Rethinking the dâr al-harb: Social Change and Changing Perceptions of the West in Turkish Islam

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Since the end of the Cold War, many observers have directed their attention to what they perceive as the escalation of an older conflict between the West and Islam. The orientalist Bernard Lewis, for instance, builds much of his analysis on the classic Islamic contrast between dâr al-Islam and dâr al-harb (‘house of Islam’ and ‘house of war’), which, in his reading, demonstrates the inherent hostility of Islam toward non-Muslims. Conflict, however, is only one aspect of the complex relationship of Islam to ‘Western’ society, and for the great majority of Muslims dâr al-Islam and dâr al-harb are no longer relevant categories for defining their relationship to non-Muslim societies. Nevertheless, the problematic addressed by the conceptual opposition of dâr al-Islam/dâr al-harb points to an issue that has remained important to religious Muslims and has been answered in different ways at different times: in what kind of a society can one live a Muslim life? In Germany, many religious Muslims have recently undergone a significant shift toward a more ‘integrational’ stance. To understand this shift I examine the transnational experience of Turkish Muslims in Germany, particularly that of a ‘second generation’ of Turkish migrants, alongside recent developments in Turkey itself, where there has been an accelerated integration of Islam into modern Turkish society. In so doing, I sketch a historical process in which, for many religious Muslims in the Turkish Islamic tradition, liberal society has come to appear as a social context conducive to the practice of Islam.

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Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, many European and American observers have directed their attention with new urgency to what they perceive as the escalation of a much
older conflict between the West and Islam. One particularly popular commentator on Islam and Muslim history who argues in this way is Princeton-based orientalist Bernard Lewis, who builds much of his analysis on the classic Islamic conceptual pair \( \text{dār al-Islam} \) and \( \text{dār al-harb} \) (literally: ‘house of Islam’ and ‘house of war’). In his reading, these concepts demonstrate the inherent hostility of Islam toward non-Muslims, and particularly toward the West (most recently Lewis 2003). More thoughtful commentators often point out that not all Muslims are hostile toward the West, and that the concepts of \( \text{dār al-Islam} \) and \( \text{dār al-harb} \) are, for the great majority of religious Muslims, no longer relevant in defining their relationship with non-Muslim societies. While these rejoinders indeed undermine the representation of Islam as locked in necessary conflict with Western society, what tends to remain unclear in these liberal critiques of orientalist (mis)representations of Islam is the question of why some Muslims take a conciliatory stance toward liberal society while others are sceptical or even hostile to it. In other words, the far from trivial question why religious Muslims in certain historical and social circumstances see liberal society as compatible with the Muslim project remains unanswered, and is deflected by the assertion that Islam is not necessarily hostile to Western society. Lewis’s use of the \( \text{dār al-Islam}/\text{dār al-harb} \) as a transhistorical principle defining the worldviews of Muslims is undoubtedly flawed, but he nevertheless points to an issue that has remained important to religious Muslims and has been answered in different ways at different times: in what kind of a society can one live a Muslim life?

I take as my vantage point the observation that the relationship to German society of many religious Muslims in Germany has recently undergone a significant shift toward a more ‘integrational’ stance; I ask how this shift can be explained. In order to understand this recent shift, I examine the transnational experience of Turkish Muslims in Germany and present recent developments in Turkey, particularly the accelerated integration of mainstream Turkish Islam into modern Turkish society over the past two decades, in conjuncture with the experience of the ‘second generation’ of Turkish migrants in Germany. I wish to stress, however, that the aim of this paper is not to announce a successful model of integration of a Muslim community into a Western European society, which would clearly be premature. Nor is it my aim to celebrate the ‘compatibility’ of the Turkish Islamic tradition with liberal society. Rather, I want to sketch a historical process in which, for many religious Muslims in the Turkish Islamic tradition, liberal society has come to appear as a social context conducive to the practice of Islam.

When I speak of the Turkish Muslim diaspora in Germany, I refer to the cluster of religious Muslim communities, or \( \text{cemaats} \), that have emerged as a result of Turkish migration to Germany (mostly labour migration and subsequent family reunion) since the mid-1960s, and which are rooted in the tradition of Turkish Islam. In 2000, approximately 2.4 million Muslims of Turkish descent were living in Germany. About 2 million of these were Turkish citizens, and 470,000 had acquired German citizenship (Şen and Aydin 2002: 15). About 80 per cent were (at least nominally) Sunni Muslims and the remaining 20 per cent predominantly Alevi. The number of \text{practising} Muslims is impossible to ascertain with any accuracy, both because of a lack of census
This Turkish Muslim diaspora is not rigidly separated from Muslim communities in Turkey. In fact, the relationship between the diaspora and Turkish society has always been close, with people, goods, and, not least, discourses flowing back and forth. Nor is this Turkish diaspora entirely separated from Muslims of other ethnic and religious backgrounds in Germany (in fact there are numerous attempts to establish more inclusive Muslim communities and organisations, especially among younger Muslims) or from the wider German society. Ties to Turkey have become somewhat looser over time and have lost some of their significance, on the one hand to the more transnational structure of Turkish Islam (that is, the criss-crossing of connections between Turkish Muslims all over the world), and on the other hand to a more intensive involvement in German society. Even so, ethnic/national origin remains an important dividing line for the Muslim diaspora in Germany.

Werner Schiffauer (2000: 18) has recently suggested dividing the history of Turkish Islam in Germany into two phases. The first phase, from the early 1970s to the early 1980s, was characterised by a grass-roots movement in which Turkish Muslims who had come to work in Germany as migrant workers formed local associations for providing prayer rooms, organising Islamic instruction for themselves and their children, and inviting imams from Turkey. While these associations were often initially formed without regard to their members’ political or sectarian affiliation, in many of these emerging communities bitter disputes subsequently erupted over the political/religious affiliation of the groups and their mosques. These struggles largely crystallised in the question as to which of the big Turkish cemaats, now branching out into the German diaspora, would the local mosque associations attach themselves. Schiffauer suggests that this era of contest was largely over by the mid-1980s, by which time each of the Turkish organisations had consolidated its hold on certain mosque associations. In the second phase of Turkish Islam in Germany, new mosque associations were no longer formed by local Muslims with heterogeneous affiliations, but by those larger organisations which had established themselves in Germany and shaped the institutional matrix of the Turkish diaspora. This process, in effect, made Turkish Islam in Germany an extension of the discursive and institutional structure of Islam in Turkey.

Over the past few years, however, new developments have emerged that make it plausible to suggest that since the late 1990s we can talk of a third phase of Turkish Islam in Germany. In this new phase, at least two developments have converged. The first of these developments is the fragile and by no means linear but nevertheless significant process of social and legal integration of Turkish Muslims into German society. Most significant is the increasing number of Muslims who have become German citizens, and there have been a number of government decisions and court rulings which begin to acknowledge the presence of Muslims as a relevant religious community in Germany. The second, equally significant, development is a process in which the Islamic community in Turkey has significantly re-considered its relationship to secular society and to Europe in the past decade. In short, this process has led, among religious Turkish Muslims, to the widespread embracing of a liberal attitude...
with regard to society and the state, to a significantly more favourable view of Europe, and to a renewed emphasis on the transnational character of Islam. Together, these two converging trends are significantly re-shaping the relationship between Muslims of Turkish descent and German society.

The Integration of Religious Turkish Muslims into the Public Sphere in Turkey and the Transnationalisation of Turkish Islam

I want to begin with the second aspect of this ‘third phase’ of Turkish Islam in Germany, namely, some of the recent changes within Turkish society and, closely related, some major conceptual changes within the Turkish Islamic tradition. These concern the relationship of Islam to the West, and the ‘secular’ constitution of society in the Turkish Republic.

Developments in Turkish society have affected the Turkish diaspora in Germany in two related ways. First, the rapid transformation of Turkish society over the past decades has substantially changed the experiences and thus the subjectivities of Turkish Muslims. This process has led to an increasingly urgent re-consideration of the place of Islam in modern society, making critical and self-reflective approaches to the Islamic tradition the norm rather than the exception. This development has also shaped those Turkish Muslims who migrated to Germany in recent years. Secondly, and equally important, is the fact that most of the religious authorities widely recognised by Turkish Muslims in Germany are still located in Turkey. They are thus shaped by, and have to be understood from within, a Turkish context. Therefore, although the situation is changing and, as we shall see, the German experience makes itself more strongly felt in the way Muslims approach Islam in Germany, Turkish Islamic discourse greatly affects the diaspora community. This is especially clear when the ways in which the relationship between Islam and ‘the West’ is conceptualised are at stake. How importantly this Turkish development inserts itself into the German context becomes clear if we look more closely at the case of one recent migrant to Germany.

Yasemin is a young woman of 25 years, born in Herne, Germany (in the Ruhrgebiet) where her father worked as a miner after migrating to Germany in the late 1960s. In 1983, however, the family decided to return to Turkey. From the age of six, Yasemin grew up in the area of Zonguldak (in the Turkish Black Sea region) which her parents had left in the 1960s, and where the modest wealth resulting from the years in Germany now allowed them to buy some land and to build a spacious house. After completing primary school, Yasemin entered a (public) Imam Hatip school in the vicinity, which combined secular secondary education with a religious curriculum. The Imam Hatip schools attracted a great number of children from religiously-minded families before they were closed down in the late 1990s. It should be noted, however, that ‘religiously-minded’ does not necessarily imply a strict observance of Islamic practice. In fact, Yasemin’s parents were not then (and are still not) ‘strict’ Muslim practitioners in the sense that their daughter is now; nevertheless, they considered it important to educate their children in a religious spirit. Like her older brothers and
many of her peers, Yasemin rediscovered a strict practice of Islam during her adolescence. She is part of a generation of women which, in the last two decades, has transformed the Turkish Islamist movement by adding a distinctively female character to the public face of Turkish Islam (Aktaş 1992; Çakır 2000). During her years at the Imam Hatip school (and with the encouragement of one of her cousins), Yasemin became acquainted with the İskenderpaşa branch of the Naqşbandi brotherhood and its Sheik, Prof. Esad Coş. The Naqşibandis are generally seen in secular Turkish circles as a particularly reactionary branch of Islam (the term often used is irtica), due to their strong commitment to a life guided by the sharia. While the Naqşibandis have traditionally encouraged the involvement of religious Muslims in public affairs, they combine this worldly engagement with an emphasis on nefs terbiyesi, the ‘education of the self’, with the ultimate aim of purging the self from worldly desires that stand in the way of a profound relationship with God. Since returning to Germany in 1998 to marry her husband Ahmet, Yasemin continues to pursue her affiliation with the cemaat.

Her long absence from Germany makes Yasemin’s position in Berlin somewhat precarious. ‘Yes, I would like to have German friends’, Yasemin said in response to my asking whether she had German friends or acquaintances in Berlin. When I insisted, she continued with a desperate smile,

It’s so hard to make German friends. There are many Germans in my school [where she trains as a medical assistant], and I sometimes talk with them between classes, but then they go home and I go home. And also, you know, my German is not very good. No, I don’t have any German friends here.

In contrast to her husband who, although of Turkish descent, grew up in Berlin and now works in a lower-tier administrative job for the municipal government, Yasemin returned to Germany as a stranger. Superficially, it might appear as if not much has changed since her mother came to Germany a generation ago. However, if we look more closely, it becomes clear how much has, in fact, changed, not only for Yasemin, but for many of her generation who have chosen to live in Germany. Like many of her peers in Turkey, and unlike most of her mother’s generation, Yasemin has sought both a religious and a secular education, and she aims to work in a trained job or to pursue further education. The collective emergence of religious Muslim women as a visible and vocal public presence in Turkey, and at the same time, their ongoing commitment to orthodox Islam, has been facilitated by the acquisition of Muslim learning. Closely related to this is the partial re-interpretation of Muslim rules of female ‘modesty’. In this respect, for Yasemin as well as for many other religious Muslims, wearing the dindar (religious) headscarf, together with a wide overcoat, which is now widely seen as satisfying the religious requirement of ‘modesty’, serves the crucial function of allowing them to see themselves as Muslim actors in a secular public arena, including the public space of religious institutions and organisations (Göle 1996; Olson 1985; White 1999).

‘Pious dress’ not only fulfils the requirement of mainstream interpretations of the Islamic tradition in Turkey. The headscarf is also a powerful form of body technique in
the sense outlined by Marcel Mauss (1992). It marks Yasemin’s public presence in a pluralist society, both for herself and for others, as that of a practising Muslim, setting her apart from the more latitudinary Muslims as well as non-Muslims. In this respect, however, life in Berlin is not entirely different from that in many Turkish urban spaces. There, ‘pious dress’ also marks women (and to a lesser extent men) as dindar Muslims as they move amongst a multicultural, secular, and often anti-religious public. It should be noted that Yasemin, like my interlocutors in Turkey, exercises some flexibility with respect to these body techniques. Although Yasemin generally wears her scarf in public, even though she is anxious that Germans may have hostile feelings towards her because of that, she has told me of an occasion where she decided not to wear the scarf. This was during a weekend excursion with the occupational training class she had just joined. Although the participants were all women, the compound in which the workshop was held was not exclusively occupied by women, and thus she would normally have worn her scarf. She nevertheless decided not to wear it (but a head-band instead) so as ‘not to frighten’ her co-students.

Yasemin’s action could be interpreted as bowing to social pressure from the rest of her non-Muslim classmates and, to some extent, it may in fact be just that. From a slightly different perspective, however, one could also see this as a gesture more of humility than of defeat. An acquaintance of mine in Istanbul, a very principled Muslim practitioner, once told me about an incident that had troubled him for a long time. When he first went to Ankara to study he paid a visit to a female relative of his whom he had not seen since childhood. He describes himself as having been a fairly radical young man at that time. Thus, when the woman opened the door and stretched out her hand in welcome, he rejected the hand she gave him to shake, on the grounds that, according to a conservative interpretation of Islamic rules, a man must not touch a woman when she is not of the nearest kin. This incident had the consequence that his contact with that part of the family to which his relative belonged completely broke down, because he was seen as a ‘fundamentalist’ who behaved condescendingly toward women. In hindsight, my interlocutor told me, he was now convinced that he had acted wrongly on that occasion, both because he insulted the woman without reason by rejecting her greeting of welcome, and because his behaviour aggravated already strained family relations. He ended his story with the rhetorical question, asked, it should be noted, from a perfectly principled standpoint, ‘is it worse to transgress in this minor way or to strain relations with your family?’ The point is that Muslim practitioners, like this acquaintance or like Yasemin, can confidently ponder, and often answer, this and other such questions by using their fluency in the Islamic discursive tradition.

When Yasemin’s parents came to Germany they did not know what to expect: their journey was a wager, mostly on economic return, and underlying their decision to go to Germany was the commitment to return eventually to Turkey (Schiffauer 1991). When Yasemin moved to Berlin, in contrast, not only did she literally return to Germany, she arrived in a social setting in which an established, complex Turkish community already existed, as well as a well-developed public knowledge, in Turkey, of the living conditions for Turkish Muslims in Germany. Moreover, in contrast to her
parents, Yasemin came to Germany to stay, a fact highlighted by her marriage to a German citizen. She will probably become a German citizen herself sooner or later. And yet, it is difficult to imagine that Yasemin will ‘assimilate’ to German mainstream society, in the sense of giving up her close relationship with the Islamic tradition. Certainly she did not see such assimilation as part of her move to Germany. So, why did Yasemin leave Turkey and come to Germany? How does her commitment to Islam relate to this move? When I asked her why she had come to Germany, Yasemin told me that, in her view, life was simply better in Germany than in Turkey, and she insisted that she had liked Germany as a child. At first, this answer puzzled me, not only because she had previously told me that she could not remember much of her childhood in Herne, but also because she did not seem particularly happy with her present life in Germany. Moreover, her decision to build a life in Berlin seemed in tension with her commitment to a strict practice of Islam and her association with an Islamic brotherhood well known for its orthodoxy and conservatism.

I began better to understand Yasemin’s answer later, when I recalled a conversation I had had with her cousin in Istanbul. Hakan, who is an active member of the same Muslim brotherhood as Yasemin, once told me that many of his friends (a number of them also members of that cemaat) were considering emigration or had already left to live abroad. The problem Hakan saw in these migration plans was not the possible threat of conversion or relaxation of their religious commitment. Quite to the contrary, Hakan assured me; in Australia, North America, or Europe, where Hakan’s friends have settled, or plan to settle, they can practise Islam at least as freely as in Turkey, indeed, often more freely. As Hakan explained, the state in these countries guarantees religious freedom for everyone and, on top of that, religious practice outside Turkey may even have the advantage that it is easier to separate ‘customary practice’ (associated with an uneducated approach to Islam) from authentic Islamic traditions. If Hakan reproached his friends for leaving, then, it was for leaving behind the struggle of Muslims in Turkey rather than for leaving behind Islam. One particular problem that religious Muslims face in Turkey, in Hakan’s view, is that girls and women are banned from wearing the headscarf in Turkish schools and universities (and indeed in most public institutions). By dindar Muslims in Turkey, this is generally seen as a grave infringement of their religious freedom (a freedom that in this case consists of fulfilling Muslim religious duties). Thus, while he wants to stay in Turkey to make it a better place, Hakan contemplates the day when he might move to Europe or the US so that his daughter will be able to wear her headscarf to school. To underline his sincerity about his own possible migration, Hakan referred approvingly to his cousin Yasemin, who had at that point just moved to Berlin.

Today Hakan and Yasemin’s positive attitudes towards migration to the West mirror a widespread sentiment among religious Turkish Muslims; but it should be remembered that this position is historically quite specific. Not long ago, most religious Muslims in Turkey, certainly those affiliated with the Naqşbandiyya, saw the relations between the West and the Muslim community in much more problematic, often decidedly hostile, terms. More generally, when the older fetwa literature (the collections of verdicts of Muslim scholars on certain issues) commented on migration,
it emphasised that Muslims were only allowed to travel to non-Muslim countries if they had important interests to pursue in these places (Hagemann and Khoury 1997). Even today Prof. Hayreddin Karaman, one of the most respected scholars of Islamic law in Turkey, argues that permission to stay in non-Muslim countries is valid only for ‘a limited time’ (1999: 38).

How recently this shift has occurred that we see in Yasemin and Hakan’s position becomes apparent if one reads through Muslim publications from the 1980s and 1990s, for example the journals published by Hakan and Yasemin’s cemaat, the Iskenderpaşa Cemaat. The publication of these journals was guided by the leader of the cemaat, Prof. Esad Coş, who regularly took the opportunity to address his followers in a monthly column. In one of these columns, from the mid-1990s, he comments on the West’s relationship to the Muslim world in the journal Islam (October 1994: 4):

Christian armies committed endless atrocities during the many crusades against Muslims and Jews, and even Christians. Christianity was spread and sustained despite its corrupt beliefs, based on aggression, inquisition, terror, colonialism and imperialism just as in Yugoslavia, the Caucasus, Africa, and South Asia. … They try to desecrate Islam, Sufism, piety and purity and to erase them from the face of the earth. … What can we say: it is their nature, their character, their way of life, which make them behave this way. It is time for us [Muslims] to wake up and to abandon our naïveté. … These are murderous, merciless, bloodthirsty and barbaric enemies. They do not fear the judgement in the hereafter, nor do they heed the other nations. They lack civilisation, conscience, and mercy. They are strange and primitive creatures. … As you see, when a person is devoid of Islam, he loses his human properties and becomes a monster.

Yasemin’s move to Berlin and her endeavour to make herself at home in Germany are difficult to reconcile with this bleak portrait of the West. Other contributions to the journal address the issue in similarly hostile terms. The essay of the prominent Muslim intellectual Ersin Gürdoğan (Islam, September 1996: 12) concludes by insisting that ‘The enemies that compete with us cannot also be our civilisation’s helping friends. Therefore the reckoning between the believers and the unbelievers will continue until the day of judgement’.

In these texts, as well as in many other texts of the period, the relationship between religious Muslims and non-Muslims, between the Muslim world and the West, is constructed as the very axis of Muslim cosmology and appears central to Islam itself. Not even a decade ago, in other words, it seemed as if the Islamic cosmology (as it is reflected in these texts) would inherently place religious Muslims and non-Muslims in unavoidable conflict with each other. Again, reading these texts raises the question of why any religious Muslim who shares these positions would want to live in the West?

However, if we follow the journal Islam for a few years, and look at how this relationship is addressed at the end of the 1990s, we find that it has undergone a dramatic re-conceptualisation. To be sure, most contributors to the journal are still far from embracing what they see as Turkey’s too-cosy relationship with the West, and they continue to take a robust stance against their secularist opponents. But their arguments are now formulated quite differently from those made in the early 1990s.
For example, in November 1997 Sheik Cosş again uses his monthly column to write about the relationship between Muslims and the West (Islam, November 1997: 14). He opens by reminding his readers that ‘As Muslims we have to live Islam totally and apply the Sharia in every moment of our lives’, and then continues:

The freedom of belief and freedom of religion in any country, be it a secular or a Muslim country, must be complete. Pressure on religions and the religious is nothing but injustice, barbarism, and a grave sin.

To underline his point, Cosş then turns to a historical narrative which takes a remarkable turn:

Europe had a period of terrifying civil wars. ... Europeans massacred the Muslims in Spain and destroyed Andalusia. They even tortured and burned alive some of their own people who had developed different beliefs, and they forced many people to migrate to America. Those bitter experiences caused the development of secularism and freedom of belief and thought in western societies. We don’t need to live through these bitter experiences to gain these freedoms.

In another column of the same period Cosş (Islam, October 1997: 15) writes:

I am comparing Turkey to the United States and I feel sorry. Our so-called secularists and modernists ... have no understanding of the real secularism. Have they not seen Europe or America? ... Having seen and observed the West within, I can state that the ‘West’ is nothing like the way our pro-Westernists describe it. One section of the people observe their religious duties and is sincerely religious. Another section of the people are secularists, liberals or atheists; however, they all respect the religious people. ... If anybody were to suggest banning the religious schools or teaching of the scripture, the whole society, including the atheists, would strongly oppose and defend the rights of all individuals.

As these passages indicate, in the late 1990s the main thrust of Cosş’s polemic markedly changes. His argument is now levelled against the Turkish secularist establishment that denies Muslims their human right of religious freedom, and no longer against a generalised West. More dramatically, we can see that Cosş aligns himself with the ‘real West’, where he locates religious freedom as part of real secularism. He no longer foregrounds an eternal conflict between believers and unbelievers, but instead refers to a whole society of which both Muslims and non-Muslims are a part.5

This shift in Cosş’s view may partly have been influenced by his own experience of exile in Australia which, I have been told, was very positive.6 The broader background for understanding this dramatic shift, however, is to be found in the twofold collective experience of the religious Muslim community. On one hand is the experience of inclusion into modern Turkish and, more broadly speaking, Western society, and on the other, a severe crisis of this process of inclusion. As Şerif Mardin has pointed out, in the first decades of the Turkish Republic, and really up until the 1970s, Turkish society was characterised by being split into two distinct sociological tiers: the secularist tier, which was both ideologically and geographically central to the modernist project of the Republic, and the Islamic tier, which was peripheral to this project, and based mostly in the rural areas and provincial towns (Mardin 1991).
During the 1960s and 1970s, a gradual diffusion of this sharp dichotomy occurred, sociologically driven by a massive migration from the Anatolian countryside into the urban centres. The emergence of a new kind of Muslim organisation, which remains influential in Turkey today, also dates from this time.7

It was only the combination of Turgut Özal’s neo-liberal and pro-Muslim reforms in the 1980s, however, that laid the economic and political foundations for the more substantial inclusion of Turkey’s religious Muslim communities into the centre of modern Turkish society. Özal’s reforms, and his strong encouragement of religious Muslims to play an active role in modern Turkish society, meant that the religious Muslim community generated a very substantial economic base within a short period of time, and also led Muslims to occupy a wide range of new subject positions in society (Holland and Quinn 1987). Suddenly a large number of religious Muslims (increasingly including women) became very involved in the booming sectors of Turkey’s economy; religious Muslims more self-confidently became professionals, students and academics, and were elected for municipal government. Increasingly, employment opportunities arose in Muslim companies, and religious Muslims became recognised as a very important group of consumers.

This process of sociological integration, however, did not immediately bridge the deep ideological divide between religious Muslims and the secularist community. On the contrary, it aggravated the conflict, given that, for the first time, the religious community had substantially challenged the secularist camp at the very centre of modern Turkish society. This mounting crisis came to a head when the leader of the Islamist party, Necmettin Erbakan, became Prime Minister in 1996, as part of a coalition government with Tansu Ciller’s True Path Party. Shortly afterwards, the staunchly secularist Turkish military forced Erbakan’s resignation and started a process of intense repression of what it considered to be dangerous Muslim activity.

To understand why this crisis did not lead to a further reification of Muslim anti-Western sentiment in Turkey but, somewhat paradoxically, led to a radical revision of this apparently deeply grounded and cosmologically secured position, it is helpful to refer to the model of the public sphere as developed by Jürgen Habermas. In his study The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1989), Habermas shows that the liberal public sphere, as it developed as part of bourgeois society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was closely related to the emergence of a bourgeois public, characterised both by the status of its members as (male) property owners (on which they founded their claim for political and economic independence) and their status as citizens, which granted them political rights. The situation I am describing is, of course, in many ways radically different from the situation in Turkey. However, it is analogous in the sense that, while religious Muslims had religious, political and economic rights like any other citizen of the Turkish Republic, only in the 1980s did a situation emerge in which religious Muslims were becoming actively involved in Turkey’s liberalising economy in greater numbers as citizens and as religious Muslims, while at the same time being given the political freedom to become part of the Turkish public as religious Muslims.8 It seems to me that the process of becoming members of Turkish society, in the Habermasian sense of becoming economically and politically
independent citizens, eventually also affected the *cosmological imaginary* of religious Turkish Muslims.

This accommodation of the religious Muslim community into the Turkish public sphere was threatened by the 1997 crisis (the confrontation between Erbakan and the Turkish military), and most of my Muslim interlocutors, at least in retrospect, saw it as being threatened *both* by military intervention *and* by what they saw as the brash and confrontational attitude of Erbakan’s political Islam. To simplify, maybe too strongly: a majority of practising Turkish Muslims felt that, as members of a liberal, secular Turkish public, it was possible to live an active and dignified Muslim life, and that this possibility was *not* so much threatened by the West or, by extension, by the secular constitution of the Turkish Republic, as by the much more specific confrontation between the Turkish establishment and Erbakan’s political ambitions. The result of this development was a considerable disenchantment with Erbakan’s political Islam and, at the same time, considerable enchantment with what is now often seen as real secularism, a process which has left a strong imprint on recent political developments in Turkey. In 2000, the rank and file of Erbakan’s banned Refah (later Fazilet) party split into two parties, the reformist Ak party and the more conservative Saadet party, which represents Erbakan’s wing of the old party. In Turkey’s general elections of November 2002, the Ak party won a landslide victory, pushing out of parliament all parties that had dominated Turkish politics over the past decade (including the Saadet party). The dramatic shift in mainstream Islamist politics is highlighted by the fact that, when Erbakan had his short term as Turkey’s Prime Minister in 1996–97, he pointedly chose Iran and Libya as destinations for his first official visits, in order to demonstrate Turkey’s alliance with the Muslim world. The Ak party, in contrast, made joining the EU its first priority, and immediately after his party’s victory, its leader Tayyip Erdoğan began a tour of European capitals to win support for this move.

The process of the religious Muslim community’s integration into the Turkish public sphere has thus led to an interpretation of Islam that imagines the existence of Islam within the context of a liberal state and, in relation to this, a re-evaluation of the West as a possible context for a proper Muslim life rather than as the radical Other of Muslim society. As we have seen, however, there are many indications that what we can call, in this sense, the secularisation of Islam does *not* mean that the Islamic tradition has weakened in Turkey, nor, indeed, that it has ceased to be a collective project, only that this collective is no longer equivalent to the nation-state. In one sense the opposite is the case. In a dialectic that Weber noted as typical for modern society, for many practitioners the past two decades have meant a more intensive engagement with the Islamic tradition than was usual for earlier generations. The positioning of the religious Muslim community within a pluralist public sphere has meant that, for Muslim practitioners like Yasemin and Hakan and many of their generation, commitment to the Islamic tradition has become less a matter of inherited concepts and traditional authorities and more a moral and political project, which they may choose or reject from among other such projects.
Aspects of the Changing Social and Legal Position of Turkish Muslims in Germany

While developments in Turkish society constitute one important aspect of the changing relationship between Turkish immigrants and German society, more immediately important is, of course, the changing relationship between Muslims of Turkish descent in Germany on the one hand, and the German state and mainstream society on the other. To discuss the second aspect of this development of Turkish Islam in Germany, I will take a closer look at Yasemin’s husband Ahmet’s relationship to German society, and some of the parameters that define it.

Like Yasemin, Ahmet was born in Germany to parents who had come to Germany as migrant workers. In contrast to his wife, however, Ahmet stayed in Germany, and is thus more clearly part of the so-called second generation of Turkish immigrants in Germany. He attended primary and secondary school (Hauptschule) in Berlin, and subsequently entered the lower level of Berlin’s municipal bureaucracy. Ahmet, like Yasemin, is a religious Muslim. Unlike his wife, who is affiliated to a Sufi cemaat, Ahmet is engaged in Millî Görüş (National View), an organisation that has emerged as the ‘European arm’ of the Turkish Refah/Fazilet Party (Seufert 1999). Although Millî Görüş is known for its fiercely nationalist stance, Ahmet actually became a German citizen some years ago, and it is now the policy of the organisation to encourage its members to do so. Nevertheless, Ahmet told me that his circle of acquaintances is made up of members of the Turkish community like himself. As in Yasemin’s case, at first glance it seems that Ahmet’s position is similar to that of his or Yasemin’s parents. His distance from German mainstream society, however, is not that of a newcomer. Ahmet’s social distance from German mainstream society is not predicated on the lack of German language skills and foreignness to German society which characterised the experience of the previous generation. Like most of his peers, Ahmet speaks German fluently, in his case, in fact, with a distinctively Berlin accent, and he has graduated from the German education system, which enabled him to choose a respectable white-collar job. Unlike the first generation, this second generation has been socialised within the German institutional framework and, while the level of segregation of the Turkish community remains significant, this segregation is now also facilitated by the fact that within German society there has emerged a very substantial Turkish infrastructure of informal social networks, social institutions and services.

This segregation of the Turkish community from German mainstream society is particularly pronounced in the religious community, given that here social networks are often based on lines of religious affiliation, similar to the situation in Turkey. In Germany, however, this religiously defined difference coincides with and reinforces the ethnic divide between Turkish migrants and their descendants and mainstream German society. Turkish migrants have not been outside the structure of German society, but are connected through the labour market and consumption, by their role as tax payers as well as clients of the social welfare system, and by sharing many aspects of the social topography. Within this structural integration, social segregation has often been reproduced. While this framework has not prevented the persistence of
considerable segregation of the Turkish community, it has also produced a host of shared social experiences with mainstream German society, not altogether different from those shared experiences that connect Istanbul’s religious Muslims to their secular neighbours. The most significant difference from the experience of the first generation of migrants, both legally and symbolically, is that Ahmet can now claim the status of a German citizen. I had the impression, however, that Ahmet was not yet quite used to making this claim, as it were, and thus it was paralleled by the more conventional claim that the long labour service of his parents’ generation had given the Turkish community a moral right to live in Germany.

Given that his social networks are mostly within the Turkish community, Ahmet’s expression of community with his ethnic German countrymen is more implicitly than explicitly stated and only flashes up occasionally. One such occasion was during a conversation we had about the unification of West and East Germany after 1989, which dramatically changed the social topography of Ahmet’s hometown, Berlin. Ahmet, it turns out, is highly critical of former East Germans, and he instantly assumed a coalition between the two of us as fellow West Germans. Ahmet’s main misgiving is that he considers East Germans communists, and therefore atheists, in contrast to West Germans like myself, whom he sees as Christians and thus as co-religionists of a sort. Moreover, Ahmet maintains that the East Germans ruin ‘our’ (the West-German) economy. He also suggests that East Germans tend to be more racist, pointing to the higher rate of xenophobic violence in Eastern Germany (see White 1997). With understandable satisfaction, Ahmet told me that Skinheads normally do not dare to appear in that part of Berlin where the couple lives because of the strong Turkish presence there. But he is nevertheless worried about the many reports in the German (and Turkish) media about xenophobic violence in neighbouring Brandenburg.

It must not be forgotten that, historically, Turkish Muslims have not been encouraged into German society, and the threats embodied by the Brandenburg Skinheads represent only one aspect of this. Other forms of marginalisation are more intricately tied to the mainstream of German society (Stolcke 1995). One important indicator of the institutional marginalisation of Muslims in Germany is the continuing refusal of the German authorities to grant Muslim organisations legal status as Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts (bodies of public law). This legal status gives religious communities (limited de facto to various Christian traditions and Judaism) an important role in the complex framework of democratic representation that exists in Germany outside that of the parliament (Offe 2002). This exclusion has been justified by the argument that Islam is a religious tradition which is culturally alien (fremd) to Europe. Loschelder (1986), for example, argues that Islam, in contrast to Christianity, does not recognise the historical separation of the spheres of religion and politics. At the same time, he argues, Christianity still provides the basis for European ‘values and concepts’, which legitimises the state’s privileging of the Christian tradition over other traditions, while not infringing on the personal rights of members of other traditions. Moreover, it is argued, Islam does not possess the organisational structure through which it could be represented as a religion vis-à-vis the state. While
the context of this paper does not allow a closer examination of these highly problematic views, they indicate how deeply entrenched is suspicion toward the Islamic tradition in the mainstream legal interpretation of the Grundgesetz. There are signs, however, that the situation is changing. In recent years, some German jurists have developed a more open-minded view on the practice of Islamic law in the European context (Rohe 2004). More importantly, one can detect a trend in German legal practice in recent years, which seems to contradict or, at least, to moderate, the main thrust of the older view sketched above and recognises Islam as de facto part of the religious context in Germany. For example, in January 2002, the Verfassungsgericht (constitutional court) ruled that, with regard to animal slaughter, Muslims must be granted an exception from the norms of the animal protection law, parallel to that granted to the Jewish community, given that Muslim religious custom constitutes a higher good than the legal good of animal protection. 11 The significance of this court ruling is not only that it legalises a central Muslim religious obligation, but it also sets a legal precedent, recognising a collective right of the Muslim community. Equally significant is the process by which the ruling was achieved: it was the complaint of a Muslim butcher against the ruling of a lower court that prompted the decision of the constitutional court.

In another prominent ruling, a Berlin-based Muslim organisation was granted the right to design and implement Islamic religious instruction at Berlin public schools. 12 However, another legal dispute, concerning the right of a female Muslim teacher to wear her headscarf in a public school, shows that the process of ‘negotiation’ over the legal status of Islamic practice in Germany is far from over. 13 As already mentioned, the most important development in the legal landscape of Germany is the increasing number of Muslims of Turkish descent, like Ahmet, who are becoming German citizens. The extent to which this development will, in fact, ease the legal and institutional marginalisation of Islam in Germany, and result in granting Muslim organisations privileges as crucial as the Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts, remains to be seen.

Conclusion

These struggles over the adequate representation of Muslims as Muslims by the state, and the adequate recognition of Muslim religious concerns as legitimate, are not altogether different from those faced by religious Muslims in Turkey. Secularist politicians, security services, social scientists and journalists have for a very long time questioned the legitimacy of a prominent place for the Islamic tradition in Turkey. In Germany, however, this ideological faultline coincides at least partially with the faultline of ethnic difference, which makes the position of religious Muslims in Western Europe so precarious. 14

When I asked Ahmet if he was planning to stay in Germany, he answered without hesitation: ‘yes, of course’. And then, after a little break, he added ‘as long as we can live here as Muslims’. Ahmet’s answer, which I have heard in many versions both in Germany and in Turkey, gets to the heart of one dilemma that marks the place of
religious Muslims in contemporary societies: the qualified commitment of religious Muslims in Germany (and in Turkey) to secular society and the secular state. What I have tried to show is that the historical experience of Islam in Turkey and Germany, especially over the past decade, suggests that this qualification is not, as Lewis would have it, the expression of a deep-seated hostility of Muslim activists toward Western society, nor is it the expression of an unbridgeable cultural hiatus, as commentators such as Loschelder suggest. Rather, this qualification in the commitment to German (or Turkish) secular society marks the commitment to a moral project, that of Islam, which, as such commitments do, at times comes into conflict with other commitments. For example, it comes into conflict with a society, or a state, which threatens the moral framework of this moral project (as did the militant laicism of the early Turkish Republic). Yet, as we have also seen, commitment to Islam can also be the basis of surprising alliances, such as that between Turkish Islam and the ‘true’ secular state, which makes it clear that conflict is only one facet of the complex relationship between Turkish Muslims and German society.

Moreover, the answer to the question of when exactly the moral framework is threatened to the extent that emigration or resistance (or at least the withholding of legitimacy) is necessary, is, of course, neither unanimously agreed upon by Muslims nor historically fixed, but depends upon the particular situation. While, for instance, the issue of women veiling in public is an issue of great importance for most religious Muslim women in the Turkish tradition, the banning of veiled women from teaching positions, and the hostile suspicion displayed by many Germans towards veiled women, does not necessarily, at least not in the short term, mean that Muslims will decide that Germany is a place where they cannot live as Muslims. On certain occasions, for example, Yasemin decided to wear a hair band rather than her full headscarf, because she did not want to alienate her colleagues. Similarly, Muslim organisations in Germany, while demanding the right of Muslim women to wear ‘pious dress’ in all situations, have not broken off their relationship with the state, but are determined to pursue the matter in legal and other democratic ways. The overwhelming experience of Islam in Turkey and Germany shows that the great majority of religious Muslims are committed to pursuing their moral project within the framework of the German (or Turkish) constitutional framework. The caveat that this has its limits when Muslims can no longer live as Muslims, so long as, in terms of Islamic jurisprudence, they can see Germany as da'ar al-sulh (territory of contract) and not as da'ar al-harb, does not undermine this commitment.

Notes

[1] One indicator is membership in Muslim organisations. The Islam-Archiv Deutschland e.V. claims that the cumulative membership of its member-organisations in 1998 has reached one million (Oeckl 1999: 896). This number is viewed with scepticism by other commentators (Lemmen 2002: 57). Another estimate is that 20 per cent of Muslims of Turkish descent are organised in one of the Turkish cemaats (Karakasoğlu 1996: 24).

[2] I do not mean to say that historically everybody ‘previous’ or outside this modern public was ‘unreflectedly traditional’. However, I want to mark a distinction between my interlocutors in
Istanbul and what is often described as the relatively straightforward transmission of local cosmologies and worldviews in village studies such as Schiffauer (1991) and Delaney (1991).

[3] The names of my interlocutors as well as some markers of their identity are changed to protect their identity.

[4] Islam, an elaborately produced glossy magazine, in appearance a bit like an Islamist Newsweek, was for a long time the flagship of the Iskenderpaşa Cemaat’s publishing venture. In the 1990s it reached a monthly circulation of up to 100,000 copies (Çakır 1990). The cemaat was forced to close the journal after a failed attempt to launch a major newspaper project and today concentrates on web-based publications. Ços’s contributions to the cemaat’s journals were sometimes accompanied by an English translation. I use here my own translation, which differs slightly from that printed in Islam.

[5] Ços’s position mirrors the move of the leading Muslim activists in 1998 to align the case of religious Muslims with the ‘real’ West against the repression of religious practice by the Turkish secularist establishment when they appealed to the European Court of Human Rights against closure of the Islamist party by the Turkish authorities (European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, 31 July 2001).

[6] Ços left Turkey in the context of the coup-like intervention staged by the military to oust N. Erbakan as prime minister, which also led to a wave of repression against many Muslim organisations.

[7] Among the most important developments of this period is the re-emergence of Muslim civil-society organisations in the form of associations, foundations and political parties—for instance, the Iskenderpaşa Cemaat under Sheik Mehmet Zahit Kotku, the formation of Turkey’s political Islam (encouraged by Kotku) led by Necmettin Erbakan, as well as the formation of the Nurcu movement (Çaşlar and Çelik 2000).

[8] See Talal Asad (2002) for a critical examination of the question if liberal states can, in fact, represent Muslims as Muslims.

[9] This disenchantment with political Islam is foreshadowed by a bitter dispute between Sheik Ços and Erbakan in 1990, which brought to an end the close relations between the tarikat and the party (Çakır 1990).

[10] The only other party in parliament is ironically the CHP, the original Kemalist party. The Ak party has nearly a two-thirds majority of seats.


[12] For useful information about the Islamische Föderation Berlin see www.islamische-foederation.de/


[14] This faultline of ethnic or racial difference is determined by numerous interlocking factors. As Ann Stoler (1995) notes, notions of racial difference are primarily discursive distinctions that draw on changing markers of distinction. In the German context, overt commitment to Islam is part of this configuration of racial difference.

References


