Western Europe

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Is Islam Soluble into Germany?
Sunni Muslims of Turkish Origin

Similar to the overall situation in Western Europe, the Muslim youth of Turkish background in Germany[1] are quite different to the generation of their parents. Far from homogeneity, being a Muslim is nowadays made up of differentiation, cultural complexity, and mobility at an individual level even if communal features remain relevant. The following aims at briefly reviewing these trends while underlining the opportunities provided by the German context.

The first element to keep in mind concerning Turkish Islam in Germany is its transnational dimension. Being located 'in between' at least two national contexts, namely home- and host-countries, Islamic groups – mainly organized into associations – and individuals develop original and particular social practices and discourses which deal with multiple national settings. This relevance of transnationalism is directly linked to the specific national background of Turkish Muslims. The transplantation of political religious trends from Turkish to German territory from the 1960s onwards mainly helped to increase the potential of these groups because Germany offered opportunities – stability, freedom, autonomy and independence – which Turkey, a Republic that, having interpreted *laicité* as state control of religion, did not and still does not provide. The transnationalization of the social space produced by Islamic-Turkish actors in Germany grows also on the basis of a 'long distance nationalism' referring to the extension of the 'traditional' audience among migrants through the media, maintaining the presence of some political personalities and debates in the daily life of Turks living in Germany.[2] The situation of Turkish migrants in Germany composes then a permanent interplay of social positions neither systematically, nor clearly attached to stable forms of social capital in both countries.

Muslims of Turkish origin in Germany can also benefit from their particular location in a country of which they are not systematically citizens. Associations can be viewed as providing alternative modes of action to that which is provided by the exclusive reference to the welfare state as a form of incorporation that is deeply embedded in territorial and national definitions of membership. This emergence of a transnational space in which Islamic mobilization has been organized lies at the cross-roads between the legal management of religion and the externalization of Islam as a 'foreigners' cultural issue'. It is a pure product of the complex articulation of rights, rules, and institutions, independent of the usual focus on debates about political participation and *jus sanguinis*.

The German political management of Islam is mainly diplomatic. In relation to the political agenda, Islam is treated as a Foreign Affairs issue, and more recently as a 'security linked' problematic. From its symbolic to material aspects, many indicators justify the assessment of Islam as not being a social-cultural policy matter. As the very symbol of the Kemalist definition of *laïcité*, the management of several aspects of religious life by the Diyanet Isleri Türk-Islam Birligi (DITIB, Office of Religious Affairs) introduces the Turkish state as one of the actors of the Islamic scene reconstructed in Germany. At the same time, the German authorities' designation of the DITIB as the 'most favoured lord' among the plausible partners stimulates competition between associations such as the Islamische Gesellschaft Milli Görüs (IGMG, Islamic Society National Vision) or the Verband der Islamischen Kulturzen-

tren (VIKZ, Union of Cultural Islamic Centres) in the field of education, the opening of mosques or the 'importation' of imams from Turkey to Germany. Several means have been organized between Turkey and Germany to avoid a DITIB monopoly on these affairs. In the 1990s, for example, the VIKZ opened a centre for the education of *hocas* in Cologne, giving them the possibility to recruit persons with experience in living in Germany and German-language capacity to teach in their mosques. Significantly, those rivalries and competition between the main actors are not submitted to direct intervention and repression of the Turkish state.

Indeed, one of the first opportunities for Islamic Turkish associations in Germany arose from the distance from the Turkish state, in spite of its maintained sovereignty in Germany, especially through taxation and conscription. Escaping from Turkey without really leaving it, Turkish Islam in Germany cannot be dissociated from this permanent and complex interaction of the two national settings referring to different sets of opportunities.

The opportunities

The first elementary opportunities used by transplanted Turkish networks are legal – open to all non-German citizens who are allowed to organize *eingetragene Vereine* (e.V) associations. Thus, the Islamic associative network, which initially developed in Germany, corresponded to the juridical restoration of religious tendencies that exist in Turkey yet had found in Germany the possibility to act freely. This appears to be the first step of the installation of Islamic associative networks in Germany.

A second stable set of opportunities is provided by the rules concerning the position of religion in the public sphere. The German tradition separates religion and state without considering religion as a nonlegitimate actor in the public sphere, such as is the case within the constitutional interpretation of *laïcité* in France or Turkey. One elementary resource the associations can thus mobilize stems from the status of corporation of public law (Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts), given to religious communities (Religionsgemeinschaft) which rule and administer their business in an autonomous way: raising taxes (*Kirchensteuer*), deciding the composition of religious instruction, opening religious places, and being represented in public institutions such as hospitals, the army, prisons, and the media. Islamic Turkish associations could gain immediate benefits from this recognition in terms of authority, legitimacy and independence in their functioning. It could be argued that the dynamism of the associative network among Muslims in Germany is a result of institutionalization in the quest for recognition. *De facto*, the claim for official recognition began in 1997 with an official demand made by the Turkish VIKZ – a demand rapidly followed by other requests.

This is a real difference compared to other countries where the claim for institutionalization appears to be a late indicator of 'visibility'.

The third set of opportunities derives from the fact that given that the majority of Muslims living in Germany are not German citizens, the issue of Islam is not compelling for national politicians as an electoral argument. The lack of incentive is exacerbated by the collectively shared illusion of Germany as not being a country of immigration. The lexical stigmatization of foreigners is another part of a political intention to keep foreigners' issues (among them Islam) out of the domestic public sphere. But at the same time, being kept outside of domestic issues and even ignored by politicians and academics gave the opportunity to Islamic associations to organize their own social sites dealing with a double-sided 'changing face of religion'[3]: on the one hand is a need for new types of communal activities, and on the other, the transformation of tie binding the individual to his community of belongings.

A secular change?

This 'changing face' appears to be a central issue for the Islamic Turkish associations as well as for their audience. The urban landmarks they provide, and the identity references and discourses they mobilize, have been adapted to the change of clientele – passing from parents to children or grandchildren. Islam remains firstly defined as an origin and a praxis (respect of the five pillars), but being born Muslim is not a guarantee of orthopraxy. For instance, the relationship to religious belonging and praxis is not directly inherited from the family but is transformed and reinvented by younger generations, while the associative network maintains the collective reference such as the moral code and educational needs. The multiplication of the contacts and modes of participation in the host society gives new opportunities to young generations of Muslims who no longer need to stay exclusively in an assigned group or community. The *bricolage* of reference appears to be the key concept underpinning these new forms of dealing with religious belonging: people produce their own ways of being a Muslim.

At an individual level, this change gives relevance to the category of 'personhood' which mixes choice, faith and duty, without feeling under 'social' pressure in European societies. Different socialization dynamics meet and interact, the associative, familial or religious aspect being one part of it. It also represents an ethic for life which mediates familial relations, respect for the *halal* milieu, while also opening new spaces and guaranteeing the freedom of others. In this sense, 'personhood' represents a re-interpretation of tradition based on experience. It is about becoming a Muslim, not about 're-Islamization'. It is rather an 'Islamization' based on real knowledge of heritage, ethics

and codes. The headscarf, for example, is increasingly becoming a non-cohesive argument between mother and daughter – an argument of technical interpretations against traditional ones. The daughter teaches her mother how to wear it.

The main demands remain, however, the same: easier access to German nationality, the right to double-citizenship, and acquiring for Islam a status equal to that of other religions.

So the public and communal dimension of Islam in Germany still asks for recognition and visibility in the urban milieu. But a strong differentiation is growing between 'belonging' and 'believing'. While the distance from the 'legitimate authorities' is growing, the religious practices are a matter of personal and individual choice and private conscience. This process is similar to that of transnationalism: multiplication of the identity references, mobility, invisibility, and avoiding state control and authority. This idea of multiple identities and complexity induces the idea of culture playing as a reference on both individual and collective levels, providing codes, symbols, repertoires and symbolic places in which people occasionally live. It also provides an ideological apparatus, practices and a symbolic repertoire by which the individual/collective consciousness as part of a believer's life is built, educated and controlled. In a kind of 'secular' perspective, the identification as Muslim is no more the exclusive producer of references and meanings. It rather figures one of the possible options, but certainly not the dissolution of religious affiliation. ◆

Notes

1. According to statistics there are approximately 2.8 million Muslims living in Germany, 79% are from Turkish origin/nationality.
2. Benedict Anderson, (1991), *Imagined Communities*. (2nd ed), London, Verso.
3. James A. Beckford, Thomas Luckmann (ed.), (1989), *The Changing Face of Religion*. Sage (*Studies in International Sociology*, vol. 37).

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