the public sphere as a social imaginary can illustrate the circulation of a universal code of modernity as well as the particular significations and practices. Approaching the public sphere as a social imaginary in Castoriadis’s sense emphasizes its dynamic aspect, as an ongoing process, a creation of significations and practices rather than an “imagined” and “preestablished” frame. Furthermore it defies the thesis of time lag and “deficiency of modernity”<sup>9</sup> for non-Western countries and gives intellectual credibility to societal practices in historical contexts other than the West; it suggests the possibility for “*l’institution imaginaire de la société*.”<sup>10</sup>

The public sphere in a non-Western context is neither identical with its counterparts in the West nor totally different, but manifests asymmetrical differences as it is continuously altered by a field of cultural meanings and social practices. Modern social imaginaries, as Charles Taylor reminds us, are social in the sense that they are widely and commonly shared.<sup>11</sup> They may have explicit theoretical formulations, but unlike ideas and ideologies they are not in the hands of a few. Social imaginaries are embedded in the habitus of a population or carried in implicit understandings that underlie and make possible common practices. Even in cases where the public sphere is introduced by colonizing agents or adopted by modernizing elites, it cannot be understood as an alien structure or as an imposed idea from the above. As a social imaginary, the public sphere works in a social field and penetrates and blends into cultural significations.

In the Turkish context of voluntary modernization, the public sphere is institutionalized and imagined as a site for the implementation of a secular and progressive way of life. An authoritarian modernism—rather than bourgeois, indi-

8. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and Wolfgang Schluchter, “Introduction: Paths to Early Modernities—A Comparative View,” *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (1998): 4–7.

9. Nilüfer Göle, “Global Expectations, Local Experiences, Non-Western Modernities,” in *Through a Glass, Darkly: Blurred Images of Cultural Tradition and Modernity over Distance and Time*, ed. Wil Arts (Boston: Brill, 2000).

10. This is the original French title of Castoriadis’s book *The Imaginary Institution of Society*.

11. See Taylor’s essay in this issue.

vidualist liberalism—underpins this public sphere. Religious signs and practices have been silenced as the modern public sphere has set itself against the Muslim social imaginary and segregated social organization; modern codes of conduct have entered public spaces ranging from Parliament and educational institutions to the street and public transportation. In a Muslim context, women's participation in public life, corporeal visibility, and social mixing with men all count as modern. The modern gendered subject has been constituted through women role models and repetitive performances, including language styles, dress codes, modes of habitation, and modes of address.

Here we see the social imaginary of the public sphere at work. While it adheres to some of the basic universal principles of the Western public sphere, these principles are selectively highlighted, coupled, and translated into social practices that are creatively altered as well. The central stakes of the modern subject are worked out in tension with Muslim definitions of self; consequently the access of women to public life and gender equality acquires a more salient signification in the public imaginary of Muslim societies. Moreover, in non-Western contexts, the public sphere provides a stage for the didactic performance of the modern subject in which the nonverbal, corporeal, and implicit aspects of social imaginaries are consciously and explicitly worked out. Because the public sphere provides a stage for performance rather than an abstract frame for textual and discursive practices, the ocular aspect in the creation of significations and the making of social imaginaries becomes of utmost importance. Social imaginaries are carried by images. The body, as a sensorial and emotional register, links the implicit nonverbal practices and learned dispositions (namely habitus) into a public visibility and conscious meaning. Public visibility refers to the techniques of working from inside out, transforming implicit practices into observable and audible ones. This essay explores the centrality of gender as well as related corporeal regimens and spatial protocols in the making of the public sphere.

The ways in which Islam emerges into the public sphere defy modernist aspirations for a civilized (read Westernized) and emancipated self yet follow a similar pattern in regard to gender, body, and space issues. The covered woman deputy walking into the Turkish Parliament and walking out the same day serves as an icon: an image that crystallizes the tensions emanating from two different cultural programs in the making of the self and the public. A visibility that by the same token reveals the ways in which Parliament as a secular public sphere is imagined, constructed, and instituted in the Turkish Republican context. Therefore a two-layered reading is required. One concerns the modern self-presentation and its migration into the Turkish context of modernity. The second concerns

the counterattack of Islamic practices as a competing form of pious self-making and social imaginary. And with this second reading, through an examination of the ways in which Islam is problematized in the public sphere, we become aware of the unspoken, implicit borders and the stigmatizing, exclusionary power structure of the secular public sphere.

### **The Headscarf in the Parliament: A “Blowup”**

For the first time in its Republican history, Turkey witnessed the election of a “covered” Muslim woman, an Istanbul deputy from the pro-Islamic party (Fazilet Partisi) during the last general elections (18 April 1999). But it was Merve Kavakçı’s physical presentation in the Parliament, not her election, that provoked a public dispute, a blowup. On the very day of its opening on 2 May 1999, when Kavakçı, a thirty-one-year-old woman wearing a white headscarf with fashionable frameless eyeglasses and a long-skirted, modern two-piece suit, walked (over-)confidently into the meeting hall of the National Assembly for the opening session of the new Parliament. The men and women deputies stood up and protested against Kavakçı’s presence with such vehemence—especially twelve women from the Democratic Left Party (DSP)—shouting “Merve out, ayatollahs to Iran,” “Turkey is secular, will remain secular,” that she was obliged to leave the Parliament without taking the oath.<sup>12</sup> Kavakçı’s Islamic covering challenged the unwritten laws of the Parliament and enraged the deputies as well as (secular) public opinion.<sup>13</sup> The best-known secular women’s association organized meetings and condemned the headscarf in the Parliament as an “ideological uniform of Islamic fundamentalism,” challenging republican state power and secular reforms.<sup>14</sup> She was treated as an “agent provocateur” in the Turkish press, which accused her of having close links with the Palestinian group Hamas and working for foreign powers such as Iran and Libya. It was discovered that Kavakçı had become a U.S. citizen shortly after becoming a parliamentary candidate. As she had not officially noted that she was holding another passport,

12. “The Revolt of Women,” *Hürriyet*, 4 May 1999, 1. According to a survey on political and social values conducted in October 1999 by the Foundation of Political Science in Istanbul (IMV-SAM), 61 percent of the Turkish population thought that Kavakçı should have taken off her headscarf while in the Parliament. Another covered woman deputy, from the Nationalist Party (MHP), had taken off her headscarf to attend the National Assembly and while giving her oath was applauded.

13. Nicole Pope, “Parliament Opens amid Controversy,” *TurkeyUpdate* (Web publication at [www.TurkeyUpdate.com](http://www.TurkeyUpdate.com)), 3 May 1999.

14. “The Revolt of Women,” 1.

authorities were able to use this legal pretext to strip Kavakçı of her Turkish citizenship.<sup>15</sup>

The above story cannot be narrated as merely a political incident. At a microlevel, instantaneous social reality and the significant tensions that generate history can be condensed and concealed. The trivial can be revealed as meaningful. In Georg Simmel's words, in these "momentary images," snapshots (*Momentbilder*), fragments of social reality, we are able to glimpse the meaning of the whole.<sup>16</sup> We can unpack the nature of the social discord between the secular and religious practices compressed in this political incident if we first take it as it is, that is, frame it as a picture or snapshot. Visualizing the story and the players will bring into focus the corporeal, gendered, and spatial aspects of the social cleavages. Second, we need to defamiliarize our gaze. The picture is taken from the present day. It is widely and commonly shared. Its accessibility makes its understanding even more difficult because it appears as "ordinary" and "natural" to the common eye, duplicating the given terms of public controversy. This *trompe l'oeil* poses a challenge to sociology. A sign must be interpreted using "thick description" and placed in historical perspective if we want to reveal all of its possible meanings.<sup>17</sup> We need to go back and forth between micro- and macro-levels of analysis, between empirical practices and theoretical readings.<sup>18</sup> If we introduce anthropological unfamiliarity, historical distance, and the shift between micro- and macrolevels, the ordinary will appear less ordinary, and the still picture will turn into a movie. In his film *Blow Up* (1966), Michelangelo Antonioni tells the story of a photographer who by chance takes a picture that appears at first incoherent and incomprehensible. But he then enlarges a detail of the photograph, and that detail leads him to read the whole picture differently.<sup>19</sup> Let us enlarge—"blow up"—the picture of the veiled deputy taken in the secular Turkish Parliament.

Merve Kavakçı's portrait is both representative and distinctive in relation to

15. Nicole Pope, "Islamist Deputy Stripped of Her Turkish Citizenship," TurkeyUpdate (Web publication at [www.TurkeyUpdate.com](http://www.TurkeyUpdate.com)), 17 May 1999.

16. David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Krause, and Benjamin* (Cambridge, England: Polity, 1985), 6.

17. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

18. Jacques Revel, "Micro-analyse et construction du social," in *Jeux d'échelles: La micro-analyse à l'expérience*, ed. Revel (Paris: Gallimard: Seuil, 1996).

19. Revel, *Jeux d'échelles*, 36. Revel uses this example to establish a parallelism with micro-history. Rather than privileging one scale over the other, he argues that the methodological principle is the variations between them.

other Muslim women in the Islamic movement. The trajectory of the Muslim woman deputy follows a social dynamic similar to that of Islamic female students who have sought the right to attend university classes wearing headscarves since the beginning of the 1980s.<sup>20</sup> Access to higher education, daily experience of urban city life, and use of political idiom and action expose new female Islamic actors to modernity; this exposure is problematic for both secular actors and religious ones. The case of Merve Kavakçı, although not an exception, serves as an example that carries the process of interaction with a program of modernity to its extreme limits; it thereby blurs the oppositional boundaries. Kavakçı had access to higher education, became a computer engineer, trained at the University of Texas (the headscarf was banned in Turkish universities), lived in the United States, had two children, divorced her Jordanian-American husband, returned to Turkey, and became a member of the pro-Islamic party. She had access therefore to powerful symbols of modernity and was simultaneously engaged in Islamic politics. Living in the United States (not in Saudi Arabia), speaking English fluently, using new technologies, fashioning a public image (light-colored headscarf and frameless eyeglasses)—these are all cultural symbols of distinction in a non-Western context of modernity. And Islamists are not insensitive to acquiring such cultural capital. In fact, though they are in an oppositional political struggle with the modern secularists, they often mirror them and search for public representatives who speak foreign languages and belong to the professional and intellectual elite. Even Kavakçı's choice of a two-piece suit rather than an overcoat is a duplication of the Republican women's dress code. With all of her elite credentials, Kavakçı could have been used to bolster Islamic pride—if only she was not so “foreign.”<sup>21</sup>

Her trajectory is not only a sign of distinction, it also distinguishes her from other Muslim women and brings her socially closer to the Western-oriented, secular elites of Turkey. It's a closeness that creates more enmity than sympathy. The appropriation of social signs of modernity, such as language, comportment, politics, public exposure, and being in contact with secular groups without giving up the Islamic difference (marked by the headscarf)—this is the source of trou-

20. Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

21. For an analysis of the foreigner in terms of distance from and proximity to the social group, see Simmel's notion of “l'étranger”: Georg Simmel, “Digressions sur l'étranger,” in *L'école de Chicago: Naissance de l'écologie urbaine*, ed. Yves Grafmeyer and Isaac Joseph (Paris: Editions du Champ Urbain, 1979); for an English translation, see *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. Kurt Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950).

ble. It is the “small difference” and the small distance between her and the secular women that ignites political passion. Only when there is this feeling of a stranger’s intrusion into one’s own domain, places, and privileges is there an issue of rejection or recognition of difference. The figure of the stranger, in a Simmelian approach, represents the ambivalent relation of proximity and distance, identity and difference, through which a group reproduces social life and structures hierarchically social space.<sup>22</sup> This is why the small difference is so crucial in understanding the rejection of those that are closest.

In Turkey, one of the arguments widely used against the headscarf is that it has been appropriated as a political symbol, so the desire to wear it is not a disinterested one. Many will say they are not against their 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 the modern social imaginary in a non-Western context. But today the play has changed and so have the actors. The Islamic headscarf is deliberately appropriated, not passively carried and handed down from generation to generation. It is claimed by a new generation of women who have had access to higher education, notwithstanding their modest social origins (many come from the periphery of the big cities or from small towns). Instead of assimilating to the secular regime of women’s emancipation, they press for their embodied difference (e.g., Islamic dress) and their public visibility (e.g., in schools, in Parliament) and create disturbances in modern social imaginaries. Islamic women hurt the feelings of modern women and upset the status quo; they are playing with ambivalence, being both Muslim and modern without wanting to give up one for the other. They are outside a regime of imitation, critical of both subservient traditions and assimilative modernity. One can almost twist the argument and say that they are neither Muslim nor modern. The ambiguity of signs disturbs both the traditional Muslim and the secular modernist social groups. And this goes further than a question of abstract identity. It takes place in the public sphere, it involves a face-to-face relation, which means that difference is marked on the body; it is an embodied difference, one that is visible to others. Islamic visibility (and not solely the identity) creates such a

22. Simonetta Tabboni, “Le multiculturalisme et l’ambivalence de l’étranger,” in *Une société fragmentée? Le multiculturalisme en débat*, ed. Michel Wieviorka et al. (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1997), 239–40.

malaise because it has a corporeal, ocular, and spatial dimension. These dimensions are only intensified in the case of Merve Kavakçı.

Kavakçı is both a local and a “foreigner” (in a literal sense as well, given that she became a U.S. citizen); she is from here but also from elsewhere. Her popular background and her choice to wear a headscarf recall the indigenous yet pre-modern Turkey, while her education, individualistic posture, and political language belong to the modern world; she is a woman who follows an Islamic dress code yet does not adopt the traditional dress, behavior, and representations. Professional and political ambitions as well as divorce are all indicators of a nontraditional life and personality. Furthermore, that she did not collapse into tears under heavy pressure and criticism, and does not speak the collective language of those who were persecuted, interposes a psychological distance between her and the Muslim community. The latter uses widely the idiom of suffering and victimization and through common emotional practices, such as crying and lamenting, reproduces a repertoire of cultural signs, a sense of social belonging, and a collective social movement. Meanwhile, Kavakçı’s individualist and composed self-presentation creates trouble in the Islamic social imaginary. Secular women, too, were no less suspicious of her “cold-blooded attitude”; it was taken as one more strike against her, revealing her militant discipline and premeditated behavior at the service of a political conspiracy. Kavakçı cannot be situated in terms of geographical location, communitarian belonging, or cultural coding; as she crosses the boundaries, circulates among different locations—thereby placing them in “disjunctive” relation to one another—new social imaginaries are being shaped.<sup>23</sup>

Kavakçı’s fearlessness in the face of intimidation and her insensitivity to established relations of domination between Muslim and secularist women are perceived as arrogant, but at the same time her carriage and discourse change the codes of interaction. Her political language is that of constitutional rights, which resonates more in a U.S.-style democracy than in Turkey, where the constitution tends to provide more trouble than rights. Her language makes reference to an ultramodern space, whereas her covered body suggests Muslim privacy and modesty. Again, she is from here but also from elsewhere; she is neither a replica of a local Muslim nor a Western other. On the one hand, she is no less modern than the Turkish women defending the secular national public sphere. On the other hand, her persistent wearing of the Islamic headscarf displays her embodied difference and reproduces and deepens the cleavage. The ambiguous signs carried by her presence create confusion and disturbance among Muslims and

23. For global circulations and modern social imaginaries, cf. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

also among secularists (including journalists from CNN to whom her U.S.-inflected language was more familiar). The fact that she comes from “elsewhere” and makes reference to another mental space disturbs—and also helps to transgress—the social rules of conduct and interaction. As Erving Goffman writes, the rupture of the framework is used by those from below, trying to discredit and disturb an adversary.<sup>24</sup> Such surprising crossovers bring into question the fixity of categories and boundaries.

The social dispute generated by the public visibility of Islam is carried by corporeal performances and self-presentations rather than by textualized forms of subjectivities and discursive practices. The public sphere is not simply a preestablished arena; it is constituted and negotiated through performance. In addition to constituting the public sphere, these micropractices enact a way of being public. We can speak of what Victor Turner calls “performative reflexivity,” “a condition in which a sociocultural group, or its most perceptive members acting representatively, turn, bend, or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, and codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural components which make up their public ‘selves.’”<sup>25</sup> Islamic performance has a reflexive character to the extent that the codes and symbols embedded in the religious culture are critically appropriated and distanced from the traditional culture. The Islamic dress code exemplifies this performative reflexivity. The practice of veiling restores a link with past traditions; it signifies the immutability of religion and nonsecular time. Through repetition, rehearsal, and performance, the practice of veiling is reproduced again and again, acquiring legitimacy and authority and contributing to the making of a modest pious self. But veiling is not derived directly from prevailing cultural habits and preestablished conventions. On the contrary, it bears a new form, the outcome of a selective and reflexive attitude that amplifies and dramatizes the performative signs of “difference.” It is transgressive with respect to Muslim traditions as well as to modern self-presentations. Consequently, the new covering suggests a more rather than less potent Islam, which accounts for secular counterattacks against the headscarf for being not an “innocent” religious convention but a powerful “political symbol.”

Let us look back to secularist counterattacks. A brief detour to the linkage between women and the making of the public sphere will introduce a historical perspective into the picture without which we cannot explain the destabilizing force of Islam in secular social imaginaries. One has to remember that secularist

24. Erving Goffman, *Les cadres de l'expérience* (Paris: Minit, 1991), 417; originally published as *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

25. Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 24.

women have entered into modernity through emancipation from religion, which was symbolized by taking off the veil. They have experimented with modernity as a tangible entity inscribed on their bodies, clothes, and ways of life—not exclusively as an abstract and distant category of citizenship. They are products of a historical, emotional, corporeal fracture with the Muslim identity; a fracture with the past that made it possible for them to have access to modernity.

### Public Site As Visual Secularism

The grand narratives on modernity typically describe the elements of modernity in non-Western contexts as insufficient. However, when the concepts of Western modernity travel into different contexts, they often acquire not only different meanings but also an unexpected intensity. Secularism is an example of this phenomenon. Secularism, because of its origins in the Western historical development, is expected to be a marginal element in other contexts, especially in Muslim ones. Yet in the Turkish case, for instance, we observe not only its role in nation-state building and its penetration into civil and military elite ideology but also its emergence in civil society and in particular in women's associations. Secularism works as a social imaginary.

It is possible to speak of an excess of secularism, when secularism becomes a fetish of modernity. Modern social imaginaries cross boundaries and circulate but take a different twist and a slightly modified accent in non-Western contexts—they take on a sense of extra. We can read *extra* both as external to the West and as additional and unordinary. The evolutionary concept of historical change can hardly imagine that there can be a surplus or excess of modernity in some domains of social life in non-Western contexts. Modernity functions as a fetish. In non-Western contexts, modernity's manifestations are overemphasized, as are the performances of belonging to modernity.<sup>26</sup> The excess of secularism in Muslim contexts of modernity is such an example. The public sphere becomes a site for modern and secular performances. In contrast with the formation of the public sphere in the West, characterized initially as a bourgeois sphere that excluded the working classes and women, in Muslim contexts of modernity, women function as a pivotal sign/site in the making and representing of the public sphere.<sup>27</sup>

26. The concept of “extra-modernity” is developed in Göle, “Global Expectations.”

27. On the public sphere in the West, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); on the public sphere in a Muslim context, see Nilüfer Göle, “The Gendered Nature of the Public Sphere,” *Public Culture* 10 (1997): 61–81.

In a Muslim context, women's visibility and the social mixing of men and women attest to the existence of a public sphere. Women as public citizens and women's rights are more salient than citizenship and civil rights in the Turkish modern imaginary. The removal of the veil, the establishment of compulsory coeducation for girls and boys, civil rights for women that include eligibility to vote and to hold office, and the abolition of Islamic family law guarantee the public visibility and citizenship of women. Women's participation in public life as citizens and as civil servants, their visibility in urban spaces, and their socialization with men all define the modern secular way of life and indicate a radical shift from the social organization and gender roles framed by Islam. In other words, in a Muslim context, secularism denotes a modern way of life, calling for the "emancipation" of women from religion, the removal of the veil, and the end of the spatial separation of sexes. Women are symbols of the social whole: home and outside, interior and exterior, private and public. They stand in for the making of the modern individual, for the modern ways of being private and public. Women's corporeal and civic visibility as well as the formation of heterosocial spaces underpin the stakes of modernity in a Muslim society.

Secularism is enacted as a modern social imaginary through gendered, corporeal, and spatial performances. In that respect, some common spaces are transformed as they gain additional symbolic value and become public sites of visual modernity and gendered secular performances. In addition to Parliament, schools, and the workplace, spaces such as beaches, opera and concert halls, coffeehouses, fashion shows, public gardens, and public transportation all become sites for modern self-presentations. They are instituted and imagined as public spaces through these daily micropractices in which men and women rehearse and improvise in public their new self-presentations, dress codes, bodily postures, aesthetic and cultural tastes, and leisure activities.

The implicit dimensions of modern social imaginaries, namely, the aspects that are embodied in the habitus of a population, in the modes of address, living, habitation, and taste, all become explicit features of performative modernity in a non-Western context. The public sphere denotes a space for the making of the new modern self while it excludes others, namely, those who do not conform to this "new life" and new habitus—Muslims, for example. Acts of performance as well as space are not socially neutral concepts; indeed, they are situated in and produced by social relations of domination and exclusion.

As Henri Lefebvre puts it, the notion of space refers not to an empty space but to a space of production of social relations, defining boundaries of exclusion and

inclusion, of the licit and illicit.<sup>28</sup> Social space, moreover, implies virtual or actual assembling at a point; urban space brings together the masses, products, markets, acts, and symbols. It concentrates them, accumulates them. Speaking about urban space invokes as well a center and a centrality, actual or possible.<sup>29</sup> Through its invocation of the possibility of assembly and commonality, public space establishes its link with democracy.

The issue of recognition 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. One has to discern the “concrete other”—single individuals with life histories—in order to be able to tolerate difference as part of a social bond.<sup>30</sup> Overpoliticized definitions of identity and arguments of conspiracy exclude the possibility of finding semblance and familiarity; indeed they reinforce the demoniacal definitions of the adversary. In Merve Kavakçı’s case, she is not recognized as a woman, an individual, a Muslim, a deputy, and a citizen but is rejected and stigmatized as a militant, an Islamist, and an outsider.

The question of a social bond with the stigmatized and excluded is the essential problem of democracy.<sup>31</sup> In the case of Islam in the public sphere, there is a double movement that causes uneasiness: Islamists seek to enter into spaces of modernity, yet they display their distinctiveness. There is a problem of recognition to the extent that Islamists start sharing the same spaces of modernity, such as the Parliament, university classes, television programs, beaches, opera halls, and coffeehouses, and yet they fashion a counter-Islamic self. In contrast with being a Muslim, being an Islamist entails a reflexive performance; it involves collectively constructing, assembling, and restaging the symbolic materials to signify difference. The symbols of Muslim habitus are reworked, selectively processed, and staged in public. Performative acts of religious difference in the secular public space defy the limits of recognition and of social bonds and unsettle modern social imaginaries.

28. Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, 3d ed. (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1986), 35.

29. Lefebvre, *Production de l'espace*, 121.

30. Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Politics* (London: Routledge, 1992).

31. Danilo Martuccelli, *Sociologies de la modernité: L'itinéraire du XXe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 447.

The Islamic critique of modernity can be interpreted as a new stage in the process of the indigenization of modernity in non-Western contexts. The Islamic subject is formed both through liberation from traditional definitions and roles of Muslim identity and through resistance to a cultural program of modernity and liberalism. Alain Touraine claims that the subject owes her existence to a social conflict or collective action that criticizes the established order, expected roles, and logic of power.<sup>32</sup> Thus the Islamic subject is created by a collective action that is critical of the subjugation of Muslim identity by both community (religious and otherwise) and modernity. The search for difference and authenticity expresses a critical resistance to the assimilative strategies and homogenizing practices of modernity. Especially in non-Western contexts, the reflexive nature of modernity, the critical capacity to surpass its limits, is weak.<sup>33</sup> Criticism of modernity is engendered when modernity becomes an indigenous, everyday practice. Indigenously defined modernity not only is a discursive regime that shapes subjectivity but also is constituted and negotiated through performances.<sup>34</sup> The Habermasian model of bourgeois public sphere as worked out by “rational-critical debate” does not always provide a frame to understand the performative basis of the indigenously defined modernity. In distinction from the Enlightenment notion of the public sphere, which endorsed gender blindness, gender movements and other identity-based movements display and make public sexual differences.<sup>35</sup> Performance of difference through corporeal and spatial practices requires a new reading of nonverbal communication, embodied information, and sensorial interaction.

The nonverbal “embodied information” and its link to “naked senses” provides one of the crucial communication conditions, according to Erving Goffman.<sup>36</sup> And of the sensory organs, the eye has a uniquely sociological function: the union and interaction of individuals is based upon mutual glances.<sup>37</sup> Espe-

32. Alain Touraine, *Critique de la modernité* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), 337.

33. On reflexivity and modernity, see Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lasch, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition, and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Cambridge, England: Polity, 1994).

34. For a discussion of such an approach to performing modernity in the case of the Miao population in China, see Louisa Schein, “Performing Modernity,” *Cultural Anthropology* 14 (1999): 361–95.

35. Michael Warner, “Public and Private,” in *Critical Terms for the Study of Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Gil Herdt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, in press).

36. Erving Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings* (New York: Free Press, 1966), 15.

37. Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places*, 93.

cially where issues of religion and gender are in question, the vocabulary of gaze and spatial conventions acquire a greater salience. When Muslim women cross the borders between inside and out, multiple senses—sight, smell, touch, and hearing—feature in concerns over redefining borders, preserving decency, and separating genders. A public Islam needs to redefine and recreate the borders of the interior, intimate, illicit gendered space (*mahrem*).<sup>38</sup> The notion of modesty (*edep*) underpins the Muslim self and her relation to private and public spaces. The veiling suggests the importance of the ocular (avoiding the gaze, casting down one's eyes), and the segregation of spaces regulates gender sociability. These acts, counteraesthetics, body postures, and modes of address are public performances; they seek to gain authority and legitimacy through their repetitions and rehearsals. They are not alien to Muslim memory and culture. They are rooted in past traditions and memory, in the religious habitus. But they are not simple conventions that have always been there and that are unconsciously handed down from generation to generation. The habitus provides, in Pierre Bourdieu's account, a source of improvisations; it allows for a process of continual correction and adjustment.<sup>39</sup> However, Islamic public visibilities are not implicitly embodied in Muslim habitus. They mark a break with traditions. Islamism is a political means for the exacerbation of Muslim difference. This process of exacerbation makes the habitus (both secular and religious) explicit and conscious. Grandmother's veiling is acceptable because it is "natural." Whereas the new veiling is seen as not so innocent because it is not a movement among religious or interior women. Secularists are not wrong to read it as a symbol. Although not rendered discursively, a nonverbal embodied communication in the veil conveys information; it disobeys both traditional and secular ways of imagining self-emancipation and becoming public.

Islamic public visibility presents a critique of a secular version of the public sphere. The work of Richard Sennett has shown that the initial development of the public sphere in the West was inseparable from the ways in which people were experiencing their bodies; the body was linked to urban space by religious rituals.<sup>40</sup> According to Sennett, the dematerialization of the public sphere and its

38. The title of the Turkish edition of my book on veiling, *The Forbidden Modern*, is *Modern mahrem*.

39. Craig Calhoun, "Habitus, Field, and Capital: The Question of Historical Specificity," in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 61–89.

40. Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York: Norton, 1996).

separation from the body is the secular version of the public sphere. The divorce of urban experience from religious understanding inhibits the creation of intense civic bonds and “civic compassion” in a multicultural city.<sup>41</sup> Drawing upon this analysis, one can suggest that Islamic public display recuperates a phenomenon that has been repressed by secularism. This public display attempts to reconstruct the social link between subjectivity and public space through the reintroduction of religious self-fashionings, performances, and rituals. Women are the principal actors in this process as they display the boundaries between private and public, licit and illicit, body and imaginary. Islamism reinforces the boundaries in social relations through regulating bodily practices in public spaces; this regulation, in turn, serves as a public display of Islamic subjectivity. The Muslim body becomes, for actors of Islamism, a site for resistance to secular modernity. It is a site where both difference and prohibition are linked to the formation of a new subject (neither Muslim nor modern) and a new sociability. On the one hand, this new subject becomes modern; on the other hand, she incorporates the limits, the boundaries, the interdictions; hence it is a “forbidden modern.” Self-limitation and self-disciplining go together with becoming modern. Ambivalence, a feeling that is normally alien to both the religious and the modern, undergirds the contemporary Muslim psyche. In *Another Modernity, a Different Rationality*, Scott Lash draws on Kant’s “reflective judgment” to define ambivalence as a third space, the margin between the same and the other, where difference is more primordial than either presence or absence and instead exists as an aporetic space of ambivalence and undecidability.<sup>42</sup>

Castoriadis insists on the complementary nature of social representations—without this complementarity, he writes, society would not be possible. For example, the relation between serf and lord—and feudal society itself—is made possible through the institutions and representations that bind them.<sup>43</sup> However, Islamic social imaginaries and practices are worked out through ambivalence rather than complementarity. Surprising crossovers between Muslim and modernity and between secular and religious practices take place, unsettling the fixity of positions and oppositional categories. Turkish experience provides us with a privileged terrain for this choreography of ambivalence. Voluntary modernization means a processed and displaced form of Western modernity as well as the absence of a colonial Other against which to direct Islamic oppositional discourse. Mutu-

41. Sennett, *Flesh and Stone*, 370.

42. Scott Lash, *Another Modernity, a Different Rationality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 4.

43. Castoriadis, *Imaginary Institution*, 367.

## Public Culture

ally inclusive categories create not binary oppositions, counterdiscourses, or emulations but multifaceted, intertwining modern performances. This ambivalence operates basically through crossing over, losing one's positionality, and circulating in different spaces, categories, and mental mappings. Rather than resulting in peaceful juxtapositions, hybridities, and augmentations, it is worked out in double negations (neither Muslim nor modern), ambiguities (forbidden and modern), resulting in fragmented subjectivities and transcultural performances. New social imaginaries are shaped by these circulatory, transcultured, and crossover performances. They are imagined, abstract, and implicit categories; they are carried in images, produced by bodily practices and in physical spaces. Islam displays a new "stage" in the making of modern social imaginaries; a stage in which ocular, corporeal, and spatial aspects underlie social action, confrontation, and cohabitation. It is the intrusion of senses, prelinguistic aspects of communication embodied in habitus, that makes the conflict between secularists and Islam so charged with corporeal stigma, affectivity, and political passion.

**Nilüfer Göle** is director of studies at the Centre d'Analyse et d'Intervention Sociologiques, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris. She is the author of *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (1996).