

ISLAM AND TURKISH IMMIGRANTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

*Umut AZAK**

According to a recent report of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia on Muslims in Europe, policies and public discourse on Islam and experiences of discrimination and social and economic marginalization in the last five years have negatively impacted on Muslim immigrants' sense of belonging to the host countries (Choudhury et al. 29). This is also true for the Turkish¹ immigrants in the Netherlands among whom only a small percentage (12 %) regard themselves as being part of Dutch society (FORUM Factbook on the Position of Muslims in the Netherlands 16). An important reason for the immigrants' sense of exclusion is the public discourse on Islam and their stigmatization as Muslims. As a matter of fact, the public discourse in the Netherlands on Islam, as expressed in newspapers and magazines in the post-September 11 context and especially after the murder of the filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in 2004, often reflects a xenophobia imbued with anti-Islamism. Different groups are in this popular discourse lumped together as the possessors of a homogeneous "Muslim culture" and the causes of their problems are looked for in "Islam" often reduced to the text of the Koran and sometimes to a specific interpretation of the text by an imam (Peters; Sunier and van Kuijeren 148). The "Islamization of the immigrants" in the words of Sunier and van Kuijeren ignores the complex interplay between ethnic and religious identity as well as the possibility that

* Dr., Frei Universiteit, Modern Türkiye Tarihi.

¹ "Turkish" here refers to those immigrants from Turkish origins and who consider themselves as Turks regardless of their ethnic background.

ethnicity can be a more important marker of identity than religion (Choudhury et al. 26).

The experience of the Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands mirrors the complex relationship between ethnic and religious identities as well the coexistence of diverse religious formations in the country of origin. However, generational changes of the immigrants or, political changes in their country of origin, as pointed at by Avcı, can “redefine” the relationship towards their country of origin and lead to a “rapprochement” between different Turkish-Islamic communities in the Netherlands (210). This article aims to shed light on the historical formation of the heterogeneous Turkish Islam in the Netherlands and new trends affecting it, on the basis of previous research and personal communications conducted in June 2008.

The first generation of Turkish immigrants were labor migrants who came to the Netherlands on the basis of an agreement which was signed by the Dutch and Turkish governments in 1964. Turkish migrants who came from villages in the Central Anatolia and the Black Sea Region were mostly settled in cities such as Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Utrecht. Although the official demand for unskilled labor stopped in 1974, the migration from Turkey continued with family reunification programs and with the political refugees who came during the 1980s. Today, Dutch citizens who have Turkey as their country of origin constitute 2,27 % of the population (372. 714 out of 16.405.399 in 2008 according to the online publication of the Statistics Netherlands²). Turkish immigrants range from atheists to pious practitioners of Sunni Islam who are organized around several

² Figure: “Population by origin and generation,” 1 January 2008. Available online at <http://statline.cbs.nl>.

Islamic associations and mosques.³ Currently, from among 453 mosques in the Netherlands, 245 belong to these Turkish organizations (FORUM Factbook 15). There are also non-Sunni immigrant groups of either Turkish or Kurdish ethnic origin, namely Alevites who distance themselves from these mosque-centered formations.⁴ This coexistence of different Turkish “Islams” in the Netherlands reflects the plurality of Islam in Turkey.

Islam in Turkey

The debate on Islam in the Netherlands concerns the issue of integration of Muslim immigrants, which include Turks along with other ethnic groups. In Turkey, however, Islam is often on the agenda as a problem in relation to secularism. In Turkey, radical Islamism is seen as the major threat for secularism, the central principle of Kemalism which is the founding ideology of the Republic. This is at least the perception of the military which sees the guardianship of the secular regime as its essential duty, even at the expense of democracy if necessary. The military leadership today, however, instead of interfering in democracy with overt coups as it did lastly in 1980, acts together with the state’s juridical organs, the mainstream press and civil society organizations supporting secularism in order to block the actions of allegedly anti-secularist political actors. The latter, according to the military, are hiding themselves behind the new vision

³ Mosques in the Netherlands have been functioning as community centers even for ideological groups for whom religion is not the main focus, as in the case of several mosques which are bases of the so-called *ülküçüs* (idealists) or extreme nationalist associations who are the followers of Alparslan Türkeş (d. 1997) (Landman 218).

⁴ Four Turkish organizations which represent different Sunni groups take part within the CMO (Contactorgaan Moslems en de Overheid) which is the official consultative organ on issues related to integration since its recognition by the government on November 1, 2004. Turkish Alevi organizations who were excluded in the set-up phase of this organ established with other non-Sunni groups the CGI (Contact Groep Islam) which was recognized on January 13, 2005 (Euro-Islam Info, 5).

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*

of “conservative democracy” adopted by the Justice and Development Party (JDP), the governing party which had its second landslide electoral victory in July 2007.⁵

This picture of a polarized Turkey divided between the JDP supported by Muslim masses versus the secular state overshadows the real dynamics of Islam in Turkey and its complex interaction with the state. Such a picture does not help a better understanding of the dynamics of Islam among the Turks living in the Netherlands either. A short account of Islam in Turkey which can be summarized as the coexistence of the state-controlled Islam with a multi-faceted unofficial parallel Islam in a secular political setting might, however, facilitate a better analysis of the recent dynamics in both countries.

It is true that in the 1920s, the founding cadres of the Republic led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk accelerated the process of secularization and Westernization from the top down with radical reforms unprecedented in the Islamic world. The state-imposed secularization in the fields of education, law and culture under the single-party regime (1923-1945) created a gap between the urban elite having access to these fields and the masses who were largely illiterate. Besides, as Mardin stated, except for a minority, the secular official ideology of Kemalism could not play the role of a rival ideology vis-à-vis Islam nor did it let other ideological currents challenge religion (Mardin 149). However, not all the bridges were

⁵ The last press declaration of the Turkish military, the so-called “*e-muhtıra*” (e-memorandum) was released on its webpage on 27 April 2007, when the National Assembly failed to vote for a president. The memorandum expressed the “disturbance” (*endişe*) of the military concerning the debates on secularism during the presidential election process and declared its commitment to protect Turkey’s secular system. The text of the memorandum is available online at the Turkish Military’s web site: http://www.tsk.mil.tr/10_ARIV/10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_1_Basin_Aciklamalari/2007/BA_08.html

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*

broken between the state and the society. Islam continued to be one of these bridges.

The Kemalist political elite eradicated the Ottoman sultanate and its basis of legitimacy, the Caliphate, and removed Islam from the public sphere by closing Islamic schools, courts and Sufi brotherhood. However, their aim was not to establish atheism. Like the Ottoman state, the Republican regime integrated and subordinated Islam to the requirements of the state while keeping Islam under control and preventing opposition from using it as a rival ideology. A state organ for administering religion was established in 1924 under the name of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA). The latter, under direct supervision of the Prime Minister, appointed *imams*, preachers and supervised *müftüs* as well as centrally distributing the Friday sermons to the mosques throughout the country (up until 2006). The PRA's main function was to promote a national, rational and private Islam, loyal to the secular state, as opposed to what the state framed as foreign, superstitious, political and reactionary Islam. Hence, secularism (in Turkish *lâiklik* > from French *laïcité*), the pillar of the Kemalist ideology protected by the Constitution since 1937, has been marked by the state's control over religion rather than a complete institutional separation between the two.

After the transition to competitive multi-party politics in 1946 the state's control over Islam in public began to loosen and Islam began to serve as a means of political mass mobilization (Toprak 124). All right-wing political parties which took power since the 1950s emphasized the freedom of conscience and their respect to people's religious values. As stated by Mert, none of these parties questioned the principle of secularism or the control of religion by the state through the PRA. What they did was to criticize the neglect of the

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*

spiritual sphere during the single-party period. To remedy this neglect, new theology faculties and preachers' schools have been established by subsequent center-right governments to supply the people's need for "enlightened men of religion."

This official state Islam was, however, could never monopolize the religious sphere. With the relative liberalization of the political and cultural spheres, the increasing levels of education and the social mobility in the context of multi-party democracy, a political struggle over the definition and reformulation of what is national, Islamic, as well as the meaning of secularism began. Despite the continuing legal restrictions on Islamic formations out of the control of the PRA, a heterogeneous and unofficial parallel Islam coexisted in opposition to and sometimes intermingling with the official, Sunni and apolitical Islam of the PRA (Zarcone 272; 306-7). This plural nature of the Turkish Islam has been exported to Europe too via Turkish immigrants who have settled there in big numbers from the mid-1960s onwards.

An important stream in this parallel Islam has been the Turcoman-Kızılbaş Islam of neither Sunni nor Shiite Alevites who used to survive within endogamous and isolated communities in Anatolia for centuries vis-à-vis the dominance of the Sunni political center and who mostly supported the Kemalist regime and its secularization program.⁶ Another important stream of the parallel Islam is that of Sufi brotherhoods which had a problematic

⁶ Alevites, who have traditionally inhabited rural Central and Eastern Anatolian provinces and have largely migrated to large industrialized cities of Western Turkey, comprise 15 to 30 % of the total population of Turkey. The intellectual elite of the urbanized Alevites began to be outspoken about their belief in the intellectual and the political arena from the 1960s onwards and questioned the Sunni bias of the PRA. However, Alevism has only recently been recognized by the latter as an Islamic belief. There is, however, also a big controversy over the definition of Alevism as to whether it should be regarded as being within or out of Islam, as a religion, or a secular worldview and philosophy.

relationship with the Kemalist regime because they were banned in 1925.

The Ottoman *ulema* (doctors of Islamic law regulating justice and education) lost their already diminished power with the closure of the Islamic schools and courts by the Republican state. Nevertheless, the transfer of Islamic knowledge continued with the clandestine activity of Sufi brotherhoods. Among the latter the Naqshbandiya was the most effective.⁷ The most influential Sufi groupings which were also effective among Turkish immigrants in Europe have emerged from within this order: *İskender Paşa Cemaati* who are led by Mehmed Zahid Kotku (followed by his son-in-law Esad Coşan, d. 2001); *Nurcular*, led by Bediüzzaman Said Nursî (d. 1960), *Süleymanlılar*; led by Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan (d. 1959), etc. (Zarcone 306-7). Because the ban on forming Sufi orders has been in force throughout the Republican period, *zikir*, repetitive recital of the name of God, the central traditional practice of a Sufi order like Naqshbandiya, has been replaced by social gatherings for reading and discussing commentaries of the Koran and the hadith (Zarcone 276). This new Sufi Islam has been organized as communities (*cemaat*) which are hierarchically organized under their sheikh (Zarcone 281). *Süleymanlı* community led by Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan, for example, has focused since 1949 on Koran courses as alternative to the state-controlled courses and from mid-1960s onwards organized in larger scale (Zarcone 282; Yavuz 145-49).

⁷ The Naqshbandi order, which took its name from Sheikh Baha ud-Din Naqshband of Bukhara (d. 1390), was introduced in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century and had an increasing influence under with the Mawlana Khalid Baghdadi (d. 1827) all over Anatolia. The order is characterized by “its concern for the integrity of the *Shari‘a*” and “for the replacement of *adat* - customary law - by ordinances of the *Shari‘a* in several places” (Algar 14-15). The intellectual elite of the urbanized Alevites began to be outspoken about their belief in the intellectual and the political arena from the 1960s onwards and questioned the Sunni bias of the PRA.

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic*
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008

The *Nurcu* community or the disciples of Said Nursî have been organized around *dershanes*, which are reading groups led by seniors who studied *Risale-i Nur*, Said Nursî's commentaries of the Koran (Yavuz 151). It was in these "textual communities" that Said Nursî spread his own version of science, which, unlike positivism, reconciled faith and science, and approached scientific discoveries as revelations of the depth of the Koran's message (Yavuz 159-60, 163-64). After Said Nursî's death, the *Nurcu* movement was fragmented into several groups. Among them, a group under the leadership of Fethullah Gülen (1938-), who was a preacher and a disciple of Said Nursî, increased its influence in the 1980s. Gülen distanced himself from the wider *Nurcu* network by accommodating with the secularist military and bureaucratic elite, by internationalizing its nationalist Islamic mission in the Turkic Muslim world and lastly even to African countries (Turam 359). Currently, his movement is the largest Islamic movement in Turkey, with numerous schools, universities, companies and media outlets throughout the world. As stated by Turam, his followers voted always for conservative central right parties, the last of which is the JDP, with whom they display similar attitudes, such as rejection of radical Islam and dialogue with the United States and the European Union.

The parallel Islam has intermingled with the official Islam via the cadres who infiltrated into Republic's schools of preachers, theology faculties and the PRA (Zarcone 307). For instance, it was Süleymançıs who trained and employed preachers for the PRA until the latter began to employ only the graduates of official Preachers' schools and Theology Faculties in 1965 (Gözaydın 223). Moreover, parallel Islam was also an important player in the political sphere. The Naqshbandi order played a crucial role in the establishment of the first

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*

major Islamic party in Turkey. The National Order Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi*) was founded in 1970 by Necmettin Erbakan (1926-) with the encouragement of the Naqshbandi Sheikh Mehmet Zaid Kotku (d. 1980) (Çakır 22). Erbakan's political ideology formulated under the name of *Milli Görüş* (National Viewpoint) envisioned an economic development based on industrialization, but rejected Westernist cultural modernization by stressing the importance of "morals and virtue" and Islamic values, and basing the national pride on the "glorious" Ottoman/Islamic past. This Islamic and nationalist ideology appealed to small traders and low income groups from rural areas or peripheries of metropolitan areas who felt like their economic situation as well as their religious and cultural values to be under attack (ibid.). *Milli Görüş* became also an important religious movement among Turkish immigrants in Europe, including the Netherlands. Erbakan's successive political parties were disbanded in 1972 (National Order Party) and in 1980 (National Salvation Party, *Milli Selamet Partisi*) after the military interventions. The Welfare Party (WP, *Refah Partisi*) was the new party of the *Milli Görüş* movement between 1983 and 1998. The current Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was active in the latter especially in the 1990s. The WP, which became the senior member of the coalition government in 1996, was closed by the Constitutional Court in 1998 as it was seen as a threat to the secular character of the Republic (Cizre and Çınar). The WP was replaced this time by the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*), which was again closed down in 2001 for its anti-secular activities.

After the closure of the Virtue Party, the movement was divided into two between the traditionalists and the reformists. The reformists founded the Justice and Development Party (JDP) on August 14, 2001 and elected Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the prominent

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*

ex-mayor of Istanbul, as their leader. These reformists under the leadership of Erdoğan have been critical of the political style and policies of the WP and began to build a dialogue with non-Islamic sectors of the society. They have criticized and even rejected their Islamist past by adopting a new political discourse under the name of “conservative democracy”; avoided their earlier anti-Westernist outlook; and accepted economic liberalism. They have defended a consensus-seeking politics, and broadened the party’s support base. Since November 2002, they have been the governing party and repeated and even increased their electoral success in July 2007. Despite the opposition of the military and the masses who protested the JDP government’s alleged Islamist agenda of overthrowing the secular regime in the big cities of the country, Abdullah Gül, the second man of the JDP, was elected by the Grand National Assembly as the President of the Republic. Gül became the first president whose wife wears an Islamic headscarf which is considered by the secularist establishment to be a symbol of radical Islamism, and hence unacceptable within state institutions. However, it was not this development but the government’s attempt to amend the constitutional law in order to enable “covered” students to legally study in university campuses resulted in the current situation (as of June 2008) where the JDP is tried by the Constitutional Court on the charges of undermining secularism.

Islam among Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands

The first generation of Turkish-Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands operated in an alien environment and made their best to carve their own spaces in it by clinging onto their religion. As their stay in the Netherlands was conceived as transitory, the orientation of

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic*
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008

the first Turkish migrant organizations was towards Turkey rather than the host country. Accordingly, these organizations reflected the political and religious cleavages in the home country (Avcı 205). Gradually the plural Turkish Islam was reproduced in the Dutch setting in such a way that the Sunni Islam of the PRA coexisted with parallel Islam.⁸ However, Turkish Islam in the Netherlands is also shaped by local factors such as the Dutch legal system, institutional structure and experiences as migrants in the Dutch society (Sunier, *Islam and Ethnicity*, 155, 161). Although the ideological roots of the first organizations were in Turkey, the legal and historical conditions in the Dutch context have gradually made them less dependent on the social and political dynamics in the home country. The first Turkish-Muslim organizations also fitted in the system of religious pillarization which organized politics, media, welfare, sports, schools and even economics according to religious denomination in the Dutch society in the 20th century. Interestingly, as stated by Rath, Sunier and Meyer, the establishment of Islamic institutions began in a gradually “de-pillarized” society due to the increasing secularization of the Dutch society since the 1960s. Away from the restrictions of the Turkish state, these immigrant organizations could freely conduct their activities and spread their ideas (Landman 219). The principle of equality concerning religious communities guaranteed by the Dutch Constitution of 1983 provided the Turkish immigrants with “the legal and political leverage to demand equal treatment and, in some cases, extra provisions in order to be able to catch up with established

⁸ Another important constituent of the parallel Islam in the Netherlands is the Alevite groups who distance themselves from all the Sunni groups –either linked to the Diyanet and to other parallel Sufi formations. Alevites are organized in 16 different associations linked to the Federation of Alevite and Bektaşî Associations (Federatie van Alevitische en Bektashistische verenigingen, HAK-DER), which unite the Alevites and Bektaşîs under its umbrella.

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic*
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008

denominations” (Sunier and van Kuijeren, 145). This legal and institutional framework combined with the community initiative was crucial for the existence of these Turkish-Islamic organizations.⁹

From the mid-1970s onwards, as family reunions increased and the children of immigrants began to be educated in Dutch schools, the option of returning to Turkey began to disappear: Many immigrants preferred the much more convenient living conditions in the Netherlands. Hence, as pointed at by Canatan as well as by Sunier (*Islam and Interest Struggle*), a major shift occurred from the 1980s onwards in the leadership profiles and in the roles of the organizations within the Turkish community: Generational change was accompanied with a new orientation towards the host country. The community-centered, introvert, traditional understanding of Islam of the first generation began to be replaced by a new, individual, secular and pluralist understanding of Islam compatible with the modern trends.

This transformation of Turkish-Islamic organizations was facilitated by the Dutch authorities’ increasing concern for integration of immigrant groups. The observation of Sunier and van Kuijeren sheds light on this process: “Islamic organizations were considered important to immigrant identity, and their activities were judged in terms of their function in the process of integration. Organizations could now apply for subsidies to develop activities for their rank-and-file members, provided these activities sustained the integration process” (148). The sensitivity of Social-Democrats and Liberals on the issue of integration helped Turkish-Islamic organizations in

⁹ As also stated in a recent report on Islam in the EU published by the European Parliament, external relationships of the immigrant organizations and their contribution is secondary compared with the financial and community effort generated by the immigrants themselves (Dassetto et al. 9). The research of Rath et al. conducted in the cities of Rotterdam or Utrecht concluded the same by showing that external factors such as “foreign powers and international Muslim organizations have played only a limited role in the process of institutionalization” (191).

participating in public life and in receiving subsidies for their initiatives. In the course of years, members of Turkish-Islamic immigrant organizations have become more and more active in local politics.¹⁰ In Sunier's words, the second and third generation leadership of Islamic organizations "is trying to alter them from organizations *for* Muslims into organizations *of* Muslims" (*Islam and Interest Struggle*, 49).

Parallel Islam in the Netherlands:

The first Muslim association for Turkish Muslim migrants in the Netherlands was founded in 1971 and registered as *Vereniging ter behartiging van de belangen van moslims in Nederland* (Association for the Promotion of the interests of Muslims in the Netherlands). This was followed by the Stichting Islamistisch Centrum Nederland (SICN, Foundation Islamic Center in the NL) which was established in Utrecht in 1972. These were private initiatives for organizing prayer meetings and Koran lessons for children (Van Bommel 127). The SICN was established by a group named by other Turkish groups as "Süleymancı," because they were linked to the followers of Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan in Turkey. Though critical of the secular regime in Turkey, Süleymancı in the Netherlands stayed away from active politics and restricted themselves as in Turkey to the teaching of Koran (Landman 217). While their activity was clandestine in the Turkish context where the Koran courses had to be under the supervision of the Diyanet (PRA), in Europe they could legally and freely survive and develop their community.

¹⁰ See, for instance, the article by Landman and Wessels for civil activism of the Turkish (and Moroccan) organizations in the process of bargaining with local municipalities for building new mosques, as well as the research of Rath et al. (111-199).

As stated by van Bruinessen, Süleymançıs used to be known as an introvert community restricting themselves to purely religious activities. However, in the last years this seems to have changed. The group's main activity is still to organize student dormitories and give Turkish children Islamic education. The association has been going through a new phase under the leadership of the new chairman, Fikri Demirtaş, who is a second generation Turk educated in the Netherlands. Members of 91 Süleymançı organizations which include not only mosque organizations (48 mosques) but also women's and youth branches have been in the last years engaging in community projects and activities promoting integration of immigrants in the Netherlands. The community celebrated last year the 35th anniversary of their organization by publishing a booklet and organizing a cultural festival in Utrecht.

Another community which has been organized in the Netherlands also around mosques since 1975 is the *Milli Görüş* (National Viewpoint) group. The *Milli Görüş* in the Netherlands which began to organize in Rotterdam in 1975 was an extension of the Islamist political movement led by Necmettin Erbakan in Turkey. Associations linked to the *Milli Görüş* group are not only mosque associations but also women's and youth associations which organize cultural or educational activities within the mosques or other places. Via activities such as conferences, language courses or cultural festivals, celebrating and exhibiting or performing what they consider as the Turkish-Islamic art and culture, *Milli Görüş* organizations ensure their internal cohesion as well as taking part in the public space. These activities are also major events which promote women's access to the public sphere and let them develop their organizational skills. The leaders of the *Milli Görüş* act as intermediaries between the

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*

Dutch society and their communities by taking part in public discussions on Islam or the problems related to migrants (Sunier, *Islam and Interest Struggle*, 46). In 1997, the *Milli Görüş* in the Netherlands was divided into two regional organizations: the southern (*Nederlandse Islamitische Federatie*, NIF) and northern branches (*Milli Görüş Nederland*). Unlike the leadership of MG Northern Netherlands (MGN) who often represent themselves in the media as democratic Muslims integrated in society, the NIF is more cautious and passive in terms of media appearance.

As hinted by Avcı, at least at the leadership level, the regional separation of the MG reflects the ideological bifurcation of the MG movement in Turkey (206, 209). The leaders of the MGN do their best to manage the image of their organization as a promoter of multiculturalism and integration, in a manner similar to the leaders of the JDP in Turkey who have distanced themselves from the earlier Islamist discourse of the MG parties and have stressed their commitment to democracy. The president of the NIF, Mehmet Yaramışlı, on the other hand, clearly expresses his organization's continuing commitment to the founding ideology of Erbakan. In his view, the liberal orientation of the JDP and its cooperation with the global political and economic order occur at a cost: the loss of the identity of MG.¹¹

Nevertheless it can be too quick to conclude that the North-South division within the MGN reflects the split of the MG in Turkey between Erbakan and Erdoğan (JDP). The current leaders of the MGN, like Canan Uyar, the president of the Women's Federation of the MG North Netherlands (*Stichting Vrouwenfederatie Milli Görüş*

¹¹ Personal communication on 13 June 2008 at the İskender Paşa Mosque in Rotterdam.

Noord Nederland), are clearly different from the earlier generation in terms of their internalization of the democratic culture and their focus on the Dutch politics rather than merely Turkish one. However, in the words of Uyar, they are still “Erbakancıs” (supporters of Erbakan) in the sense that they respect and are proud of the founding fathers of their organization.¹²

Besides the members of the MG North Netherlands, currently the most active Turkish-Muslim group in the Netherlands is “Fethullahçılar,” named after their leader Fethullah Gülen. The followers of Gülen are organized not around mosques but around reading circles focusing on Said Nursi’s commentaries of the Koran or on the more accessible speeches of Gülen. As Yavuz states, the *dershanes*, places where these reading groups meet serve several purposes such as disseminating information, finding jobs, and forming diverse social networks etc. As elsewhere, Gülen’s followers in the Netherlands are active especially in the field of education and media. Via their association, Stichting Witte Tulp (founded in 1997), which has branches in several cities they organize extra-curricular support for immigrant students in order to help them increase their performance in their schools. The Cosmicus Institute and its affiliated college in Rotterdam, another successful initiative of the Gülen movement, attracts third generation Turks from several backgrounds, even from the MG community which usually attend Islamic schools.¹³ The circulation of the weekly Turkish newspaper Zaman Hollanda

¹² Personal communication on 12 June 2008 in Amsterdam.

¹³ In the Netherlands, there are 37 Islamic primary schools and one secondary school in Rotterdam, which are recognized and financed by the state. Islamic primary schools entitled to full government funding and aiming at “improve the achievement levels of the pupils and to transmit Islamic identity.” The courses offered follow a national curriculum, while a few hours per week are allotted to week religious lessons and ceremonies. A recent research comparing the pupils at Islamic schools and with the schools with a similar pupil population could hardly find any differences between the two (Driessen and Valkenberg 23; Shadid, W and Van Koningsveld).

reaches 10.000, while its monthly Dutch version, *Zaman Nederland*, which addresses mainly the 2nd and 3rd generations of Turks has a circulation number of up to 50.000.¹⁴ Alaaddin Erdal, the director of the Stichting Time Media Group (founded in 2005 in Rotterdam) which publishes these newspapers, claims that the ideological borders between the communities have been erased and that although communities continue to exist on the surface, in the last years, dialogue replaced ideological clashes and individual rivalries. He gives the example of his own newspaper which is no longer a publication of a restricted community but that of a larger community of Turks.¹⁵

The members of Turkish-Muslim organizations like Milli Görüş, the Gülen group and Süleymançıs take part in the democratic civil society and even compete with each other, trying to increase their share in the pool of official subsidies offered for promoting integration and multiculturalism. This competition results in civil activism beyond mosque organizations and increases participation of Turkish immigrants in public life. This shift from the mosque-centered Islam to an Islam dispersed in the larger public sphere is an important development in the Netherlands. The civil activism of Turkish-Muslims leads also to an increased consciousness about their need for an educated elite who can represent them in the public sphere. Hence many Islamic associations offer not only traditional Koran courses anymore, but also organize university students for helping younger students increase their success in the school.

¹⁴ The *Zaman* in Turkey has been in the last years the newspaper with the highest daily circulation (-+ 800.000).

¹⁵ Personal communication on 11 June 2007, at the building of Time Media Group in Rotterdam.

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*

Official Islam in the Netherlands

The state-Islam of the PRA entered the scene only in the late 1970s, after Süleymançı, MG, and Nurcu communities had already been active in the Netherlands. Seventeen mosque organizations founded the TICF (Turkish Islamic Cultural Federation, Stichting Turks-Islamitische Culturele Federatie) in 1979 with the aim of responding to the demands of the Turkish community for religious services by sustaining contacts with the PRA in Turkey (Van Bommel 135; Avcı 207). Today, the TICF is the largest Turkish organization in the Netherlands with its 143 mosques (83 in the Rotterdam region, 60 in the Deventer)¹⁶ which work under the umbrella organization of the ISN (Islamic Foundation Netherlands, Islamitische Stichting Nederland, Hollanda Diyanet Vakfı). The ISN was established in 1982 to deal with the management of the mosques. These mosques are referred to as “Diyanet” mosques as these are all administered by the PRA (Diyanet) in Turkey, via the ISN. According to the statute of the ISN, the chairman of the association has to be the religious attaché who is appointed by the PRA and based at the Turkish Embassy in the Hague. The ISN fulfills the same function as the PRA and its civil organ, Turkish Diyanet Foundation (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı) in Turkey: It is active in building, maintaining and operating mosques and it employs imams, besides several activities such as organization of religious events such as pilgrimage to Mecca, burial funds or religious education) and several socio-cultural activities (Avcı 208). The Diyanet mosques in the Netherlands as in Turkey and other European countries aim at “promoting and consolidating national solidarity and unity,” preventing the mobilization of Turkish citizens

¹⁶ The list of the mosques can be seen at the web page of the ISN: <http://www.diyamet.nl>.

along the religious ideologies opposing the secular state, and propagating a quietist Islam loyal to the Turkish state (Gözaydın 223; Landman 222-23).

The PRA's activity in the Netherlands is often framed as the Turkish state's extension of the control of Islamic practice even beyond the national borders (Waardenburg 23). Not surprisingly, the leadership of the ISN, frames the abroad services of the PRA as beneficial for the peace and democracy in Europe as the PRA aims to keep immigrants away from Islamic radicalism. The chairman of the ISN, Fevzi Hamurcu, defines the Diyanet as the only Islamic institution in the Netherlands which adopted secularism.¹⁷ He argues that the backing of the Turkish state gives immigrants a feeling of confidence, as the Diyanet imams are financed by the state and not any other private initiative. Hasan Güney, the chair of the Mimar Sinan Mosque Association in Leiden and one of the founding members of the ISN in the early 1980s affirms this view. Güney also adds that the state-financed imams contributed to the public order and security as these could be neutral arbiters solving intra-community quarrels and restricting (if not bringing an end to) common activities such as gambling and the consumption of alcohol.¹⁸ Similarly, Arif Baran, board member of another Diyanet mosque (Ahi Evran Mosque in The Hague), thinks that the ISN is the only institution which can address the people's needs.¹⁹ These local representatives of the ISN describe it as the only trustworthy and neutral roof organization which provides the mosques which they built with their own civil initiative with religious services and qualified imams.

¹⁷ Personal communication on 12 June 2008 at the main office of the ISN in The Hague.

¹⁸ Personal communication on 8 June 2008, Leiden.

¹⁹ Personal communication on 7 June 2008, in The Hague.

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*

The Diyanet mosques have not been perceived by the Dutch authorities as positively as these representatives of the ISN. The fact that imams appointed by the PRA in Turkey for 3 to 4 years have no connection with the Dutch society leads to the perception of these imams as obstacles to integration. To respond to this concern of the Dutch authorities, the ISN began to offer a 3-months long intensive language and adaptation course (in cooperation with Albeda College in Rotterdam) in 2006 in order to prepare the new imams for the new problems they can experience.²⁰ These courses educate the imams on the social and political situation in the country and also teach them the politically and culturally correct ways of doing things in the Netherlands. The basic language they learn during this course facilitates their daily conduct though it is not sufficient for preaching.

As observed by van Bruinessen, in the Netherlands, because of the “tradition of moral leadership by church ministers, there has been a tendency to perceive imams as Muslim ministers and to attribute to them pastoral functions that they never had in the countries of origin. They were often considered to be the most appropriate and representative spokespersons for their communities (or even for all Turks, all Moroccans, etc.), and became favorite targets for programs aiming at the integration of Muslims” (Van Bruinessen). The experience of an imam employed in a Diyanet mosque in Amsterdam, illustrated below, proves how limited this perception of the imams is.

²⁰ As a precaution for preventing the imams and other spiritual leaders recruited in Islamic countries from being barrier to integration, Dutch authorities require (since 2002) all imams and other religious leaders to complete a year-long language and integration course on basic understanding of Dutch social norms and values before they are allowed to practice in the Netherlands (Euro-Islam 2007-2008, 6; Dassetto 144).

An Imam in Amsterdam

As explained by Ahmet, the pseudonym that I give him to preserve his anonymity, the mosque in the Dutch context is only indirectly within the bureaucracy of the Turkish PRA.²¹ The real authority at a mosque in the Netherlands is not the imam but the mosque committee consisting of nine - usually first generation- men. The imam leads the worship besides giving Koranic text-reading and religious knowledge courses to children and working as a spiritual advisor if necessary. His role often is that of psychological advisor especially on Fridays when many more people gather in the mosque. While an imam is a state employee, the board of the mosque association consists of civil volunteers who take care of the building and organize other religious services offered by the ISN. The imam who officially works under his superior, the religious attaché in the Hague, is in practice working together with this board trying to establish good conducts with its members and the mosque community.

As a state official, Ahmet has limited liberty compared to imams in other community mosques who can talk about politics and often take a critical position vis-à-vis the Turkish state. Besides, his critical messages about Dutch politics can lead to a diplomatic scandal as he is directly under the supervision of the attaché seated at the Turkish Embassy. This neutral position and lack of “political mission” decreases the attractiveness of the Diyanet mosques for many immigrants. However, this situation also has its advantages. In other community mosques, imams are free to express their political views as long as they remain within the ideological framework of their community. However, the imam’s position is even more at stake as he is totally dependent on the community as his financial source. Diyanet

²¹ Personal communication on 6 and 15 June 2008, Amsterdam.

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*

imams, like Ahmet however, on the other hand, are financially independent from the community. Besides, their independent and relatively neutral position vis-à-vis the community gives confidence to those immigrants who see the mosque only as a worshipping place. An imam from among the community would never be respected, says Ahmet, as he would always have opponents to his leadership.

Ahmet's experience as an imam in Amsterdam shows that an imam's role is limited by the power structure in which he operates. However, the removal of Turkish, along with other native languages as the second language course from the curriculum of primary schools in the Netherlands seems to have increased the importance of the imam in the eyes of the immigrants. Imams began to be seen even more important as they talk to children in Turkish during the Koran courses. This is true for all Turkish communities who have a concern on the issue of language. This concern is expressed by Yaramış, the director of the Milli Görüş Southern Netherlands: "Giving up our language means giving up our selves, our very existence."²² For Turkish-Muslims, Islam is an identity which keeps them different from the dominant culture; however, it is not a sufficient marker of identity vis-à-vis other Muslim minorities. As also observed by Sunier in the early 1990s, Islam functions in the Dutch setting also as a source of ethnic consciousness and reassertion (Sunier, *Islam and Ethnicity*, 161). Again in the words of Yaramış, it is "the language which carries the Islamic culture" that Turkish-Muslims try to preserve and transfer to their children. Hence, an imam of Moroccan or Dutch origin cannot satisfy their needs.

²² Personal communication on 13 June 2008 at the İskender Paşa Mosque in Rotterdam.

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*

The main source which is used by Ahmet for preparing his sermons and preparing his advices is the official catechism prepared by the PRA. However, as he is not isolated from the world surrounding him, he reads also several works which can enrich the content of his sermons. He is especially benefiting from the Koranic commentaries of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, the spiritual leader of the Nurcu movement, and the scientific explanations and stories offered in the works of Harun Yahya.²³ He says that because he does not mention the names of these authors, only a very limited number of literate audience can notice the sources of his stories. It is maybe here that the border between the state Islam and the parallel Islam gets blurred. As long as the circulation of Islamic sources which constitute the basis of the parallel Islam are accessible to all, such a dichotomy is only on the surface.

Conclusion

A recent book on Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands and the turkey-EU relations, coauthored by Veyis Güngör, the current chairman of the Dutch branch of the UETD (Union of European Turkish Democrats),²⁴ is heralding the rise of “Euro-Turks” who are

²³ The penname of Adnan Oktar (Ankara, 1956), who is known for his advocacy of creationism. In the early 1980s, he gathered around himself young students from prominent families of Istanbul which had a high economic status. In 1990, he founded the Scientific Research Foundation (SRF, or, in Turkish, Bilim Araştırma Vakfı, or BAV) which publishes Oktar’s books (the most famous of which is *The Evolution Deceit*, London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1999) and brochures and distributes them throughout Turkey, Europe and the United States.

²⁴ UETD, which has its branches in nine centers in Europe, states its mission as “to assure the integration of the Turks of Europe into European society while preserving their own identity.” http://www.uetd-brussels.eu/index.php?act=show&code=page&id=72&id_page=15&resume=0. It is also lobbying support for the democratic struggle of the JDP vis-à-vis a possible military-backed judicial coup in Turkey. See the joint proclamation of Turkish NGOs and local politicians in support of the JDP which is also signed by the UETD on 19

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*

not blue-collar workers like their fathers but white-collar workers with better status and income, seeing their future in the Netherlands rather than in Turkey (27). We can see the young leaders of the Turkish-Islamic organizations in the Netherlands, such as Süleymançıs, Milli Görüş and the Gülen group, as such Euro-Turks who are willing to be equal partners in the public life in the Netherlands without losing their identity. It is important to note that the latter is a Turkish-Muslim identity which is being constructed in the specific context of the Netherlands. These Euro-Turks construct their Turkish-Muslim identity at different levels in relation to three different groups: the non-Muslim majority; Muslims of different ethnic origins such as Moroccans; and other Turkish-Muslim communities which continue to reflect the old political and ideological cleavages in Turkey. This web of relationships allow them to adopt an Islamic perspective which appreciates the democratic values, recognize the plurality of Islam both in Turkey and the Netherlands, and resist attempts to portray Muslims as a homogenous whole.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALGAR, Hamid. 'A Brief History of the Naqshbandi Order.' In: Marc Gaborieau et al., Ed. *Naqshbandis, Historical Developments and Present Situation of a Muslim Mystical Order*. Istanbul: ISIS, 1990: 3-44.
- AVCI, Gamze. 'Religion, Transnationalism and Turks in Europe.' *Turkish Studies* 6 (2005), p. 201-13.
- CANATAN, Kadir. *Türkse islam: Perspektieven op organisatievorming en leiderschap in Nederland*. Ph.D. Thesis, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 2001.
- CHOUDHURY, Tufyal et al. *Perceptions of Discrimination and Islamophobia Voices from members of Muslim communities*

Mart 2008, in Den Haag: "Hollanda Türkleri: Demokrasimize sahip çıkmalıyız," available online at www.uetd.nl.

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*

- in the European Union*, European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, EUMC 2006.
- CIZRE, Ümit, and Menderes Çınar. 'Turkey 2002: Kemalism, Islamism, and Politics in the Light of the February 28 Process.' *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102 (2-3) 2003: 309-32.
- ÇAKIR, Ruşen. *Ayet ve Slogan: Türkiye'de İslami Oluşumlar*. 6th ed. Istanbul: Metis, 1993.
- DASSETTO, Felice, Silvio Ferrari, and Brigitte Marechal. *Islam in the European Union: What's at stake in the future?* Brussels: European Parliament, 2007. Available online at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/expert/eStudies.do?language=EN>
- DRIESSEN, Geert and Valkenberg, Pim. 'Islamic Schools in the Netherlands: Compromising between Identity and Quality?' *British Journal of Religious Education* 23 (1) 2000: 15-26.
- EURO-ISLAM INFO. *Country Profiles. Netherlands. 2007-2008*. Available online at <http://www.euro-islam.info>.
- EXTER, Jak den. *Diyanet. Een Reis door de keuken van de officiële islam*. Beverwijk: Peregrinus, 1990.
- FORUM, Factbook: The Position of Muslims in the Netherlands: Facts and Figures, 2008.
- GÖZAYDIN, İstar B. 'Diyanet and Politics.' *Muslim World* 98 (2/3) 2008: 216-27.
- GÜNGÖR, Veyis, and Talip Küçükcan. *Euro-Turks and Turkey-EU Relations: The Dutch Case*. Amsterdam: Türkevi Research Centre, 2006.
- LANDMAN, Nico. 'Sustaining Turkish-Islamic loyalties: The Diyanet in Western Europe.' In: Suha Taji-Farouki and Hugh Poulton, Ed. *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State*. London: Hurst, 1997: 214-31.
- LANDMAN, Nico, and Wendy Wessels. 'The Visibility of Mosques in Dutch Towns.' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31 (6) 2005: 1125-40.
- MARDİN, Şerif. *Din ve İdeoloji*. 5th ed. İstanbul: İletişim, 1992.
- MERT, Nuray. 'The Political History of Centre Right Parties: Discourses on Islam, the Nation and the People.' In Stefanos Yerasimos et al., Ed. *Civil Society in the Grip of Nationalism: Studies on Political Culture in Contemporary Turkey*. İstanbul: Orient-Institut & Institut Français d'Etudes Anatoliennes, 2000: 49-97.
- PETERS, Rudolph. "A Dangerous Book." Dutch Public Intellectuals and the Koran." EUI Working Papers, RSCAS No. 39, 2006.
- RATH, Jan, et al. *Western Europe and its Islam*. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*

-
- RATH, Jan, Thijl Sunier, and Astrid Meyer. 'Islam in the Netherlands: The Establishment of Islamic Institutions in a De-Pillarized Society.' *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie / Journal of Economic and Social Geography* 88 (1997): 389-95.
- SHADID, W. and Van Koningsveld, P. 'Islamic Primary Schools.' In: W. Shadid and P. van Koningsveld, Ed. *Islam in Dutch Society: Current Developments and Future Prospects*. Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992: 107-22.
- SUNIER, Thijl and Mira van Kuijeren. 'Islam in the Netherlands.' In: Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Ed. *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002: p. 144-57.
- SUNIER, Thijl. 'Islam and Ethnicity among Turks: The Changing Role of Islam and Muslim Organizations.' In: W.A.R. Shadid and P.S. van Koningsveld, Ed. *Islam in Dutch Society: Current Developments and Future Prospects*. Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992: 143-62.
- SUNIER, Thijl. 'Islam and Interest Struggle: Religious Collective Action among Turkish Muslims the Netherlands.' In: Steven Vertovec and Alisdair Rogers, Ed. *Muslim European Youth: Reproducing ethnicity, religion, culture*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998: 39-57.
- TOPRAK, Binnaz. *Islam and Political Development in Turkey*. Leiden: Brill, 1981.
- TURAM, Berna. 'A bargain between the secular state and Turkish Islam: politics of ethnicity in Central Asia.' *Nations and Nationalism* 10 (3) 2004: 333-74.
- VAN BOMMEL, A. 'The History of Muslim Umbrella Organizations.' In: W.A.R. Shadid and P.S. van Koningsveld, Ed. *Islam in Dutch Society: Current Developments and Future Prospects*. Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992: 127-43.
- VAN BRUINEN, Martin, "Making and unmaking Muslim religious authority in Western Europe," paper presented at Fourth Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, *The Production of Islamic Knowledge in Western Europe*, Florence, 19 - 23 March 2003. available online at <http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinen/personal/publications/index-text.html>
- VERMEULEN, Floris Freek, "The Immigrant Organising Process. The emergence and persistence of Turkish immigrant organisations in Amsterdam and Berlin and Surinamese organisations in Amsterdam, 1960-2000." Ph.D. Thesis, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2005.
-

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*

-
- WAARDENBURG, Jacques. 'The Institutionalization of Islam in the Netherlands, 1961-1986.' In: Tomas Gerholm and Yngve Georg Lithman, Ed. *The New Islamic presence in Western Europe*. London: Mansell, 1988: 8-31.
- YAVUZ, M. Hakan. *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- ZARCONE, Thierry. *La Turquie Moderne et l'Islam*. Paris: Editions Flammarion, 2004.

Turkish Studies

*International Periodical For the Languages, Literature
and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 3/7 Fall 2008*