Secularism, Islamism, Emblemata: The Visual Discourse of Progress in Turkey

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Introduction

The modern Near East is a region experiencing a painful confrontation between tradition and modernity. Modernization projects which were launched during the early twentieth century to reconcile it with European modernity are argued to have failed. In many places, the projects to build secular nation-states have been overturned in favor of a revival of the glories of classical Islam. The Islamist militants, intellectuals, and politicians all argue that a return to the Islamic theocracy is the remedy for the ills of underdevelopment and the recovery of social order. To enforce their ideology, Islamists started a militant struggle against their own nationals some three decades ago, and having made advances at home, Islamist politics pose a serious threat to global peace today. What unleashed the age-old notion of Islamic theocracy as a hope for Muslims in the twenty-first century? This essay penetrates the question by looking at the changes in the design of the emblem for the City of Ankara—now a loaded symbol of visual culture in Turkey.

Turkey is a pivotal country simply because reform started there by the abolishment of the Caliphate—the spiritual leadership post of Islam—in 1924. It is the only country with a Muslim majority where secularism is established as a constitutional principle, and where a secular culture has taken root. Turkey also is placed at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, seeking membership in the European Community. However, the country experiences an identity dilemma in matters concerning religion and secularism.

There is a body of visual evidence tied to political arguments which were staged during the declining days of the Ottoman theocratic monarchy over what would deliver the country from underdevelopment. These arguments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries continued into the twentieth and the twenty-first—the period of the modern Turkish Republic. The visual evidence has a long pedigree that begins in the eleventh century, when the previously shamanist Turkic tribes adopted Islam as their religion. There are sixteenth century banners of conquest inscribed with Koranic scriptures; eighteenth century courtly art influenced by European encounters; the cultural influence of nineteenth century Europe...
infiltrating the empire’s urban centers; Western social and cultural institutions implemented by military officials and state bureaucrats; as well as reactions against change, and the creation of an orthodoxy of an Ottoman-Islamic golden age. At the end of this rich line of evidence is a recent symbol in Turkey—the replacement of a secular symbol (Figure 1) by a religious one (Figure 2) in the nation’s capital. Ankara’s new emblem reflects Turkey’s political division.

Two Models for Progress: Secularization or Islamic Revival

The precursor to the Turkish Republic, the Ottoman Empire, by the end of eighteenth century, had realized the dire need for change. In 1792, Sultan Selim III asked prominent scholars for their advice on the appropriate course of action to end the decline of the Empire. Some argued for a return to the pure, orthodox Islam of the Prophet’s age. Others suggested that the Empire stop resisting change, and seek inspiration in the forward-looking institutions of the West. Consequently, the Ottomans implemented reforms which included the abolishment of the fanatical Janissaries (1826) in favor of a modern organized army, followed by the Reform Edict of 1839 that obliged the Sultan to relinquish some of his powers. Finally, in 1876, a new constitution established a parliament which enabled the representation of non-Muslim subjects—whom Sheriat law did not recognize as equal. A reactionary Sultan (Abdulhamid) cancelled the parliament in 1878, reestablishing the Empire as an Islamic theocracy for the next thirty years. During Abdulhamid’s reign, conservative intellectuals promoted a return to classical Islam as a way to save the Empire. The Islamist or Hamidian (after the Sultan’s name) answer to progress could be summarized as “borrowing technology from the West, and preserving the tradition of Islam.” This became the cultural doctrine of the Islamists worldwide as their reaction to the challenge of European modernity in the nineteenth century.

Following the collapse of the Empire at the end of World War I, the civilian and military elite who followed the reformist thesis declared the Turkish secular nation state; and launched social and
judicial reforms unlike the partial reforms of the past. The Turkish “revolution” was aimed at the total transformation of the society.

Today, once again there is an intelligentsia that supports the first thesis, arguing for a re-Islamization of society and a return to Islamic theocracy—notwithstanding the millions of Muslims worldwide for whom the “Islamic solution” has gradually become popular during the last three decades. Proponents of the new Islamism want to reverse the modernity project. In Turkey, the most visible act of reversal occurred in 1994, when the emblem of Ankara (Figure 1) was cancelled at the behest of an Islamist mayor in favor of an Islamist symbol: a blue badge featuring drawings of minarets, domes, a tower, and stars sprinkled in the night sky (Figure 2).

The emblem depicted recent landmarks of Ankara. Kocatepe Mosque, the Atakule Tower, and the Begendik Mall were conceived by cultural conservatives to change the symbolic character of the nation’s capital. These landmarks created political controversy, and sparked fiery debates when they were implemented. They were imminently combined within the frame of the new Ankara emblem. Their juxtaposition created a corporate symbol that addressed Islamism’s social, political, and economic dimensions.

There is much more nested in the emblem than the three Ankara landmarks. I will show how much history unfolds from its layers, and why the emblem takes on so much meaning.

**Ankara as the Icon of the Secular Nation-State**

The story starts with the establishment of Ankara as the icon of the secular nation-state, and the inauguration of the ancient sun-disk as the symbol of the nation’s capital.

At the end of World War I, the Turkish reformers had emerged as the victors of an Independence War that they had instigated. Victory brought them popular support, and it granted them authority. This postwar nation-building effort afforded the reformers the opportunity to sweep away every medieval institution of the state that the Ottoman Sultans had not dared to touch. Ankara, the nation’s new capital, was at the center of this project. Almost as old as Istanbul, Ankara was the site of a Roman fortified town, which later was inherited by the Seljuks and the Ottomans. The Ottoman Ankara, like many other towns in the Anatolian mainland at the turn of the century, still clung to the old fortress. As the new capital, Ankara was designed as a model for the rest of Turkey’s developing urban centers. The 1932 plan envisioned an industrial hub and a cultural model (Figure 3). The Turkish reformers acknowledged a cultural continuum that reached beyond the bounds of Islam. Unlike the Islamist view of history, the new view took the Islamic period as only one episode in the Turkish national history. The reformers sponsored studies of ancient Anatolian civilizations—which were
considered curiosities exclusive to the British and Austrian scholars during the Ottoman period. An ancient Anatolian artifact, the sundisk of the Hatti, was chosen to symbolize modern Ankara (Figure 4). In time, this official emblem was embraced as a popular visual motif.

The republican sponsorship of a universalistic recognition of culture also set off culture wars between the vanguards of traditionalism and progressives who embraced Western ideals of liberal society and secular humanism. As we will see later, the Ankara emblem, since it was derived from a pre-Islamic culture, challenged the Islamist view that equated culture (hars) with Islam, and thus became increasingly intolerable by the emergent political Islamist movement from the late 1960s on.

Democracy for Theocracy? Cultural Conservatives Come Out of the Closet during the Cold War

By the end of WW II, the new Ankara had become a modern urban center. Turkey, criticized by the coalition for remaining neutral during the war, declared its alliance in 1944. The forward-looking, pro-Western Turkish Republic was included in the Marshall Plan for postwar development in 1947. The first democratic elections were held in 1950, and the founding Republican People’s Party (RPP) voluntarily handed over power to the Demokrat Party after it was elected to office. The majority of voters, bitter about the WW II...
economy and the increasingly inefficient single-party rule, yearned for change. Many progressives initially supported the Demokrat opposition.

For different reasons, the followers of the nineteenth century Islamist ideologies, too, had lent their support to the newly forming democratic opposition as early as 1946 (Figure 5). Egypt had its Sayyid Qutb, the scholar who is cited as the father of modern political Islam, and Turkey had Necip Fazil Kisakurek and Peyami Safa. These fundamentalist critics of the secular Turkish Republic envisioned democracy as a one-time transfer of power from the impious secular regime into the hands of the pious majority, for a return to theocracy. The nation’s goal, which was articulated as “a struggle to reach the level of contemporary civilization,” was redefined as “a march into a future that is rooted in the distant past.” Islamism’s most articulate ideologue was a poet named Mehmed Akif. He articulated his opposition to Westernization in these words: “A nation is a tree with roots in the past. Don’t let the woodsman cut the tree to cure the blight.” 10 He argued for the restriction of reforms to technical matters: “There is no such social affinity between our society and that which we want to imitate [European]. But that is not the case as regards to matters of techniques, but such matters are transmitted by imitation.” 11 In the view of the Akif’s followers, U.S. financial aid was welcome as long as it supported a “pious”
development effort. They lent their support to the Demokrats expecting the party to reverse the Westernizing reforms before their reach penetrated into every corner of the country.\(^2\) (Figure 6).

In the 1950s, the Demokrats—supported by unprecedented sums of foreign aid—launched their “magnificent development” program. It was supposed to make the preceding Republican program pale in comparison. While the goal of the Republicans was set as a struggle to “catch up” with contemporary civilization, the Demokrats frequently pronounced their goal as a struggle to achieve “Turkey the Great.” This term echoed “The Great Orient” motto of the cultural conservatives of the late 1940s, which signified a yearning for the greatness of the Ottoman-Islamic past.\(^3\)

During their formative days in office, the Demokrats pursued a populist, conservative mobilization. “Enemies of religion” and “communist” labels served to marginalize the progressives. This policy benefited from Cold War anxieties. Demokrats also waged their cultural war by symbolic conquests.

**Imperial Symbol Becomes Islamist Icon: Ankara’s Grand Mosque**

In 1954, the City of Ankara, led by the DP, decided to construct a monumental mosque in the Republican People’s Party’s stronghold. Unlike Istanbul’s skyline dominated by imperial minarets and domes—which also influenced Istanbul’s emblem Ankara demonstrated the zeitgeist of the Republican period with its modernist architecture. The New Town was designed in the first place to encourage a secular public sphere, and bore few religious buildings.\(^4\)

Yet, the Demokrats set the objective of the project competition not as Islamization of Ankara’s landscape, but as a challenge for Turkish architects to create “a modern interpretation of Islamic temples.”\(^5\) In 1957, Vedat Dalokay, who later would become the left-wing mayor of Ankara, won with a modernist design. However, the Dalokay mosque was not a completely new answer to the classic mosque form. Its point of departure was the Ottoman imperial mosque. The architect’s stylistic choices sought to integrate the building with the New Town’s modernist urban landscape. They also were responses to the progressive residents of the New Town, who were loyal supporters of the Westernizing reforms. Dalokay was proposing an unorthodox form for an unorthodox observance of religion. The foundation of the modernist Kocatepe Mosque was laid in 1963, and part of the complex was completed within a year.

Dalokay’s design retains the traditional minarets, however renders them in a gothic, prismatic form. The traditional railings were removed in favor of an uninterrupted slender tower form. Eight slender columns converge to form a prismatic tip, eliminating the cone, the most distinctive feature of the classic, “pencil” minaret. The dome is remarkably unlike the sixteenth century classical shells, which were composed of central domes supported by smaller semi-
domes. This is a single shell that covers the immense prayer hall. The result, still alluding to the classical Ottoman mosque is yet a distinctive aesthetic form (Figure 7).

By the end of the 1960s, the design which had appeased the conservatives of the 1950s was no longer satisfactory. These conservatives demanded nothing short of the unadulterated, traditional icon—the sixteenth century silhouette which would articulate the symbolic conquest of the Westernized New Town. The mosque which was in the process of being constructed was decreed irreligious; accused of being an imitation of a cheap dance club; likened to a barroom in Brussels. In the mid-1960s, when a right-wing successor to the DP came to power, the Islamist right—then a marginal but a powerful section of the centrist right—started a rigorous campaign against the modernist mosque in construction.

Islamists mixed their argument with Turkish nationalism to gain larger support. One such “Turco-Islamist,” Nihad Sami Banarli, argued that the modernist design was a humiliation for the Turk who “never imagined to be defeated to the soil that he had conquered. He was the victor of the [Western] civilization he had entered into, not the prisoner of it.” Banarli also denied cross-cultural interaction (the
Byzantine roots of the Ottoman mosque) and championed the purity of traditional culture: “When the Turks were in central Asia, they, due to a lack of materials were unable to create great architecture. Whenever the Turks raided in Anatolia and the Balkans they faced foreign architecture...immediately rejecting it. Instead the Turks embroidered into bricks and stones their very own tent domes, tent forms and tent decorations.” Westernization was to blame for this cultural invasion/subversion of the Turks by the Turks: architects such as Dalokay grew up under a “discipline of denial” (modern art education) and thus suffered from the disease of awful imitation of Western art. To avoid this cultural subversion, the Turco-Islamists envisioned a return to the Ottoman-Islamic artistic exercise dictated by the medieval guild orders: the apprentice kissing the hands of every guildsmen present—a ritual that ensured the constancy in Ottoman style and taste.

In 1967, successors to the right-wing Demokrats, the Justice Party, took charge of the issue and helped the cancellation of the Kocatepe project. This was done not on the grounds of the impiousofulness of the design, but on the grounds of the deficiency of building’s structural engineering. In one of the most sensational events of Turkish political history, the partly-built mosque complex was torn down by dynamite. Having destroyed this “wrong start,” the Justice Party administration devised a new competition that, not surprisingly, awarded a sixteenth-century, classical design—the foundation for which was laid in 1967. Referring to the Kocatepe controversy, Turco-Islamists defined Turkey’s democratic struggle as a cultural war between a minor elite and the simple noble folk (Figure 8). Ironically, six years later, the modernist designer Dalokay was elected mayor of Ankara.

Islamizing Nationalism

Beginning in the late 1960s, the right-wing Justice Party attempted to marginalize Turkish progressives with the charge of “communism.” By 1971, Turkey’s nationalist military—convinced of a revolutionary-communist threat—had taken sides with the right-wing nationalist movement, and the new state ideology was emerging as a blend of nationalism and Islamism: Turco-Islamism.

In response to the right-wing coalition/consolidation, there was a steady rise in the popularity of the Turkish left (Between 1969 and 1977, RPP votes in Istanbul rose from 33.8 to 58.3 percent; and in Ankara from 36 to 52.5 percent). The left’s ascent ended in 1980 when a military coup liquidized the founding RPP. The disenfranchised leftist, socialist, and workers’ movements either went underground or were replaced by a state-promoted ideology of pioussness or re-Islamization in all public spheres. The Iranian revolution also affected Turkey in the 1980s. Signaling the popular rise of Islam was a boom in Islamist publications, Koran schools, imam schools and, most important, the frantic activity of charitable-mosque building.

Figure 8
Cultural conservative view of the classic mosque design (c. 1976), from Mimarlik Deryisi 10 (1967), 7. This illustration, which supported an article, contrasts Dalokay’s “modernist, machine-made, mass-produced prototype” with a “classic design” that was embroidered on the rocks of the nation by a worker who seemed to possess innate knowledge of the classic form. The Turco-Islamists’ criticism had a peculiar Marxist tone.
Upon the cleansing of the political landscape in 1983, a new centrist-right Motherland Party came to power. From 1983 to 1991, the Motherland Party implemented market liberalization and helped to popularize the marginal Islamists. The Motherland party launched a neo-liberalist “second” republican era. Prime Minister Turgut Ozal’s contribution to the Turkish techno-traditionalist rhetoric was his motto: “We shall leap over the age,” which circumnavigated the humbler Republican goal of “catching up” with contemporary civilization.

Neo-Liberalist Conquest by Design: The Atakule Tower in Ankara

As an architectural celebration of the neo-liberalist economy, the Atakule Tower and Shopping Center was erected in 1988 in Ankara’s New Town republican neighborhood. Atakule was one of those ambitious urban building projects initiated by the emerging capitalists of the 1980s (Kuala Lumpur’s Petronas towers by Islamist Mahathir is the most prominent example). It also challenged its Western counterparts such as Seattle’s Space Needle.

The Atakule tower was designed by an architect who was influenced by the cultural conservative ideas of the 1970s. Architect Ragip Buluc’s neo-Islamic towers monumentalized the Seljuk and
Ottoman forms found mainly in tombs and madrasas. His radar towers for Istanbul’s Bosphorus strait referenced the pencil minarets; a monumental tower proposed for an Ankara district monumentalized geometric interlace patterns found in the Ottoman tombs. The architect’s body of influence surface in statements such as: “You’ll certainly feel yourself in heaven in an Ottoman cemetery, you won’t be afraid of death there.” Buluc also frequently criticized modern architecture employing an alienation of the individual theme. In his statements, he reiterated the loss of spirituality and the fall of the individual, while claiming to bring back the humanist element found in the almost divinely ordained (“unmeasurable” is his word) architecture of the Ottomans. These criticisms echoed Islamists including Akif, Kisakurek, and Safa in Turkey; Qutb in Egypt, and Mawdudi in Pakistan, who also voiced sharp responses to the calamities of the modern age, adopting an almost Western humanist tone.

Predictably, Atakule’s design is a clear break from the republican architecture that had given form to Ankara’s New Town—a cohesive urban fabric that was created during the 1930s and the 1940s. At the base of the tower is a mirror-glass structure that serves as the shopping center. A concrete hexagonal column rises from this glass base. The tower is a modification of the slender columns of Seattle’s Space Needle, through the translation of curvilinear surfaces into polyhedral forms to attain a gothic, Seljukid character (Figure 9). The hexagonal column is terminated at the top by a dome that is composed of a polyhedral shell. Atakule draws people into the mirror glass mall at its base, which the architect claims derives from a Seljukid portal.

Atakule is not a man-made elevation placed on the Ankara plain, as one might expect, but is erected on top of an imposing hill which already overlooks the plain. It stands like a flagpole on the New Town’s hill, which the cultural conservatives have long resented for symbolizing Turkey’s progressive, left-wing republican heritage. This architectural polemic is aptly titled as the “Ata[türk]tower,” while expressing displeasure with that very architectural heritage.

In the final analysis, Atakule stands as a mixture of functional (generic mall space driven by materials) and symbolic elements (where sculptural possibilities are explored in reinforced concrete). The juxtaposition of new materials with Islamic tradition is no longer exclusive to Turkey. This new wave of architectural orthodoxy, which is sponsored by both public and private sectors across the Muslim world, is described as neo-Islamic architecture. As the neo-Islamic sendoff to Seattle’s futuristic Space Needle, Atakule took Ankaralites on a trip to the time of the “Jetsons” and back to the thirteenth century, when Seljuk-Turks roamed Ankara steppes. However, an engineering error prevented the revolving deck and restaurant—the crucially important component and widely publicized promise of the design—from rotating.
The Kocatepe Mosque Is Completed

The Turkish left’s pacification by the military coup of 1980 gave the right-wing administration the political ground and the financial backing to complete the Turco-Islamist planned mosque in Ankara’s New Town. The foundation for this building was laid in 1967, and the lower part has opened as a temporary mosque. As mentioned earlier, the designer of the modernist mosque was elected mayor of Ankara in 1973. Even electoral power did not qualify Dalokay to once again implement his own design. Fearing attacks from the religious establishment, he found himself helping the builders. The Turco-Islamist plan was an assortment of sixteenth century Ottoman mosque features that combined the four semi-domed central plan of the Sehzade Mosque with Suleymaniye’s facades and Selimiye’s minarets. The classic Ottoman forms, which owe their shapes to their brick tile support structure, were cast in reinforced concrete. Once again, in one Turco-Islamist ideologue’s words: “A number of men in their right minds have rejected the former shape (Figure 7), which was the imitation of a cheap dance club, and have decided to give Ankara a mosque in the style of Süleymaniye-Sultanahmed. And Ankara needed such a mosque with national forms in order to become a Muslim-Turkish town.” The mosque opened in 1987 with a political demonstration of a ceremony. A further addition would make the mosque the emblem of the post-1980s marriage of Islamism and capitalism.

Kocatepe as Mosque-Mall

In 1993, a late-modern European-style shopping mall opened underneath the sixteenth century Ottoman-style mosque as the physical combination of mobilized Islam and capitalism (Figure 10). This juxtaposition echoed the glass mall and ancestral tower pastiche of Atakule. However, this final spectacle in the neo-liberal Islamist capital was not exclusively designed for the pious. The Islamist business could not afford this endeavor unless its customer base was extended to the secular society. The Begendik mall projected a modern face with its architecture and corporate identity to avoid intimidating secular customers. An identity of innocence was further articulated by the introduction of the pre-adolescent/pre-veiled girl motif in the promotional materials (Figure 11). Unlike the recently revived Islamic bazaars that offered products such as the ancient Islamic toothbrush (a short tree branch called misvak), this was a European-style mall that offered a wide range of items including sensuous lingerie and perfumery, but excluding alcohol.

Neo-liberal Islamist Icon: Ankara’s Mosque-Mall Emblem and the Emergence of Political Islam

As mentioned earlier, for the Islamists, modern Ankara was not a success to be celebrated. Ankara was not a tabula rasa, but it was a formerly Muslim town desecrated by the modernizing regime.
Political Islam emerged in Egypt after Nasser’s death in 1970. It spread out worldwide almost synchronically after the Iranian revolution, which coincided with the Mujaheddeen jihad in Afghanistan, and the Turkish and Pakistani right-wing coups. In Turkey, as elsewhere, certain visual codes signaled this rise: women’s veils, a frantic mosque-building effort, amplified prayer calls, and young men sporting crescent-shaped beards. The disenfranchised activists from the 1970s, together with a growing number of rural migrants and a pious urban middle class propelled the rapid ascent of its popularity. By the mid-1990s, this popularity won the Turkish Islamist Party the municipal elections. However, the movement was in serious need of a collective memory. The Islamists found this memory in the Ottoman-Islamic conquest of Constantinople, the Islamization of a Christian city. The Islamist mayors in the 1990s evoked that memory and employed the rhetoric of reconquest—of places desecrated by the secular regime, where the impious now dwelt. The Islamists were successful in forging relationships with an urban, pious middle class, as well as the urban poor.

Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, the country’s politics had besieged the traditionally left-wing-voting Ankara. And 1994 marked the Islamists’ municipal election victory. Ankara’s mayor (Figure 12) acted like a Muslim commander who had entered a freshly conquered city. Ankara, the icon of the Turkish secular nation state, indeed had become a Westernized urban center with public spaces, modern public works, and inhabitants who had acquired civic codes over traditional ones. The Islamist mayor was determined to be a victor, not a “prisoner” of this urban culture. He set out to make his own mark on the City.

First, he ordered the removal of the modern public sculptures on the basis of their promiscuity. The mayor declared that he would “spit right in the eye of art like that.” 30 He also removed the goat sculptures that publicized Ankara’s famous produce, as well as the City’s ancient heritage. The goats were removed for their secular presence and for their pre-Islamic connotations. Islamists denied associations with the pre-Islamic cultural history of Anatolia. Instead, they recognized a Persian-Arab-Seljuk-Ottoman-Islamic continuum. 31

Finally, the City’s symbol sun-disk got the mayor’s attention. This symbol, the mayor argued within the framework of Islamic iconoclasm, 32 was a pagan idol that the impious Ankaralites worshiped. 33 The traces of the sun-disk were erased from the City to be replaced by an emblem which amalgamated neo-liberalist economy with Islamism: The Kocatepe Mosque that symbolized the political victory of Islamism, and the Atakule Tower that symbolized neo-liberalism (Figure 13).

This is not a classic emblem that combines several visual elements in their original form. It is a modern logo that blends these elements by simplifying the forms and finding complementary rela-
tionships between them. The minarets and the gothic base allude to the Kocatepe. And when they are complemented by the deck of the Atakule Tower, which here stands for a basilican dome, the result is a sixteenth century Ottoman mosque silhouette. Thus neo-liberalist Atakule is acknowledged to be sacrosanct by the Islamists. The crescent moon and the star motif on the base of the mosque allude to the Turkish national flag. However, the crescent which encloses the star subverts the nationalist symbol. The three other stars that are sprinkled above the mosque motif are clearly not elements of the national flag. These represent stars on a night sky given the dark-blue background. One can argue that, with this gesture, the night (which is a benevolent motif in the Arabian-Islamic vision of nature) replaces the day (which the Anatolian sun-disk celebrates). Furthermore, if the mosque silhouette on the emblem is Kocatepe’s, then its minarets are reduced to two, and the three balconies on each minaret are reduced to one. The result is a plain, white mosque silhouette that reflects the neo-Islamist notion of modern: an abundance of white concrete. This silhouette could stand for any concrete replica of the classic Ottoman mosque in Turkey.

The sun-disk emblem was attacked by Islamist rhetoric as an idol that was worshiped. It had to be replaced by a proper cultural symbol. Ironically, the resulting icon that combined a sanctified shopping mall (Atakule Tower) with the mosque-mall (Kocatepe) raised the question of what the political Islamists worshiped the most. In the end, the Islamists have imagined Ankara in the form of Istanbul, the former Ottoman capital which was symbolized by its minarets (Figure 14).
Conclusion

Since 1950, the year when Turkey embarked on parliamentary democracy, an ambiguous economy prevailed in Turkish politics. At the level of state bureaucracy, the right-wing Demokrats of the 1950s projected Turkey as a modern member of the Western democratic world. Having also recognized demographic facts, they sought a conservative mobilization of Turkey’s rural majority that would consolidate their government and which they calculated would sustain their hold in office—some argued—indefinitely. The Westernizing RPP was never recognized as a legitimate political opponent, but an anomaly which had to be purged from the nation’s consciousness. But democracy was not recognized as a perpetual competition, but a one-time transfer of power. Thus, in 1960, when the Demokrats refused to yield to the request for the renewal of elections, they were removed from office by an even higher power: the military. Their successors adopted this policy of conservative mobilization—a heritage which eventually would result in the collapse of the problematic Turkish centrist right-wing in favor of political Islam.

In the 1950s, Turkish Demokrats were preaching that social change was not necessary (knowing that certain reforms—such as the emancipation of women—were not as popular in rural Turkey as they were in the urban areas). Demokrats were supported by the fundamentalists, who argued that the single-party impiety had ruined the country and that piety would bring prosperity. Therefore, the borrowings from the West should be screened, and made exclusive to a class of pious technicians. While technology could be borrowed, the “culture” of technology should be rejected. The doctrine found expression in symbolic juxtapositions of the technological and the religious-traditional, in an election poster as early as 1957. A clean-shaven prime minister, dressed in Western attire—symbols which once were a matter for cultural debate—was flanked by both smokestacks and minarets, each racing towards the
sky (Figure 15). The consequence of literal juxtapositions of tradition and technology were numerous failures of industrial development; rapid population growth; a massive rural exodus; and the emergence of an economy of land plunder as the only way to absorb that influx—in the face of civil unrest.38

As stated earlier, Islamization did not come naturally. It required a deliberate effort, partly sponsored by the hand of the very “secular” state. In the 1990s, the juxtaposition of the technological and the religious-traditional culminated in the political Islamist icon: Ankara’s emblem that carried the mosque-mall and the sanctified observation deck. It was an icon that ridiculed property ownership, urban zoning, and rule of law; celebrated real estate speculation; and memorialized the marriage of cell phone consumerism and tribal tradition. These new paradigms were packed inside one blue badge, and were carried out with the discourse of “Islamic conquest” which, while the main resource of an imperial economy, now symbolized plunder legitimized under the protective banner of religion.39

1 Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). This is the seminal study of Turkey’s modernization effort.


5 Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, 62–65. The Arabs’ defeat in the Nasser-led war against Israel in 1967 already has created a vacuum which was filled by Sayyid Qutb’s Islamist philosophy. Nasser’s death in 1970 put a definite end to the Arab nationalist cause.

6 Emre Kongar, *Kuresel Teror ve Turkiye: Kuresellesme, Huntington, 11 Eylul* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2001), 135–140. Kongar notes that, after Independence was won, Kemal Atatürk struggled with the majority of generals who supported the continuation of the theocracy. In order to proclaim the Republic, Atatürk cancelled the first parliament and founded a second parliament comprised of republican supporters.

Everything revolves around prayer houses, schools, libraries, and suffering-houses. And every individual is liable for his duties inside a social order that (dictates) when to go to bed and when to get up.


15 Quoted in Iltus, Mimarlık Dergisi, 69.

16 Cevad Ülger, Ritmin Gücü ve Ritme Davet (Istanbul: İBDA Yayınları, 1985). This is a collection of essays on art and culture by an Islamist ideologue.

17 Nihad Sami Banarli, Devlet ve Devlet Terbiyisi (Istanbul: Kubbealtı Nesriyatı, 1985), especially the chapter on the Kocatepe Mosque (“Ankara Camii,” 300–305).

18 Iltus, Mimarlık Dergisi, 69.


20 Hüsev Tayla and Fatim Ulügen were the architects brought in as a result of a new project competition in 1967.

21 Cumhuriyet (February 3, 1967): 1. Reacting to the university protests of the late 1960s, the top Turkish general, Cemal Tural, declared the leftist movements as a major national security threat. The general stressed that the army would crack down on the leftist groups in the same way that it had acted on the corrupted politicians during the 1960 coup.


23 Gilles Kepel, Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam, Chapter 4 (“Islamism in Egypt, Malaysia, and Pakistan,” 81–105) discusses the case of Anwar Sadat in Egypt, Mahathir in Malaysia, and Ziya Ullaq in Pakistan. Turgut Özal poses as the Turkish counterpart of these leaders in his consolidation of Islamist capital.


26 Left-wing journalist Müm茨 Soysal protested the erection of Atakule, writing: “If there is no place to put a tower, a revolving tower will be constructed at the top of Botanic Park in Ankara. It is really a magnificent idea to disgrace the most beautiful part of Gankaya with a shopping site and putting a 150-meter-high tower over it.” in Milliyet (December 31, 1985).


29 Banarli, Devlet ve Devlet Terbiyisi, 303.

30 Quoted in Yenibir (February 17, 2003). Also available at www.yenibir.com/bultenler/bulten/1,sayid~199,00.asp. “In the Land of Fairies” was a public sculpture by the prominent Turkish sculptor Mehmet Aksoy, who argued that his work celebrated his cultural roots with portrayals of Anatolian mothers and the fertility goddess imagery.


32 Islam was established as a religion by the conquest of Mecca, a cult center. The prophet had destroyed the idols of Mecca in order to establish Islam as a monothestic religion.
33 Gürsel Korat, “Ankara’nın Sembolu” (Ankara’s Symbol) in Radikal (Section: 2, April 2, 2001). See also “Welfare Party Terrorizes the Capital” in Cumhuriyet (October 8, 1996).

34 The Demokrat Party passed laws in 1951 and 1954 to liquidate the opposition RPP’s assets. By 1959, the opposition newspapers were either periodically closed by the government or their page runs were restricted. In April 1960, DP founded a special commission (Tahkikat Komisyonu) to investigate the actions of the opposition party and press. See Cumhuriyet Ansiklopedisi (Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Yayinlari, 2002, vol. 12). Also see issues of Akis and Kim, weekly news magazines published in Istanbul during the 1950s.

35 Berkes, The Development of Secularism in Turkey, 473. The Turkish Civil Code, which passed in 1926, abolished polygamy and elevated the legal status of women. While women practiced their rights easily in the cities, certain women’s rights remained only in theory in the isolated, patriarchal rural settings.

36 Berkes, The Development of Secularism in Turkey, 360. In the 1910s, the Islamists warned against the cultural dangers that awaited Turkish student abroad. They stated: “If we must send our youth to Europe, we should send them only after having taught them our own customs and morality … We are Orientals, and we shall always remain so.”

37 Berkes, The Development of Secularism in Turkey, 473–474. The wearing of the fez—which the Europeans used as an image to caricature the Turks—was banned by the so-called “Hat Law” in 1926. At the time, this forced change of headgear—which had strong religious signification—met with opposition.