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Secular and Religious Nationalism Among Young Turkish Women in Belgium: Education May Make the Difference

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In this article, we shall discuss the interaction between nationalism and education from the perspective of Turkish immigrant girls in Belgium. More specifically we examine the role education plays in influencing a girls' choice for a rather secular or rather religious nationalism. First I shall discuss the observation that Turkish immigrants girls in Belgium consider themselves as "different" from the rest of society. This observation has to be linked to the existence of strong forms of nationalism, both secular and religious within their country of origin. Then I examine the key role of education, especially within secular nationalism. The way in which such a nationalistic heritage is interpreted may well be influenced strongly by the concrete reality of the immigrant context. Finally I evaluate the decisive role education plays for immigrant girls - and not for boys - in defining ones places in a specific nationalistic world view and hence in Western society.

Turkish Immigrants in Belgium

As in other West-European countries, the first Turkish immigrants came to Belgium in the sixties, as a result of bilateral agreements between Turkey and Belgium (Atalik and Beeley 1992). Although a halt to immigration was called in 1974, the Turkish population in Belgium continued to increase steadily (Bayar 1993). In 1993, 88,269 Turks or 0.9 percent of the total population in Belgium, were registered (Poulain 1994). The majority of these people come from rural areas in Central Anatolia, especially from the region around Emirdag. Emirdag, a small town in the Province of Afyon, is situated in an arid and poor area that is strongly affected by emigration.

By Belgian standards, most Turkish immigrants belong to the lower socio-economic strata (Manço and Manço 1992). Unemployment amongst this group is high. In 1993, 15 percent in the 15 to 64 age group were unemployed, compared to 4.3 percent of the Belgian population (Poulain 1994). The school career of Turkish immigrants in Belgium is problematic (Timmerman 1992). At the end of primary school, in 1995-1996, the percentage of pupils behind schedule among the non-European Union (EU) pupils was almost four time higher than among the Belgian pupils (52 percent compared to 13 percent).¹ Turkish youngsters are also overrepresented in branches of study that give poor prospects of employment. In 1995-1996 more than 40 percent of the Belgian pupils in the last year of secondary school were following "Algemeen Vormend Onderwijs" (general education) compared to only 15 percent of the non-EU pupils. On the other hand more than 60 percent of the non-EU pupils were attending "vocational training" compared to only 22 percent of Belgian pupils.¹ Turkish pupils are often enrolled in the so-called "immigrant schools", i.e. schools where the majority of the pupils are immigrant children from a low socio-economic background (Timmerman 1995).

Methodology

I rely for this contribution on my doctoral research (from 1989 to 1996), which focused on the relation between education, socio-cultural praxis and ethnicity² among

young women belonging to three different perspectives, or subcultures, in Turkish society (Timmerman 1999). These perspectives were expressed in terms of the social and spatial origin of the women. These groups consisted of young women from the immigrant Turkish community in Belgium, from a rural emigration area in Turkey (i.e. Emirdag), and from a metropolitan middle class milieu in Istanbul. In this particular paper, I shall focus on the group of Turkish immigrant girls in Belgium.

About a hundred Turkish immigrant girls participated in the field research. I administered a questionnaire to 82 of them in order to get information about their socio-economic background and their school career. All of them had arrived before the age of twelve in Belgium and at the time of the research, their mean age was twenty years. These girls attended school, except four who were already working. Although their school career was on average better than that of the Turkish population in Belgium, nonetheless it was poorer than that of the Belgian population. The families of the girls, except four, all originated from the countryside. The educational level of the parents was very low: 60 percent of the mothers and 30 percent of the fathers had not completed primary school. Only 4 percent of the mothers and 13 percent of the fathers had gone beyond primary school. Few parents were able to speak one of the national languages fluently (Dutch, French or German): only 8 percent of the mothers and 25 percent of the fathers. The majority of the mothers (59 percent) were housewives and only 10 percent were employed, most of them as cleaning women. Among the fathers only 27 percent were employed, 20 percent were retired, 26 percent were unemployed and 27 percent were qualified as "disabled." It was clear from our information that our sample was representative of the socio-economic situation of Turkish immigrants in Belgium.

Neither naïve realism that assumes that we have immediate and direct access to the phenomenon under study nor relativism that states that it is impossible to make any reliable and valid statement about social reality offer any prospects for contemporary anthropology. Therefore we opt for the alternative of "subtle realism" as described by Hammersley's (1992). In this view ethnographic descriptions are selective constructions that - in a more or less accurate way - reproduce phenomenon which exist independent of the researcher. In consequence several non-contradictory and valid descriptions and explanations of one and the same phenomenon can exist next to each other. In this study we tried to find a balance between an *emic* and an *etic* perspective. The method of participant observation, the research technique I used, offers the possibility of giving a voice to the Turkish immigrant girls who participated in the research. The discourse of these girls can be compared with information coming from scientific literature and the media. Ethnographic truths are inherently partial, subjective and incomplete. We agree with Clifford (1986: 25) that epistemological self-consciousness has not to result into a pessimistic view on the possibilities of anthropological research, as long as the ethnographic discourse can be situated in a historical and spatial context.

For my fieldwork in Belgium (1989-95), I was involved with several socio-cultural organizations oriented towards immigrants. One of these had been established by young Turkish immigrant women themselves and was located on the edge of a "Turkish neighborhood." The women in charge of this organization had succeeded in finding their way in Belgian society; the girls with whom they worked, however, were still in the process. I taught a Dutch language course there for several years, and was also involved in several other activities organized for these girls.

Another socio-cultural organization in which I was active was run by Belgian social workers. This association, too, was located in a neighborhood with a large Turkish immigrant population. I worked with this organization for five years, participating in activities organized for second-generation immigrant girls.³ I was also employed as a psychologist at a health center consulted mainly by Turkish immigrants. A psychological consultation is the medium par excellence to gain insight into personal experiences. Although these setting provided me with very authentic background information, I did not “recruit” from it participants for my research.

Feeling different

The cultural difference that exists between “the immigrant” and the local people fades after several decades. Immigrants and locals live in the same society, speak the same language (most of the time), are socialized in the same school system, participate in the same labor market, and aspire towards the same material goals (Roosens 1989; 1998). Nevertheless, the feeling of ethnic “difference” remains highly relevant (Barth 1994, Portes and Stepick 1993). The emotional engagement with ethnic identity does not diminish with time (Epstein 1978). In general, strong centripetal tendencies towards cultural homogenization, intense economic integration, and a globalization of consumption and the media go hand in hand with the development of new forms of “provincialism” that are often ethnically inspired (Eriksen 1993). Globalization and localization seem to be two interrelated processes (Friedman 1990).

Immigrants have left behind their familiar background and must become acquainted with a new environment. The immigrant Turkish girls who participated in this research were definitely searching for something to hold on to. Lorkovic (1993: 245) states that when people find themselves in an insecure situation, they are likely to desire more structure and consequently to withdraw into a space where they feel safe and confident. In such a situation, people will tend to seek what they perceive to be their “authentic” identity, defined by so-called “tradition” and “culture”, and legitimated by descent (Ahmed 1995). They will, in other words, seek an ethnic identity that, according to Frederik Barth (1969: 13), classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background.

Ethnicity itself contains a reflexive component. According to Anthony Smith (1992: 512) it is a dynamic mode of self-consciousness, a form of selfhood reinterpreted if not reinvented generationally in response to changing historical circumstances. People ask themselves questions about their “own” culture, with reference to “other” cultures (Vermeulen and Govers 1994). The presence - albeit on an abstract level - of an “other” group is indispensable. Contact with other communities sharpens ethnic consciousness, ethnicity not being a characteristic of a group but of a relation (Eriksen 1993: 12). For immigrant Turkish girls, participation in the social life of the host country always implies interaction with “others”.

The cultural content that immigrant Turkish girls give to their ethnic identity can vary extensively; Thomas Eriksen (1993: 73) speaks of “negotiable cultural context”. A Turkish girl who participates fully in Western society and one who is completely wrapped up in an Islamic way of life will both define their socio-cultural praxis as “authentically” Turkish. Participation in Belgian society seems to have little influence on the importance they attach to their ethnic identity. Therefore, Turkish girls who

are, objectively speaking, closely integrated in Western society do not feel less Turkish. Sümeyya⁴ is a case in point.

I wrote down in my diary⁵:

It was the first time that I saw Sümeyya. I knew that her family had a good reputation in the community. Even the headmaster of the secondary school had spoken positively of them. Sümeyya's family was considered - within their own community - to be very closely integrated in Belgian society. Sümeyya had an interesting job in a maritime company but she was considering going to university again. She spoke Dutch fluently. There was a discussion going on about "naturalization". Leyla - another Turkish girl - said that she was considering taking Belgian nationality. Sümeyya replied fiercely that she would never take that step. That would be totally against her feelings: she was and wanted to remain Turkish. She was very emotional about it. (I knew Sümeyya from the Turkish "girls' association" of the socio-cultural organization where I worked in the context of my "fieldwork")

The environment of girls like Sümeyya is often less Turkish than that of Turkish girls who are not studying. Due to their social milieu, girls like Sümeyya are confronted to a greater extent with "the other" in society and therefore feel the need to affirm their "Turkish identity". Because of their "mixed" environment their behavioral patterns often differ - as amongst youngsters from other ethnic minorities - from one context to another, and the belief systems with which they are dealing are sometimes contradictory (Schneider 1997). Nonetheless, the ethnic identity these girls claimed remained firmly Turkish.

Turkish girls who have very limited contact with Belgian society, for example girls who are following education in the so called "immigrant schools", also experience their Turkish identity as being essential. Girls following education in "immigrant schools", i.e. schools where the majority of pupils is from Turkish and/or Moroccan descent, have few opportunities of getting concrete information about the "Belgian" way of life. By consequence their world is often more "Turkish" than that of girls enjoying an education at a "quality" school - schools which are de facto dominated by a Belgian higher middle class population - or of girls like Sümeyya who after getting a degree, have a white collar employment in a "Belgian" environment. Generally speaking, girls from "immigrant schools" seem to have less need to assert their "being Turkish" before foreigners. Nonetheless they, including Zülbiye, are also keenly aware of their descent:

The war between Iraq and Kuwait had been going on for some days. Zülbiye was worried. The whole family was watching the news on Turkish television together. Although Zülbiye had difficulties understanding what was being said, she was reassured by the words of president Özal, who made an appeal for peace. But if war had broken out in Turkey, they would, according to Zülbiye, have returned there to defend their country. That was certain. Zülbiye told me that, a few years before, another war had nearly broken out. On that occasion her father told them that if this happened, they would return to Turkey to defend their motherland. (Zülbiye is a pupil from an "immigrant school")

The examples of Sümeyya and Zülbiye illustrate that ethnicity is salient, irrespective of an individual's degree of objective integration in Western society. Throughout my research I never met one Turkish girl who did not claim - irrespective of her ideological orientation - that her Turkish identity was important. Until recently, very

few Turkish immigrants were interested, despite the objective advantages, in adopting Belgian nationality⁶ (Poulain 1994). Besides the rather difficult procedure for attaining Belgian citizenship, emotional reasons too come into play here. A discussion that took place at the “girls’ association” illustrates this point quite nicely:

At a meeting in the “girls’ association” we were talking about naturalization. Some girls said that previously they would never have considered it, but now they had started to realize that Belgian nationality also had its advantages. Burcu told the other girls that she had held Belgian nationality from childhood. Everyone was surprised. Her father had decided more than twenty years ago that the whole family should be naturalized for pragmatic reasons. Burcu said that she had never dared tell that to her Turkish friends. She was ashamed of having Belgian nationality. She experienced it as disloyalty towards her Turkish community.

The Turkish identity played an important role in the lives of all Turkish immigrant girls whom I met. This transpired, for example, in the way they talked about the motherland they had left behind. Regardless of the content immigrants give to their Turkish nationality, they want foreigners to be informed only about the positive side of Turkey. Turkish immigrants complain that Belgian television programs, for example, only stress the negative aspects.

I told Gülsen that I had seen a TV-program that I thought gave a good and balanced picture of Turkish society. She had also seen it, but she was very dissatisfied with it. According to her they had - as always - put too much emphasis on the negative aspects of Turkey. I asked her if the information had not been correct. She replied that everything that was shown was correct but she found it misplaced to be so free about it. She was afraid that people - that is, Belgians - would thus get a negative image of Turkey, which would be a pity. (Gülsen is a Turkish teacher who instructs Turkish children in Belgium)

The emotional ties with the country of origin remain very important. The identification is so intense that criticism towards Turkey is experienced as personal criticism, as we see in the example of Gülsen. Turkish nationalism remains strong even in the context of migration. In order to grasp the significance of this issue, one must take into account a variety of historical developments.

Turkish nationalistic heritage and the key role of education

“Turkish Republican Nationalism” or Kemalism -named after Mustafa Kemal (1881-1938), better known as Atatürk- became the national ideology of the Turkish Republic, founded in 1923.⁷ Kemalism aimed at making Turkey a modern state, united around a single Turkish culture (Ross 1981). In order to transform the religious-dynastic state of the Ottoman Empire into a modern capitalist state, secularism had to become one of the key principles of the new society (Kandiyoti 1991). In order to guarantee that Islam would be kept out of the political arena Atatürk founded the ministry of religious affairs, *Diyanet*, short for *Diyanet Isleri Bakanligi* (Toprak 1987: 220). The aim of this ministry was and still is to control and monopolize all religious activities in the Turkish Republic. The caliphate was abolished in 1924. In that same year, the Sharia (the Islamic legal code) was abandoned, and in 1926 a new civil code, based on that of Switzerland, and a new penal code, modeled on the example of Italy, were introduced (Tapper 1991).

Within this modern nation, education was to play a crucial role (Barchard 1985). In 1924 the Unification of Education Law, which fully secularized education, was passed. According to Aksit (1991: 161) “The Unification of Education Law (...) asserted a centralist, modernist, national educational system under the guidance of rationalism and scientism, to establish a new nation with a new identity, and a new unified morality.” Primary education became compulsory, both for boys and girls. To further reinforce Turkish national sentiments, at the expense of a broader Islamic identity, Atatürk decided in 1928 to replace the Arabic with the Latin alphabet. Turkey officially became a secular republic in 1937. Though Islam was to be excluded from public life, it was nonetheless allowed to keep its significance within the private sphere. In this worldview, to which we refer as a “folk Islamic value system” patrilineality and the segregation of the sexes are principal criteria. This “folk Islamic value system” still dominated private life, while a Kemalist inspired worldview determined social life (Meeker 1994: 24-33).

The shaky balance in Turkish society between a folk Islamic value system that determines private life and a Kemalist system dominating the public domain has been profoundly disturbed in the last decades by the rise of Islamism (Cakir 1992). The phenomenon of Islamism spread through the Islamic world after the foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo in 1928 (Van Nieuwenhuijze 1995). Islamism wants to improve the quality of the contemporary urban society by purifying Islam of all “non-Islamic” elements. Islamism wants to bring contemporary society in line with Islamist ideology; it aims at the Islamisation of modernity (Cizre-Sakallioğlu 1994: 261). Contrary to a folk Islamic frame of reference, Islamism aims at controlling all aspects of society, both private and public (Roy 1992: 109). Turkish islamism, first and foremost, opposes the contemporary Kemalist inspired regime. It is an alternative nationalistic ideology that has very few things in common with traditional, popular Islam. Within Turkish Islamism national identity thus takes precedence over religious membership, so much so that being defined an Islamic *Türk* is preferable to being called a Muslim. As secular nationalism, Islamism gives a new self-image to people who can no longer identify with their position in their village, lineage, clan or tribe. The most influential exponent of Islamism in Turkey is the *Fazilet Partisi* or Party of Virtue.⁸ The discourse of the *Fazilet Partisi* is as patriotic as that of Kemalism, only the accents are different. In much the same way as Kemalism can be defined as secular nationalism, Islamism in Turkey can be considered to be a form of religious nationalism.

Although the Kemalist discourse challenges the Islamic heritage of the Ottoman past, there are striking underlying similarities between the two (Turan 1991). These similarities are a crucial element in understanding the importance of education in Turkish society (Tapper and Tapper 1987). Knowledge is especially valued within Islam. This is the fundamental premise on which the Kemalist emphasis on education can be justified. Atatürk’s often cited proverb “*hayatta en hakiki mürşit ilimdir*” - the most genuine (*spiritual*) Guide in life is (*scientific*) knowledge - is based on concepts that in the first place have a religious significance: *Mürşit* (guide), *ilim* (knowledge) and *hakiki* (genuine, true). It is remarkable that this proverb, by using key concepts of the traditions of the Ulema (*ilim*) and of the Sufi (*hakiki, mürşit*), aims at validating modern scientific knowledge. There is also a resemblance between the study ethos of Kemalism and the duties of the believer towards the Umma⁹. Both at school and in the Umma, diligence (*çalışkanlık*) and

self-sacrifice are considered to be central values. Due to such reciprocal obligations, studying has acquired an aura of an almost sacral significance; it is a duty every citizen has towards the Turkish nation.

Education is one of the pillars of Turkish secular nationalism or Kemalism. But within religious nationalism or Islamism, education has its place too. In Turkish secular nationalism, education is a lever for women to participate in a Western-oriented society; in Islamism, education is entirely situated in an Islamist worldview. In this world view, girls and boys should be ideally educated in single-sex institutions from secondary education on. Within this frame of reference, intellectual - Islamist - women are also respected, and they enjoy a role in public life. They can be trained in and exercise any profession, as long as they respect the principles of Islamism that advocate Islamic family values as the basis of a just society (Meeker 1991). This means that, whatever a woman's social role, her role as a mother and wife remains the most important. Under no circumstance does Islamism tolerate any ideas that are overtly redolent of the Western world. In contrast to the Kemalist and the folk Islamic views of society, education in the eyes of Islamists provides no legitimization whatsoever for participating in any Western oriented society.

Ethno-nationalism in the Turkish immigrant community in Belgium

Nationalism is a central issue beyond Turkey as well. It influences the way in which immigrants experience their situation in Belgium. The slogan of Atatürk "*Ne mutlu Türküm diyene*" (what happiness for the person who can say "I am a Turk") is a significant reality for most Turkish immigrants in Belgium. The commitment to Turkey that is evident in Turkish immigrants is great, and considerable effort is made by Turkey itself to maintain ties with its expatriates. It is obvious that Kemalism - the official doctrine of the Turkish nation - plays a role in the construction of the ethno-nationalistic identity of immigrant Turkish girls. Secular nationalism is alive in (the few) Turkish student organizations in Belgium. Turkish students who want to participate in Western society find a rewarding frame of reference in Kemalism, which advocates education as the instrument for socio-economic emancipation. This form of Turkish ethno-nationalism is compatible with integration in a Western, i.e. Belgian, society.

In Belgium such Kemalist inspired associations have remained marginal, though. At most they reach better-educated immigrants. In Turkey, Turks come into contact with Kemalism mainly through formal education or more generally through the cultural apparatus of the Turkish State. Turkish immigrants who left Turkey at an early age or who have had little contact with the Turkish educational system are thus less familiar with this secular frame of reference. However, we see that these Turkish immigrants, who lacked knowledge of the Turkish cultural apparatus, but who integrated successfully into the Belgian educational system, found an easy link to the Kemalist inspired heritage. The close interaction between the Turkish migrant community in Western Europe and Turkey makes this possible.

\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$An important source of inspiration for the Turkish identity constitute the Turkish television channels that can be viewed in Europe. During my research, it was possible to tune in to a special "Europe-channel" of TRT, the Turkish national broadcaster. TRT's programs specially made for Turkish immigrants in Europe, are very nationalistic. Much attention is paid to the Turkish cultural heritage, folklore and tourist attractions. Also, in popular Turkish serials and films, the so-

called “authentic Turkish culture” that is mostly located in the countryside, is represented in an idealized manner. All major Turkish newspapers have a European edition aimed at Turkish migrants. The scholars Altay and Ural Manço (1994: 277) also emphasize the importance of the Turkish media for the cultivation of a national identity among Turkish immigrant communities. One should take into account that the majority of Turkish immigrants are not capable of understanding non-Turkish programs. In this context Turkish channels fulfill a prominent role. Recently, several commercial channels have emerged. They too promote Turkey, although their ideological orientation is less favorable towards Kemalism, and sometimes even anti-Kemalist. Some private channels are in line with an Islamist world view. This form of nationalism, namely Turkish Islamism, is also increasing in popularity in the Turkish community in Belgium.

Islamic consciousness is growing within the Turkish community in Belgium. Fifteen years ago it was unusual to see young Turkish girls wearing a headscarf. Nowadays, young women in “Islamic dress” are a very visible group within the Turkish immigrant community. Turks who returned to the immigrant community in Belgium after spending years in Turkey felt that Islam had become more “militant” in their community. They noticed that Islam had become more popular in the Turkish immigrant community generally. Deniz, a political scientist, said:

“I have no trouble with the rise of fundamentalism although I see it is there. My mother, for example, became more religious. During the previous Ramadan she went to the mosque for the very first time. This can be partly explained by her age. As she grows older she is more alone. Going to the mosque is a social event for her. Contrary to most other women, my mother is critical. Certain things that the Imam says she finds really stupid. She believes it’s foolish for Turkish immigrants to fly to Turkey merely to vote (at that time for the pro-Islamic Refah Partisi).”

*Milli Görüş*¹⁰, the ideological movement of the pro-Islamic *Fazilet Partisi* (Virtue Party) in Turkey, is most representative of Turkish Islamism in Belgium. *Milli Görüş* has become well established in Europe, with headquarters in Cologne. In Belgium, about forty mosques are associated with the organization, though another fifty five are still primarily associated with the *Diyanet*, which is anxiously monitoring developments. Besides controlling and monopolizing all religious activities in the Turkish Republic, the *Diyanet* also tries to control Turkish immigrants in Europe (Dassetto 1990: 192). In Belgium, the *Diyanet* represents the official attitude of Turkey towards Islam, while *Milli Görüş* represents an aspect of religious opposition. More so than *Milli Görüş*, the *Diyanet* strives towards a liberal and secular interpretation of Islam. It wants to enhance the Turkish-religious identity of the immigrants without interfering with their participation in secular society (Doomernik 1995). *Milli Görüş*, on the other hand, aims at the economic and social integration of the Turkish immigrant community as a whole. It is the community it wants to integrate, not its members as such (Manço 1992: 265).

Besides religious activities, *Milli Görüş* provides a whole range of educational and socio-cultural activities for its members. Many of these activities are targeted specifically at youngsters. It organizes sports and recreational activities, and language courses too. As they have a solid infrastructure at their disposal, besides well-equipped sports accommodation and comfortable meeting places, they have a broad appeal. *Milli Görüş* also provides material support to its members in the form of

scholarships and loans. More so than the *Diyanet*, it is oriented towards the situation in the host country.

These tendencies within the Turkish immigrant community affect the way Turkish immigrant girls experience their ethnic identity.

Public roles for Turkish immigrant girls

Many of the Turkish immigrant girls I met were not satisfied with their current situation; they felt they had only limited freedom of movement within their Turkish community. Ayla, a student in Medicine, said it as follows:

“During my stay in Turkey this year, it became clear to me that even in Emirdag women are allowed much more freedom than we (migrant women); they are much more advanced than we. Girls and women in Emirdag have much more possibilities doing things outside the family. I am really discouraged by this observation.”

The socio-cultural context for girls in Turkey, especially in the more urban environments is, more relaxed than in the migrant community in Belgium (Timmerman, 1999). Especially towards eventual relationships between girls and boys, the migrant community is very restrictive. Derya, a girl from the girls’ association, said:

“It is so obvious that relations between boys and girls are forbidden that it is even not a topic that can be discussed. At home, we never talk about boys. Sometimes we speak about namus (sexual honor), implicitly we are speaking than about boys.”

According to a “folk Islamic frame of reference” - which as stated before is dominated by partilineality and the segregation of the sexes - the social role of girls is situated within the family (Delaney 1991). This role is very clearly defined. Many of the girls felt they were being held hostage by “tradition”, and that in order to escape this “limitation” they had to find a way of manifesting themselves outside the family context as defined by this folk Islamic world view. In a Turkish context, education provides a legitimate alternative (Kiray 1982). As Ayfer, a girl who was studying architecture put it: “I have a ticket out”. Nalan, a girl who was studying to become a teacher, said it pithily: “If I was not studying, I was still sitting home and waiting whatever my family should decide for me.”

Aynur, a girl who was studying Pharmacy, told me:

“Studying is the easiest way to become accepted by the Belgians and to become appreciated by the Turks. Education is the instrument for girls to enhance their status in society. It is the only possibility for them to become more independent from their family and to get more autonomy to make their own decisions. Girls who are studying are more taken seriously, also by boys.”

As we have seen above, within a Kemalist world view, education is important for girls, as well as boys. Alongside the Islamic world views, which mainly emphasize women’s role within the family, Kemalism exists as another Turkish frame of reference, one that stresses the role of women in public life. The key to this emancipation is education. Those who have acquired knowledge deserve important status. Turkish girls who “have studied” are regarded to have a legitimate reason to stand out within a Western inspired frame of reference, and, in consequence, to develop personally outside the family context. It is not the contact with “Western

culture” as such that makes the transition possible to a “Western” societal model, but successful participation in the school system.

However the option of a Western-inspired way of life is problematic for many immigrant girls. In order to justify such a “Western option” within their own community, certain conditions need to be fulfilled. Gaining high academic credentials or acquiring a high professional status are essential criteria. Few immigrant girls are able to meet such requirements. By contrast, the criteria of Islamism - to observe the orthopraxis and to accept the Islamic familial values as the basis for a just society - are within their reach.

Several girls started attending meetings of the local *Milli Görüs*. They began to pay more attention to the formalistic signifiers they attributed to Islam. For example, *Milli Görüs* seems to pay considerable attention to a proper Islamic diet. It is common knowledge that pork and alcohol are forbidden. However, it is far less self-evident that ready-made food may contain “unclean” ingredients. Therefore, *Milli Görüs* has drawn up lists of all forbidden ingredients, so those believers could check every packet of food before consuming it. It was also considered important amongst the girls attending the meetings of the girls’ association to abide by the “rules of Islam” as prescribed by *Milli Görüs*, in relation to food.

Together with Hayriye I went shopping for the reunion of the “girls’ association”. She told me that we had to be careful which biscuits we bought because certain biscuits contain ingredients forbidden “by their religion”. Hayriye did not know what these forbidden ingredients were but she knew which brands of biscuits were considered to be acceptable by the mosque. Hayriye said that she herself did not bother but that the other girls certainly did.

Organizations such as *Milli Görüs* thus put a great deal of emphasis on formal aspects through which they can stress their difference from “the others”. Food, dress code and even the decoration of the home have to be solidly Islamic, as I learned from an incident at the house of Sevim, a girl from the “girls’ association”:

The brother of Sevim (a prominent figure of the local Milli Görüs-association) no longer wished to have pictures of people or animals in his home. According to him, Islam forbids it. He has extreme views on this issue. His wife recently bought a vase with a small bird painted on it. As a good Muslim he could not tolerate such a thing in his house. His wife had to return the vase to the shop. Also the children’s room had to be redecorated because posters of animals or children were forbidden.

According to Eric Hobsbawm (1992), the emphasis on formal requirements is an important difference between religious nationalism or Islamism on the one hand, and secular nationalism on the other. Islamist movements provide their followers and society with a concrete and detailed program for regulating daily life. Not only external elements can be used to create distinctions; ideological differences too can serve this purpose.

The familial praxis as prescribed by *Milli Görüs* is considered, by *Milli Görüs* - followers, as hugely different from that of Belgium. Some of the girls in this study tried to live according to such Islamist values. Some girls, as for example Asime, reproached their parents for not having been more conscientious in providing them with an “Islamic” education.

"I have always the permission to go into town with my friends (girls). My mother never asks where I will go and what I will do in town. I think that this is not correct. She acts like Belgian mothers".

By claiming an Islamist identity Turkish immigrant girls also wanted to distinguish themselves from "loose" Belgian girls. Belkis, a young girl who was following a vocational training formulated it as follows:

"The other (Belgian) girls in our class are surprised that we (Turkish girls) are still virgins. But I prefer that instead of being a toy for boys. I must admit that I am proud to be a virgin. No Belgian girl in our class is able to say that."

Orthopraxis is a convenient instrument for cultivating the distinction between oneself and "the other". Also by living up to the social rules as prescribed by Islamism girls want to display their Islamic identity and invite recognition. Such gestures ultimately become symbols marking the ethnic group (Barth 1994: 16).

The increasing influence of Islamism was thus noticeable amongst the girls participating in this study. *Milli Görüs* pays a great deal of attention to young girls and women. They argue that later, as mothers, they will play a key role in the transmission of Islamist ideas. For permanent success, it is imperative to win women over for their project. In addition, according to Islamism women embody Islamic authenticity most profoundly (Kandiyoti 1995: 308). Respect for Islamic family values forms the basis of a just society (Keddie 1995). It is in this sense that girls and women play a central role. Islamist movements organize many activities for girls and women: socio-cultural activities, meetings, courses and sport-activities. Sevda, a girl who was following a vocational training told me:

"We are very busy now. Nearly every evening we go to the cemiyet¹¹ (the local Milli Görüs). On Monday evening we follow aerobic. On Tuesday evening the young girls meet together and then we just talk, laugh, gossip and drink tea and eat cake. On Wednesday evening the imam gives instruction about Islam. On Thursday evening some of the other girls meet again, but I stay at home. Otherwise I don't have any time left for my homework. Since the cemiyet opened its doors we have no time to be bored anymore."

Young women, as Sevda, have the opportunity for participating actively in social networks outside the familial context insofar they meet the requirements of the Islamist social project. This implies obeying, also in public life, the rules set out by Islamism, as for example the segregation of men and women and the covering of the female body. Obeying the rules set out by Islamism, following higher education in Belgium and building on a professional career belong also to the possibilities.

The ambiguity that exists between a Western and an Islamic value system is much smaller within Islamism than within a folk Islamic world view. Questions about the desirability of Western ideas become redundant. Islamism - contrary to a "folk Islamic world view" - totally rejects the "Western model" at first sight. It does, however, incorporate many modern Western elements, without regarding them as Western, in education, technology, political and social organization, and even in personal behavior (Roy, 1992). According Ernest Gellner (1983: 76), Islam is ideally prepared for a place in modern society because it is represented both in the "High Culture" by means of orthodox Islam, as well as in the "Low Culture" by means of "folk" Islam. The high form of Islam has several characteristics as: scripturalism, puritanism, individualism, rule-orientation, a low loading of magic, an aversion to disorderly folk practices and mystical indulgence; that make it very suitable as a

world view in a modern urban environment. High Islam fits anonymous mobile society.

Compared to secular nationalism, Islamism can also provide a better answer to the existential questions of life. As other religious ideologies it succeeds in giving meaning to profound human suffering, sickness, loss and death (Toprak 1987: 221). Secular world-views are less successful in interpreting the often unacceptable conditions of the human existence. For immigrant girls who have little to hold on to socially, Islamism gives a clear and supporting, all-embracing frame of reference. Also the conditions that make Islam suitable as a discourse of protest against the Western dominance contribute to the popularity of Islamism. In other words a context of unredeemed expectations and frustrations make the appeal of an ideology, namely Islamism, that promises justice on the basis of a familiar world-view, namely Islam, even more attractive. Also for Turkish immigrant girls the choice for a militant Islamic model presents itself as a more familiar and legitimate alternative. According to Feride Acar (1995: 63) an Islamist discourse provides certainty for women caught at the crossroads of the traditional pressures of private life and the modern demands of public life.

What about boys?

Another aspect inherent on the ideas militant Islamic movements have about the family are the hierarchical relations within it. They are fervent champions of patriarchal ideas (Koçtürk 1992: 61). Felice Dassetto (1990: 201) speaks in this context of a familial re-socialization to affirm the traditional roles. The dominant role of men is central to an Islamist frame of reference. The girls participating in the research, too, had been told that they should obey their male relatives.

The girls from the “girls’ association” had gone to a meeting of the imam. They had asked him if they themselves could be the judges of what they needed to do to be good Muslims. According to the imam, he himself had no authority to force them to behave correctly, but their fathers, brothers or husbands did. These men even have a duty to force them to live according to the guidelines of Islam. If men can prevent someone from committing a sin (günah), they receive a blessing that involves a reward in heaven (sevap), but this is not the case for women.

Not only older men, but younger ones too are urged to take more seriously their responsibility for their women and in particular to guard their moral behavior. The case of Tayfun, a brother of one of the girls who participated in the research, is a good example in this respect:

Cennet’s brother Tayfun (Cennet is a pupil at a secondary school) had many difficulties and had to change schools. Tayfun himself had chosen to go to an Islamist boarding school, which according to Cennet was very strict. Every morning at 5 o’clock, the boys were woken to pray, and their last prayer was at twelve o’clock at night. According to Cennet, Tayfun had already changed a lot. He carefully checked all the food they bought to make sure that it did not contain any forbidden ingredients. He was also critical of the way his sisters dressed. Recently they had gone to a wedding and, in his view, the skirt of his elder sister was too short, even though she had bought that skirt in the presence of her mother. Their father intervened, and told Tayfun that he should not bother his sisters. Cennet was very pleased that her father had intervened.

On the other hand, Tayfun was taught at school that his sisters should obey these rules.

Young men, mostly “second generation” such as Tayfun, feel comfortable in an Islamist worldview. It was mainly the brothers of the immigrant Turkish girls involved in the study who were attracted to it. The immigration context is particularly harmful to the patriarchal role of young men in general (Kiray 1990). The socio-economic position of most young Turkish men is worse than that of their Belgian counterparts. As we have already pointed out, they are, on average, not well educated and unemployment among them is high. Even more so than women, they are targets of racism (Timmerman 1999). For these Muslim men who want to “re-legitimate” their male authority, the mosque may gain a new significance. Young Turkish immigrant men who are seeking a more prestigious status in society are gratified by the new social concern that the Islamist frame of reference has to offer (Timmerman 1994). Feeling insecure and searching for stability and a more positive identity elsewhere, they find solace in an Islamist ideology. Although girls may also find this kind of solace in Islamism, for girls, education too can offer some alternatives.

I discovered that indeed the Islamist view was considerably less attractive to educated Turkish girls than to educated Turkish boys. Unlike for educated girls, Islamism can strengthen the position of educated boys within the private sphere of their community, without damaging their freedom of movement in a Western public domain. Meral, a medical student, told me:

“Milli Görüs is still gaining influence in the Turkish immigrant community. They have a lot of support among the second and the third generation boys who have failed in most social domains. This movement is less successful among girls. There are a lot of young women who go to Milli Görüs because their husband is a supporter of the organization. I know only a few Turkish girls who are studying and who follow this militant Islamic perspective. Bahar, for example, is a first-year History student. Before, she tried several other subjects. Another girl, Rabia, already in her fourth year of Medicine, is totally covered (kapalı). She dresses that way because of her family. To escape this she went to live on her own last year. During that time she was uncovered. But now she’s living with her parents again because she was unable to cope financially. Now she is “kapalı” again. Rabia is a very intelligent but also a very pragmatic girl. Among the Turkish boys who are studying, the sympathy for Milli Görüs is much more widespread. The five Turkish boys in the first year of Medicine are all from Milli Görüs. My friend Ayten (a girl) who is also in the first year says that these boys refuse to talk to her. In their eyes Ayten is a “renegade”: according to them it is not proper for a Turkish woman to dress and to behave in a Western manner.”

In order to understand why the Islamist perspective is more successful amongst educated boys than girls one has to take into account the enormous difference between the social status of an uneducated and an educated Turkish girl. As we have already pointed out, education improves the social status of a girl dramatically. It gives her an opportunity to occupy a position in the public domain of a Western society, besides her place within the family. This makes education, if it is attainable, a very attractive goal for many Turkish girls. For boys, on the other hand, education can at best add some prestige to their already solid public status in their Turkish community. In other words, boys do not need education to acquire a place in Western

public life. By contrast, an Islamist worldview succeeds in improving the status of boys also in the public domain as well as within the family. Unlike with girls who opt for the Islamist perspective, their Islamist public role does not stand in the way of participation in Western society.

Conclusion

Turkish nationalism, both secular and religious, is a significant element in the context of immigration. All young women who participated in this research were proud to be Turks. However, there is considerable diversity in what these immigrant Turkish girls consider to be “authentically” Turkish. As Anthony Smith (1986:2) asserts, “ethnic communities, so easily recognizable from a distance, seem to dissolve before our eyes the closer we come and the more we attempt to pin them down”. Both the Turkish girl who fully participates in Western society and the one who is completely wrapped up in an Islamist way of life, define their socio-cultural praxis as “truly” Turkish. For claiming their “Turkish” identity, immigrant girls have the possibility of choosing between a secular (Kemalism) or a religious (Islamism) form of nationalism. Both approaches value learning but only the former associates it with participation in Western society.

Following secular nationalism or Kemalism, the school system is the path to the emancipation and social mobility of women in the public world. This dyad of education and nationalism guarantees the recognition of women with a good education in the broader social domain. The success of this “tandem” can be explained only by the favorable co-occurrence of several other factors. The status of education is premised on the “old” social perspective of Islam; even the most conservative milieus do not oppose knowledge. Besides, education makes women more efficient in contemporary capitalist society.

As the possibilities associated with secular nationalism are only open to those who are successful in their studies, only few can benefit from it. Immigrant Turkish girls who do not study –the majority among them-, may nonetheless still gain recognition within Islamism, as that recognition requires only respect for the Islamic family values and orthopraxis.

The attraction to Islamism may be facilitated as Islamist worldview is gaining influence among the Turkish immigrant community of Belgium. Several characteristics make Islamism attractive as an ideological frame for establishing a social project in a modern society. Likewise, some processes that are inherently connected with the migration context enhance the appeal of an Islamist worldview. Contrary to secular nationalism -as formulated within Kemalism- recognition is obtained through defining oneself as an opponent of the West. This is achieved through affiliation to the Umma by means of orthopraxis. Kemalism’s dyad of “nationalism and education” has been replaced in Islamism with the dyad of “nationalism and orthopraxis”. In this movement, the dynamic orientation towards progress and collective development is not lost; but the route to fulfillment is different.

Nonetheless, the “educational culture” in which successful girls participate and the social mobility they anticipate has proven to be an important alternative that diminishes the appeal of the Islamist project. Boys on the other hand, need no “alternatives” to improve their status as their dominant position is considered evident within any Islamic frame of reference. With their status, educated girls could, if they

wanted to, take advantage of Kemalist reforms that guarantee their social emancipation and give them a place in public life within their Turkish immigrant community and within Belgian society. Unlike uneducated girls, these girls have a genuine choice between a secular and an Islamist frame of reference.

Like previous research (Lamphere 1992), this study indicates that interrelations between newcomers and an established society are not just a matter of ethnicity but can be affected by the possibilities that are offered in terms of education. These possibilities, however, have to be in tune with what is considered suitable by the newcomers. In this instance, it appears that high achievement in Belgian schools is significant for Turkish girls not just within the Belgian context but also within a Turkish frame of reference.

Notes

- ¹ Source: "Onderwijsstatistieken - Departement Onderwijs", 1996, Brussels.
- ² 'Ethnic identity' is defined as the feeling of belonging and continuity in existence constituted by self- or other-ascription and which claims common ancestors and cultural tradition (Roosens 1994).
- ³ The term 'second generation' refers to children of immigrants who were born in the host country, in this case Belgium.
- ⁴ The names I use are pseudonyms.
- ⁵ All italicised sections of text are excerpts from my diary.
- ⁶ In 1991, 879 Turkish nationals claimed Belgian nationality. This number grew to 3886 in 1992 and to 6572 in 1995. The increase is due to the relaxation of formal procedures, which took effect on 1 January 1992. (Cf. Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en voor Racismebestrijding. Jaarverslag 1996, Brussels).
- ⁷ In this context, J. Kellas (1991: 75) speaks of 'reform nationalism'. The initial purpose of this type of nationalism was national rebirth. It was, however, limited to the existing state. Nationalists - and in the first place Atatürk - were already governing the state. It was hoped that reform would bring about economic modernisation, release from foreign control, and protection of the national identity. The reform nationalists overthrew European imperialists and established a modern state. According to Kellas, this kind of nationalism expressed itself most clearly in antipathy towards foreigners and in the promotion of the national language and culture.
- ⁸ The Fazilet Partisi is the successor of the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) of Necmettin Erbakan, that was outlawed by the Constitutional Court in January 1998.
- ⁹ The community of Moslim believers
- ¹⁰ In Belgium there are other Turkish Islamic movements besides Milli Görüs, but they are all less prominent. An example is the Süleymancilar, which was founded in 1973 in Germany. In the 1980s, their network encompassed 150 mosques and 300 local organisations in the European Community. The Naksibendi and the Nurcu movements are also active in Belgium (Leman 1992).
- ¹¹ Turkish word for association.

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