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IMAMS WITHOUT DISTRICT: CHANGING ROLES OF CONTEMPORARY MOSQUE OFFICIALS

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ÖZ

Bir cami görevlisi olarak yeni imamın görev tanımı fiilen değişmiştir. Geleneksel vazifelerden bazılarının terk edilmesiyle birlikte modern imamın artık bir dizi yeni görevi vardır.

Yeni imamın konumu ve yetkisi, sadece Avrupa'da değil, Türkiye'de de değişmiş durumdadır. Avrupa'da bir imamdan beklenenler, mesela, Ankara'daki bir imamdan beklenenlerden fazladır; Avrupa'daki bir cami önce bir Türk mahallesidir, ondan sonra dini bir mekandır ve imam da bu alanın merkezi şahsiyetidir.

Anahtar Kavramlar: İmam, İslam, Avrupa, Diyanet, Avrupa'da İslam, mahalle, göç.

ABSTRACT

The job description of the new imam as a mosque official has de facto changed. A contemporary imam is now responsible for a number of new tasks while some of the conventional ones have been abandoned.

The position and authority of the new *imam* – not only in Europe, but also in native Turkey – have changed. Expectations placed on an imam in Europe are greater than those placed on an *imam* in Ankara; a mosque in Europe is first a Turkish district, and second a religious place, with the *imam* as the central figure of this sphere.

Keywords: imam, Islam, Europe, Diyanet, Islam in Europe, district, immigration

> "Unlike the Ottoman district imam (*mahalle imamı*), the alternative agent of the republic, "the teacher," was not successful in communicating and changing Turkish society."[1]
>
> Şerif Mardin

1. Introduction

Ottoman district imams (*mahalle imamları*) were very functional agents bridging the gap between the civil and official spheres. With regard to their duties and rights, they were key personages in counseling people in their local communities.

As part of their job description, district imams would solve problems like disagreements among different groups or disputes in families in addition to providing arbitration when needed. They were also officially responsible for registration of any person or family moving in or visiting the district. Of course, issuing marriage certificates was one of the most important duties of a district imam, for which he was also paid.

Unlike Ottoman district imams, a contemporary imam in Turkey, or even in Europe, officially has only religious obligations in and around his local mosque, without any social or semi-juridical functions. However, because of the needs a congregation has or the pressure they may put on the imam, contemporary imams usually execute more duties than stated in their official job description.

A general view on Turkish Islam is essential to understanding its influence in the Turkish diaspora, including Western Europe. I have summarized in three categories the story of Islam and its socio-political reflections in the country of origin of guest workers: official Islam, parallel Islam and Islamic movement. The last one is a contemporary phenomenon,

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[1] Master sociologist Şerif Mardin in an interview to Radikal Newspaper 25.05.2008.

while the first two are examples of old institutions with more or less new forms.

The Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA/Diyanet) is the successor of *meşihat,* Ottoman ministry of religious issues, and Theology (İlahiyat) faculties are a replacement for classical *madrasas*. Although Sufi orders were abolished in November 1925, *tariqahs* still have a strong influence in Turkish social networks in the diaspora.

In this article I would like to compare the job descriptions of Ottoman district imams to the contemporary Turkish guest imams serving in Western Europe for short terms, and discuss the chances of possibly drawing inspiration from a traditional experience in our post-secular world. About the real situation of imams in Europe I mainly based on my own empiric work in the field between 2005-2010 in the Netherlands. My fieldwork consists of participant observations, survey with 73 imams and semi-structured interviews with 13 imams.

2. Ottoman religious bureaucracy

The Ottoman State was a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual empire, where religious diversity was institutionalized with the application of multiple judicial systems called "*millet system*." The word "*Millet*" is derived from the Arabic word "*millah*", which occurs in the Qur'an. It means faith and, in this sense, a religious community. However, the rights and duties of "the people of the book,"—i.e., Christians and Jews—are recognized as a reflection of Islamic jurisprudence. The "*millet* system" began with Mehmed II the Conqueror (Fatih, r. 1444-46 and 1451-81).

On June 1, 1453, just three days after the conquest of Constantinople (Istanbul), Mehmed II appointed the most anti-Western clergyman – also an anti-Catholic-- , Georgious Kourtesios Scholarios (d. 1473) as Gennadios II, Ecumenical Patriach of Constantinople and head of the Greek Orthodox Church. He also became the political leader of the Greeks, the largest minority in the empire. The Ottoman sultan received Georgious in person and gave him a crosier, a mantle, and a *berat* -- an

official document bearing his signature.[2] According to this official document, the patriarch was authorized to regulate civil and social life of the Greeks (Ortaylı 2008, Karpat and Yildirim 2010). The Armenian Gregorian Church and the Chief Rabbinate of the Jews were also granted these privileges. All religious groups had the right and institutions to train their clergy according to their own tradition.

The dissolution of the "*millet* system," which provided autonomy for religious and ethnic entities of the empire, began in the 19th century. The Ottoman State attempted an integration of the minorities with the Imperial Rescript of Gülhane (*Gülhane hatt-ı hümâyûnu,* also known as *Tanzimat Fermanı*) in 1839 and *Islahat Fermanı* in 1856, with two *fermans*[3] signed by the sultan to grant equal citizenship rights to all religious and ethnic groups.

In the classical Ottoman era, similar to other religious groups, Islamic religious bureaucracy was organized as consisting of two main branches: *Meşihat* (*mashihat*), and religious higher education institutions known as *madrasas*. *Meşihat* was an administrative institution and *şeyhülislam*[4] (Pixley 1976, White and White 2015), as the head of the *Meşihat,* was a special member of the *dīvān*, or cabinet, appointed directly by the sultan (Heyd 1969). Madrasas were the universities, mostly established by a sultan or a vizier; the salary of professors (*muderris or dersiam*), grants of the students and other costs were covered by a *waqf*, or a pious endowment established to generate income for the university. In the contemporary Republic of Turkey, Diyanet (PRA) would be seen as the successor of *Meşihat* and İlahiyat (theology) faculties -- or academic programs -- as a replacement for *madrasas*. I could not say that they are precisely the same, but I see a direct correlation and continuity between the missions and functions of these institutions.

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[2] All other sultans after Fatih Sultan Mehmed also followed this symbolic ritual.
[3] Higher legislative documents signed by the Sultan.
[4] Head of the religious bureaucracy in the Ottoman State.

3. Situating imams in Turkish tradition

There was no specific training for imams in the Ottoman era until 1913, and imams were not included in the scholars (*ulama*) class. However, a "*berat*,"[5] certificate with the signature of the Sultan was always required for their appointment. Imams were considered as servants of the state, but were paid by the endowments of *mescit*s (*masjid*),[6] or mosques. The salary of the imam and sometimes the source of this payment were also specified in the *berat* of the Sultan. Appointment of an imam was possible only through the suggestion of the board of trustees of the mosque or by a judge (*kadı/qāḍī*),[7] as well as the confirmation of the Sultan and a written certificate. This certificate clearly specifies the duties of an imam and only gives him the right to lead daily prayers and fulfil other administrative duties, such as writing a statement of marriage or conducting funeral services. If specified, the imam would also deliver sermons and the sultan would give him another separate *berat* for this additional duty. In this case, the appointed person would now be called an *imam-hatip* (imam-preacher) instead of the mere imam.

If an imam was appointed as the district imam, this prestigious title was noted in the *berat*. There was only one district imam (*mahalle imamı*) in a district, but sometimes more than one mosque, or *masjid*. A *Masjid* only has a *mihrāb* (the niche for leading prayer), while a mosque also has a *minbar* -- a short flight of steps used as a platform by a preacher in a mosque for the Friday sermon. If a sponsor wanted to put a *minbar* in a *masjid*, an authorization from the Sultan was required. In this case, the sponsor would be required to pay the salary of the *hatip*. (Beydilli 2013).

When an imam was appointed without the responsibility of a district, it would also be specified in the *berat* of appointment that he was

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[5] Official documents signed by the Sultan.

[6] *Masjid* (mescit) is a small mosque in districts, mostly without a minbar and used only for daily prayers. The Friday prayer is a big feast and convention in a central mosque or in a *musalla,* a suitable outdoor place.

[7] Qadi (kadı) was a judge, but also acted as governor in most of the cases in the Ottoman system Masud, M. K., R. Peters and D. S. Powers (2012). Dispensing justice in Islam : Qadis and their judgements. Leiden ; Boston, Brill..

"without district" (*mahallesiz*). When a new sultan ascended the throne or in the event the *berat* was lost, obtaining a new *berat* was required. However, in modern Turkey, all imams and other employees of mosques and Diyanet in general, in both Ankara and other provinces, are civil servants, and their salaries are paid by taxpayers' money.

This very brief summary of the Ottoman system clearly shows that the source of payment presents the essential difference between the Ottoman and the republican models of employing imams.

The Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA, Diyanet)[8] was established on March 3, 1924 under Law number 429, replacing the *meşihat (mashihat)* of the Ottoman period, which had served since the 17th century. *Meşihat* and its head *şeyhülislam* (*sheikh al-islam*) were the official final authority for adjudicating on religious problems of the state as well as the public (Pixley 1976). There were *muftī*s appointed by *mashihat* in provinces, cities and countries (Masud, Messick et al. 2005). Contemporary Diyanet also has *muftī*s in all provinces and countries, but a modern Turkish *muftī* is an administrative official rather than a religious authority.

Diyanet has 119,743 officials, nearly 110,000 of whom are imams and other clerics,[9] with the remainder appointed as *muftīs* and administrative staff (diyanet.gov.tr). Diyanet started an academic education project for imams in the period of former PRA president Mehmet Sait Yazıcıoğlu (1987-1992). After nearly a decade of stagnation, the education project was reanimated during President Prof. Dr. Ali Bardakoğlu's term (2003-2010), and further in the term of President Prof.

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[8] In Turkish: *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (DİA)*. Official translation of this name in English, according to the website of Diyanet and other documents, like some English articles of the President of Diyanet, is Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA). Therefore, I prefer this official translation of the Diyanet instead of Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) which is a common usage by researchers in this area. I also use "Diyanet" in short.

[9] Based on the list updated on 31.12.2014, www.diyanet.gov.tr. According to this list, there are 74.340 imams, 12.050 prayer callers (müezzin-kayyum), 2.724 preachers and 19.906 instructors of Qur'an courses.

Dr. Mehmet Görmez (2010-) with approximately 40,000 imams pursuing academic education at a faculty or college level.[10]

4. Islam in Europe

Identity policies and migration are two key concepts for understanding the presence and development of Islam in Europe, including issues related to imams, mosques, Islamic education and spiritual care. Descendants of the first-generation "guest workers" are now beginning to seek another identity, clashing at the same time with the legacy of their parents, and with the top-down integration (assimilation) policies of the social engineers of European national states (Roy 2002, Roy 2004, Sunier 2012).

The recent Muslim population in Europe consists mainly of a migrant working class and their descendants, born in or immigrating to Europe with family unification. Labor migration from the Muslim world to European countries began in the late 1950s and reached its peak in the 1970s. At the beginning, most guest workers came from specific areas with historical ties to the host country: a colonial past, in the case of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia for France; India and Pakistan for the United Kingdom; or being in the same alliance during a world war, like Turkey for Germany. The recent picture is more complicated, because, for example, Turks have also immigrated to France, Belgium and the Netherlands; Moroccans have also immigrated to Belgium and the Netherlands. Italy and Spain were not principal migrant destinations before the 1990s.

The Muslim population of Europe is estimated to be somewhere between 12 to 25 million people, or up to 5% of the total population of the continent. There is no precise data about the Muslims living in Europe, because the European legal system does not allow the registration of race and religion. Most Muslims have European citizenship (Roy 2004).

[10] www.diyanet.gov.tr.

Both Turkish and European governments are interested in the issue of mosques and imams in Europe because of their social identity policies.

According to Austrian Muslim writer Muhammad Asad (d. 1992), the crusades (1095-1272) were the most important experience of European thought concerning Islam. He argues that this hostile confrontation that occurred in the childhood of Western civilization continues to cast a shadow on the relationship between Europe and Islam, and therefore, Islam is still considered an outlier of Europe (1947, 2001).

On the other hand, Lewis argues that we are now living in the time of "third confrontation of Islam with the West (Lewis 2002)." In the last three decades in particular, Islam has increasingly moved to the center of immigration and diversity debates (Zolberg and Long 1999), and the core of this debate is perceived as a crisis of multiculturalism (Modood and Ahmad 2007). However, the typical Muslim image in Europe is still 'non-European' (Hellyer 2009, Yılmaz and Aykaç 2012).

Throughout the last decade, Islam has stood out in Europe because of public controversy and tragedy, like the ban of *hijab* in public schools in France (2003), the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh (2004), the Madrid (2004) and London (2005) bombings, the Danish cartoon controversy (2005), PEGIDA demonstrations in Germany (since October 2014), and the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris (January 2015). There have been several national and local debates as well, surrounding the establishment of new mosques, Islamic education institutions, dual citizenship of Muslim immigrants, slaughtering of animals according to Islamic rules, and circumcision.

These events, coupled with the anti-Islamic discourse of some political leaders[11] in Europe, confirm the thesis of Asad, who advocated the idea that a relationship based on peace and tolerance between Europe

[11] Most prominent anti-Islamic politic figures in Westerm Europe were Geert Wilders of Party for Freedom (PVV) of the Netherlands and Marina Le Pen of French Front National (FN).

and Islam is impossible. According to extremists from each side, Islam and Europe are sworn enemies.

On the other hand, some other Muslim and non-Muslim writers notice the diversity in Islam and among Muslims living in Europe (Azmeh 1993). Autochthonous or immigrant, the origins of immigrants, gender and generation creates variations of Islam in Europe (Azmeh and Fokas 2007).

Ideologue theorist Anton Zijderveld of the Dutch Christian Democrat Party (CDA), states that electors of anti-Islamist Geert Wilders in the Netherlands do not have knowledge on Islam and Muslims, especially on diversity in Islam, which has more factions than Protestantism.[12] Many variations of Islam interact with a changing and redefined Europe.

Turkish sociologist Nilüfer Göle argues that defining Europe as an identity based on shared history and common Judeo-Christian values means 'othering' Turkish and Muslim migrants. Alternatively, she defines Europe as a laboratory for the future, which will entail testing "claims for universalism and its limits" by the Turkish accession into the European Union and an Islamic presence in Europe (2006). Furthermore, Göle talks about "de-centering Europe, re-centering Islam," which means placing Islamic civilization in the picture and allowing Islamic diversity to play a role "in reshaping European public spheres" (2012).

In its modern history, European countries situated Christianity and its variations by redefining the church-state relationship. The Jewish tradition also had a place in this historical process. When Islam became an internal participant in Europe (Johnson 2009) after World War II, mainly via labor migration (Parsons and Smeeding 2006), a two-sided difficulty was revealed since there was no church institution in the Islamic tradition. European secularism was based on a separation between the church and

[12] "De islam is nog meer verdeeld dan het protestantisme. Waar heeft Wilders het over? Maar mensen weten dat niet. Ook in kleine dorpen, waar geen Marokkaan of Turk woont, zijn mensen doodsbang voor de islam." http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/article/detail/1108248/2010/06/12/Geef-het-nieuwe-Nederland-de-tijd.dhtml retrieved on 12.03.2014.

the state, and the governments saw Islamic "churches" as players in the game. The Milli Görüş (Nationalistic View) community, Diyanet or the Süleymancı[13] community (the followers of Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan) are not "churches", and an imam is not the equivalent of a pastor, either.

The flip side of the coin is the difficulty of Muslims in understanding secularism. As Abu Zayd also states, according to the most dominant Muslim perspective, secularism is a Western phenomenon which Islam has nothing to do with (2008), because secularism is European exceptionalism, born from the relationship of church and state, which never existed in the Muslim world.

"To be a European Muslim"(Ramadan 1999) or not to be, this is the problem. But as Nielsen argues, the commitment of Muslims to be European opens opportunities both for Islam and for Europe (2007).

In this sense, Europe and Islam connect to each other by creating hyphenated identities (Göle 2006) such as Euro-Turks, Turkish-Dutch imams, or French-Muslims. Some other writers prefer to connect identities without hyphenating, such as "*Deutschkei*"(Argun 2003), an amalgam of *Deutschland and Turkei*.

Turkish-Islamic or Islamic-Turkish nationalism in the diaspora is a "hyphenated ideology" working together, however, in the late Ottoman era, Islamism and Turkish nationalism were rivals (Landau, Landau et al. 2010).

Islamic religious education in Europe and the influence of the state are two discussion points (Zirker 1988, Panjwani 2005, Khorchide 2008, Sunier 2009).

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[13] This religious group prefers calling self as Suleymanli instead of Suleymancı which generally used in Turkish society.

According to the Turkish ministry of foreign affairs, there are five million Turkish people living abroad, with four million of them in Western Europe.[14](Al-Hamarneh and Thielmann 2008).

Working and living in Europe was a brand-new situation for the Turkish "guest workers," as well as for the "landlords." In the beginning, Turkish migrants were only "workers", only "guests" (Abadan-Unat 1964, Abadan-Unat 1975), but in time they evolved into residents and citizens (Abadan-Unat 2002, Koopmans 2005).

When the guest-workers were upgraded to regular immigrants and later, to residents and citizens of the Netherlands, thanks to family reunion (1972-1980) and family formation (1980-1990), the establishment of mosques in this "Western return" and the permanency of immigration increased religiosity among Turkish immigrants in Europe (Schiffauer 1988).

5. Diyanet in Europe

Unlike a typical imam in Turkey, a Turkish imam temporarily serving in Europe plays multiple roles at the same time. As an imam, he performs religious services at the *mihrāb* of the mosque five times daily. As a preacher (*hatip*) at *minbar,* he delivers a sermon at least once every Friday. He is a Qur'ān tutor and teacher of Islam at weekend courses organized by the mosque institution. He visits families for counseling or arbitration, and visits patients and prisoners to give religious care or guidance. Some of them join dialogue activities and sometimes are invited by a food producer to issue and sign a "*halal*" certificate. In addition, the imam of a mosque represents the Islamic community before other religious groups.

The Turks settled in Europe, first as guest-workers (*gastarbeiter*), then, over the past fifty years, as immigrants, as I mentioned above. The immigrants' religious needs were generally not foreseen, and therefore the

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[14] http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-expatriate-turkish-citizens.en.mfa (retrieved, 1 March 2016).

immigrants themselves took the initiative for their religious needs in their own hands. As a result of this vacuum, certain religious communities (*cemaat*) and Sufi orders (*tarikat*) started taking advantage of the fact that a 'religious market' had developed, and organized themselves into non-profit organizations (*vereniging* or *stichting*). Hence, many of the Turkish religious groups opened up branches in Europe (Mumcu 1987), including the Netherlands, as I summarized earlier. Following the 1980 coup-d'etat, the Turkish state also felt that it was necessary to have a presence in Europe, via the Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA, Diyanet) of Turkey.

State-supported Diyanet organized itself along the same lines as the religious communities who were already active in Europe, and successfully competed for people's attention. Within a very short time, they became the largest and most powerful Muslim community in Europe. Following the AK Party's ascension to power, the party's differing religious politics were also felt in Europe. The AK Party positioned itself similarly to the Christian Democrats in Europe, which resulted in greater acceptance and visibility for religion in the public sphere. While receiving support from religious groups and drawing strength from the use of religious symbols, the AK Party enabled the state to make use of religious opportunities. The Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), which was set up to serve with a monopoly on religious affairs, and as a first stage of development in Europe, tried to bring together all the various Turkish religious communities under its roof, through what I call their "umbrella policy." 'Bringing together' does not mean organizing all of them under the same organization, but rather creating greater inner communication among religious groups, and a greater coordination in religious activities and strategies. Through this 'umbrella policy,' the Diyanet aims to embrace the various religious groups' formations and become the representative of all Turkish Muslims in Western Europe.

Diyanet strives to keep in touch with all Turkish people living in Europe, not only for addressing the religious questions of the immigrants, but also as a civil representative of their social and cultural needs as an organization.

European politicians and academics generally hold that Turkey is using religion and Diyanet to preserve the identity and language of the Turks living in Europe in order to ensure a certain level of political, cultural and economic power as well as representation in European states. As a concrete step, the Presidency of Turks Abroad and Relative Communities[15] was established in 2010 to coordinate strategies and politics, and "to defend the rights of Turkish citizens living abroad, to organize them and to keep their connections with the mother country."[16]

The religious services, which were initially organized through the initiative of immigrants themselves, and later on through the Turkish state's PRA, caught the attention of European governments in later stages, when it became apparent that the immigrant workers were to be permanent members of their societies.

I now observe that the European states are all, one by one, creating services to satisfy the religious needs of European Turks through their own unique formulas and approaches, as these states take their place in the 'religious market.' The fact that the collective Muslim sub-consciousness—in particular that of the Sunnis—is open to state influence, could have played an encouraging role in the involvement of the state. Since an organized religion holds great power, it naturally competes with the power of the state.

Currently imams serving in Europe are only temporary in their capacity as employees of the Turkish state, or that they are people invited by religious sects to Europe, again, on a temporary basis. This temporary character of the imams' work in Europe is mandated by Turkish Diyanet decisions. Just as the religion itself came from on high, it now seems as if the imams are from another planet too, as there continues to be a vast cultural, lingual and generational barriers between the imams and the second generation European Turks. This gap is, at times, so large as to

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[15] Dış Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı

[16] http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=930439&title=dis-turkler-baskanligi-kuruluyor (retrieved on 29.04.2010).

stand in the way of communication. However, mosque congregations are still largely comprised of first-generation immigrants in the case of the Turkish community, while the majority of Moroccan immigrants are the second generation in the Netherlands. The first-generation Turkish mosque congregation in the Netherlands is apprehensive of the future appointment of non-Turkish imams in Turkish mosques settled in the Netherlands.

6. Importing Imams into Europe

The first professional imam was invited to the Netherlands by workers to lead the rituals of fasting for the holy month of Ramadan (Güney, interview). The workers organized and chose Hasan Güney as their chief both in the factory, and as religious leader to perform religious services. Güney was not educated as an imam and he suggested inviting a real imam during the month of Ramadan. An imam was invited and successfully performed the rituals of Ramadan, such as leading daily prayers and *teravih,* the special prayer in the nights of the holy month, as well as preaching Fridays and every night before *teravih* prayer.

Some European governments have improved plans on training homemade imams in the last decade. In the Netherlands, the first attempt at a homemade imam education began in the theology program at VU University of Amsterdam in 2005, and in 2006, Islamic theology education began at University of Leiden.[17] In the same period, Turkish Diyanet tried to educate European Turkish students in Ankara and Istanbul at Theology faculties. In the near future, we can expect a new generation of imams in Europe who have also been educated at institutions in Europe.

There are also a few female preachers, female Qur'ān tutors and religion teachers, quite invisible and mostly unpaid, who work voluntarily in women's organizations of the mosque community. In most cases, the imam's wife assists her husband voluntarily and this ability of the wife is a preference in appointment of an imam.

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[17] I give detailed information on Islamic theology education in Europe later in this chapter.

Social and economic conditions of Western Europe after the Second World War dictated the labor import. According to the Ankara agreement of 1963, Turkish labor was exported to some European countries, including Germany and the Netherlands. After several years of labor in a European country, Turkish guest workers obtained residence permits and later, the right for citizenship. Almost all of the first generation guest workers accepted these rights to stay in a European country. Sometimes, when there were difficulties obtaining legitimate citizenship, guest workers used an alternative way to get a quick permission of residence or citizenship: marrying a European citizen. Some of these marriages were real, but most of them were temporary or sham marriages that existed only on paper. This situation gave rise to several religious questions, such as the verdict of Islam on marriage with a woman or man of the People of the Book (Judeo-Christian), or the situation of the first wife, if the person was already married in Turkey. Most workers came from the rural areas of Turkey, where official marriage was not widespread in the ‘60s and ‘70s. They were married according to their local customs in the presence of the imam of the village. Their children were also not officially registered; only when a male had to do his military service in his 20’s did men apply to the office of the governor to register the marriage first and then all the children. Most guest workers came from this cultural environment and were only religiously wed without no official documents. They wanted to get citizenship first, or residence permit to obtain the right to bring their families from Turkey.

Some Turkish imams came to the Netherlands with a temporary appointment in a Diyanet Mosque in the Netherlands, but after the end of their temporary work, they stayed in the Netherlands. Some of them preferred to work in other mosque organizations, mostly in Milli Görüş, while yet others tried to keep their independence by choosing not to work as imams.[18]

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[18] Because my fieldwork was in The Netherlands, all examples are from this country. Here are some examples:

The motivation of imams who prefer to stay after their official appointment period varies from pursuing a career or making money, to religious idealism. In some cases, imams are primarily committed to the religious community, rather than the official authority of PRA. When the religious community makes a decision, the imam may decide to risk his future at Diyanet. Not returning to Turkey after the end of the official appointment period means that the imam loses his rights to complete his career in the homeland.

7. Education of Imams

Diyanet imams working in the Netherlands are selected from among nearly 140,000 PRA personnel, including imams, preachers and *muftīs*, all of them civil employees. Diyanet has no specific, regular 'imam education' schools or faculties. Imams and other employees working at PRA for religious services are educated in *İmam-Hatip* Schools at a secondary level education and in theology faculties at a university level. The training of imams in *İmam-Hatips* as well as İlahiyat faculties are

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Arslan Karagül came to the Netherlands as a Diyanet imam in 1983. He pursued his M.A. with the support of the Turkish counselor of religious affairs, Dr. Fahri Demir, and ISN in his official period of working as an imam. After this temporary appointment, he stayed in the Netherlands for one year and wrote his M.A. and Ph.D. at UvA. He pursued his education and worked as an Islamic Spiritual Care specialist in hospitals in Utrecht and in Amsterdam (1995-2005). In 2005, he was appointed a Professor of Islamic Spiritual Care in VU University Amsterdam.

Nedim Bahçekapılı was appointed in the Netherlands as an imam in 1993. When his official work ended in 1997, he joined the Islamic University of Rotterdam (IUR). After the splitting of the IUR, he became the director of the Islamic University of Europe (IUE).

Hüseyin Kerim Ece worked in the Netherlands as an imam between 1985 and1995, first for Diyanet and later for Milli Görüş. He is now working as an Islamic Spiritual Care expert in a prison.

Ali Türk was appointed as imam in the Netherlands in 2001. After his official work as a Diyanet imam, he chose to stay in the Netherlands. After the end of his official work period in the mosque in 2005, he worked in a factory. His wife also worked in a non-religious working environment, but both of them continued giving voluntary religious lessons in some mosque communities.

Bünyamin Kılıçarslan is also a former Diyanet imam. After his official work period with Diyanet, he stayed in the Netherlands as an imam in a Milli Görüş Mosque. He is a typical local mosque imam interested only in the religious services in the mosque. He feels he never needs to learn the Dutch language in order to use it in his services. External contact is always arranged by the mosque administration, the Diyanet mosque and the Milli Görüş mosque. His family still lives in Turkey and he hopes to return to Turkey after a few extra years of working.

criticized with the claim that the curriculum is more theoretical and that imams need practical training during their services at mosques (Buyrukçu 2006).

İmam-Hatip Schools are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of National Education and provide basic education on the recitation of the Qur'ān, (*qirā‹a, kırā›at*), the interpretation of the Qur›ān (*tafsīr*), tradition of the Prophet (*hadīth*), Islamic faith (*akāid*), the Islamic systematic of theology (*kelām*), Islamic jurisprudence and ethics (*fiqh*), oratory (*hitābet*), and the methodology of understanding and applying Islam in daily life (*usūl-i fiqh*). The medium of education is Turkish but the students also learn Arabic with an emphasis on grammar and classical religious texts, especially *tafsīr* and *hadith*. *İmam-Hatip* Schools teach exactly the same curriculum as regular high schools (*genel lise*) regarding social and scientific subjects to students between 14-18 years. Courses on religious topics are an additional element in the curriculum.

Female preachers follow a similar path as their male colleagues, but it is not always as straightforward. A female preacher, Fatma Ömeroğlu-Ergüneş, waited for four years to get permission from her father to continue her education at a faculty. According to the perception of her family, when girls continue higher education they lose their Islamic identity and ethical values.

"I cried for four years when I saw Istanbul University. After four years, with the grace of Allah, my family gave me permission to attend a faculty. My first choice was medical faculty but after the entrance exam I was located in Theology Faculty of Ankara. It was not my first choice but it was also one of them. Marmara University did not have a faculty of theology yet, but only a program at the level of an Institute. I attended the Theology Faculty of Ankara University for two and a half months, then I moved to Istanbul, because the Theology Institute at Marmara University in Istanbul became a faculty that year" (Fatma Hoca- interview).

Fatma Hoca was the first female graduate of the *Haseki* in-service training Institute of Diyanet (Presidency of Religious Affairs – PRA). Her story demonstrates that the opportunities for female theologians are less available than for male theologians in their education process in Turkey because of cultural, historical and social reasons. There is no discrimination regulating policy in the process of appointing female candidates in PRA. I asked President of Diyanet Prof. Dr. Mehmet Görmez the reason why at least one female member was not on the Higher Council of Religious Affairs at Diyanet. He said, "The members are selected through an exam, and almost all of the candidates are male."[19] There are relatively more female students in *İmam-Hatip* Schools and theology faculties (60% female and 40% male, according to Ali Köse from Marmara University), but there are relatively fewer female employees at PRA and at the theology faculties. This can be explained by either the unwillingness of women to apply for these positions, or that employers (PRA or the faculty) do not prefer them. Most female graduates of theology faculties choose to become homemakers or work as teachers or Qur'an tutors, where they can spare more time for their children and household. The strong patriarchal culture affects both men and women. Men do not 'give' more room to women; but also, for the most part, women do not try to show more initiative, or 'get' more responsibility.

8. Appointment of Imams

In principle, *İmam-Hatip* secondary and high schools prepare students in Turkey to become candidate imams with theoretical classes and training in the mosques; but Diyanet does not accept these candidates directly as imams. They can only be appointed as imams after passing a selection exam. After the appointment, in-service training continues. The same system is applied in the process of appointment of *muftīs* and preachers. They are first appointed as imams in mosques and only after they have completed their theology education at a university. Parallel to

[19] Personal conversation in 2007. He was vice president, and after Bardakoğlu, Prof. M. Görmez was appointed as President of Diyanet on November 11, 2010.

their formal education, they also attend an in-service training academy for at least two and half years. *Muftī* and preacher (*müftü/vāiz*) candidates attend high-level seminars on *tafsir, hadith, fiqh and kelām,* using classical Arabic textbooks and discussing them in Turkish.

An imam is responsible for daily services in the mosque, while a preacher (vaiz) works free from a designated mosque, preaching according to a monthly program in different mosques on different days, in addition to the sermon before the Friday prayer. Friday prayer is the most important prayer, and sometimes the mufti of the province preaches in the biggest mosque of the city and the other mosques listen to his sermon through an audio system established among the mosques. A mufti is the chief of all imams and other religious employees in a province. This is shortly the situation in Turkey, but there is a different selection process to become an imam abroad.

An appointment to a position of imam in Europe is only possible after sitting in a selection exam conducted by the employees of Diyanet. The first criterion is the professional qualification of the candidate. Although it is rarely the case, knowledge of a Western language is a preference. After the selection, imams attend an intensive orientation course for a month and a language-culture orientation course for three to six months. In Europe, local mosques request an imam from the local organization of Diyanet in Europe-in Germany, DİTİB (Diyanet-Germany), and in The Netherlands, ISN. These local requests are passed on to the central administration of Diyanet in Ankara via the attaché of the Consulate of Religious Affairs of the Turkish embassy.

Imams are appointed for a temporary period of four years and are expected to return to Turkey after completing their mission in Europe. Mostly they return to Turkey after this temporary period, but in some cases, imams prefer to stay in Europe to work in other fields. This temporary arrangement, which appoints Diyanet imams as civil servants of the Turkish government and retains their close ties to Turkey, is based on the prediction that guest workers in exile will return to the homeland.

This solution has repeatedly failed because of the "cultural and linguistic gap" (Ewing 2003) between the imams and the second and third generations of diaspora.

I observed that the professional level of imams appointed in Europe is higher than the average imams in Turkey. Most of the appointed imams in Europe are *muftis,* or preachers in Turkey, not just ordinary local mosque imams. Because Diyanet wants to send the most qualified imams to Europe, some of them have a Ph.D. and others have attended the *Haseki* in-training institute seminars of Diyanet.

This careful selection and appointment process of imams for European service takes place as a parallel strategy related to the general Turkish foreign policies. Turkey wants to be a part of the European community. With this vision of becoming a part of Europe, imams sent to Europe are carefully selected, and are expected to accomplish more than just tending to the needs of the local community. Requirements of their position in European society are also taken into account. A Diyanet imam in Europe can represent Turkish views in his work area, because he is, above all, an official of the Turkish government. On the other hand, an imam can be competing in the 'religious market' of Europe with non-Diyanet or non-Turkish imams, with the concept of homemade European imams, and with Christian priests. The educational background and professional qualifications of an average Diyanet imam are higher than most Turkish and Arabic imams, but lower than an average clergyman in Europe.

During a visit to Belgium in 2003, I asked the Turkish counselor of religious affairs in Brussels about the approach on the dilemma of homemade imams and imams sent from Ankara. He said, "This is a big issue that can be solved by politics of our civil and military bureaucracy, but I see no problem in the future. Because Turkey will be a member of EU, Ankara can appoint imams to Brussels or Paris the way they appoint imams to Van or Kayseri [Turkish cities FO]."[20] This quotation shows us

[20] Personal conversation in 2003 in Brussels.

that the vision of some Turkish religious bureaucrats regarding the effects of accession of Turkey into the EU was not realistic. There are no regulations that guarantee that Turkey could appoint imams in Europe as easily as it could within its borders

The structure of Turkish religious bureaucracy changed after 2005 with alterations in conditions and procedures of the appointment of attachés and counselors. According to a new regulation, theology academics can apply for an attaché or counselor position just like PRA employees who do not have an academic background. The Syndicate of PRA employees was against this new regulation and carried it to the court. Finally, the ruling was in favor of the new regulation of PRA. A Professor of History of Religion at Marmara University was appointed to a post in Paris for the first time and this sparked discussions as the judiciary process continued. After the solution of judicial problems, other academics have been appointed in Western Europe and the U.S. as religious counselors. A Professor of History of Religions from Uludağ University (Bursa) was appointed in the Netherlands, and a Tafsir professor from Ankara University was appointed in Washington. A Hadith professor, Ali Dere in Germany, was already an employee of PRA. According to this new policy and regulation, Diyanet aims to appoint academics with a religious background as representatives of the Turkish religious bureaucracy.

Milli Görüş also selects imams from people who have a background of *İmam Hatip* High Schools and theology programs in Turkey, in addition to theology programs of other Muslim countries, like al-Azhar of Cairo. Retired imams from Turkey or those imams who stay in Europe after their official appointment at Diyanet mosques has ended are the favorite imam candidates for Milli Görüş. All Milli Görüş imams in Europe, including the Netherlands, are appointed by the central administration of Milli Görüş in Cologne, but mostly after a proposal of the administration of the local mosque. There are around 150 CV's of imams from Turkey reserved in the administration of Milli Görüş in Cologne to appoint when needed (Ünye-interview).

As I described earlier, Milli Görüş is organized in the Netherlands in two different administrations. Both of them answer to the central administration in Cologne and each of them has around 20 mosques under their jurisdiction. Milli Görüş Zuid Nederland (NIF) has almost no permanent imams. They prefer to work with retired imams from Turkey or work with imams who stay for a limited period of time after their official work with Diyanet. Retired imams from Turkey, like other civil employees with the same degree, have a special passport (Green passport), which allows them to stay in Europe for three months without a visa. NIF prefers to work with these temporary imams instead of appointing a permanent imam. Director of NIF, Mehmet Yaramış, says that they do not depend on the imam, but on the administration in the mosque. The expectations of NIF from a local mosque imam are limited to leading the daily prayers and Friday sermon. If he can help in the education of children, he is welcome. According to Yaramış, NIF provides religious education in the mosques, often without involving the imam. They provide a separate crew for this mission. If an imam would like to help he is welcome to do so (Yaramış-interview). But this is not a common strategy of Milli Görüş, neither in Northern Holland nor in Germany or any other countries, according to a respondent from the executive of IGMG in Cologne (Ünye, interview). Milli Görüş Zuid-Nederland (NIF) does not prefer to share its authority with local mosque imams. The administration would like to keep their power over the community, and the administration perceives the imam as a rival of its authority. They believe that if an imam is appointed for a long time, the power of central administration will decrease.

Süleymanlis[21] educate and train their imams at special Qur›ān Courses that are like traditional *madrasas* in their curriculum. Some of them also attend official religious educational institutions in theology faculties, and later, the Haseki in-training academy of PRA. The community also has similar courses in the Netherlands where they follow the same strategy. They offer confessional religious education and imam

[21] This religious group, at least its Dutch branch prefers this name, means followers of scholar Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan.

training in their seminars, and have sent several imams or imams-in-training to new or established Dutch education institutions. Eighteen imams (or imams in training) have already begun their training at inHolland vocational school in Dutch language. Some of them want to attend the VU University of Amsterdam after graduating from the vocational school, according to the coordinator of this education in the community, M. Sagsu.[22]

Most of the preachers and other religious leaders of the *Hizmet* community (Gülen movement) are also educated in Turkish or Arabic (al-Azhar of Cairo) theology faculties like Milli Görüş. An imam of Ehl-i Beyt mosque of the *Shiʿī-Jaʿfarī* community in Den Haag is educated in Qoum of Iran.

As a common observation, I can say that all imams, preachers and other religious leaders are selected from among many candidates; therefore, they are, for the most part, better qualified than local imams serving in most local mosques in Turkey. The Islamic knowledge level and religious forming of the first-generation mosque congregation, however, are below an average mosque congregation in Turkey. The biggest disadvantage of the Diyanet Turkish imams serving in Europe is their limited work time in these countries. They used to be appointed for six years at the beginning of this project, but Turkish government noticed that after the six years, imams could earn the right of residence in these countries, and thus the duration of service was shortened to four years.

9. Challenge of the change: unique and shared roles of contemporary imam

The position and authority of the contemporary imam – not only in Western European countries but also in Turkey – has changed. The classical Ottoman district imam (*mahalle imamı*) was a very powerful and central person in society.[23] The imam was the representative and

[22] Personal conversation with Sagsu in December 2009 in Rotterdam.
[23] On the role, position and effect of Ottoman imams see: Tut, Faruk. *Osmanlılarda imam-hatiplik müessesesi* (Institution of imam-preacher in Ottomans) unpublished MA

spokesman of the district to the higher authorities until the first half of the 19th century (Ortaylı 1974, Ortaylı 1985). He was one of the most powerful leaders of the 'civil society,' if explained in modern terminology. With the advantage of being one of the people, an Ottoman imam played the role of mediator between people (*re‹āyā*) and official authorities of the state.

The job description of the new imams as mosque officers has de facto changed. The basic role of the imam in the mosque, such as the recitation of the Quran and leading prayers, remains important, but the new imam also functions as a social worker, a religious and social advisor, family consultant and spiritual care expert. Giving answers to religious questions is only a small part of his work.[24]

His role in the mosque is unique, but issuing a *fatwa* or answering religious questions are mostly shared roles. There are many alternatives to the imam in this area. All Muslims go to a mosque and can pray under the leadership of the imam of any mosque; however, they often reserve their questions for a particular imam. I can speak of "family imams" in the same way as family doctors.[25] These imams are not different imams, but are selected for their trust and content of the heart. Some Muslims choose a particular imam for mostly psychological reasons or as a part of family

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thesis, İstanbul 1991 and Akın, Ahmet. *1575-1600 tarihli Bursa şer'iye sicillerine gore din görevlisinin sosyal hayattaki rolü* (Role of religious servants in social life according to Bursa *sharīa* courts' registers 1577-1600) unpublished PhD thesis, Bursa 2002. For a critical view from within see: Ersoy, Mehmet Akif, *Safahat*, chapters "Asım" and "Köse İmam".

[24] Based on fieldwork for my PhD research between 2005-2010. The most important part of fieldwork was semi-structured interviews with 13 Turkish imams working in the Netherlands.

[25] There is a story by the Great Imam Abu Hanifa about his father asking a district *imam* some religious questions. As an old man, Abu Hanifa's father asked Abu Hanifa to guide him to a district imam. When he asked for some *fatwas* on worship issues, the district imam hesitated and did not want to answer. But Abu Hanifa said, "Give him a *fatwa*, because his heart trusts only your *fatwa*." I heard about the same situation concerning a professor of *fiqh* at Marmara University who was later Dean of the Faculty of Theology in Adapazarı M. Erkal. Tam isim gerekir His father also asked an ordinary mosque imam for *fatwas* instead ofhis son, who was a professor of *fiqh*. There is a psychological factor in accepting a *fatwa* from a certain *imam* or *muftī*.

tradition. When the father and mother follow an imam or *muftī*, the children can easily follow their parents.

The big dilemma in training and appointing imams is unsuitability of imam's background with the rapidly changing needs of the society. Although the task package of imam has changed, formations of the imams are not suited to keep up with the pace of the changing needs of the people.

10. Conclusion

The job description of the new imam as a mosque official has de facto changed. A contemporary imam is now responsible for a number of new tasks while some of the conventional ones have been abandoned.

The basic role of the imam in the mosque, such as the recitation of the Quran and leading prayers, remains important, but the new imam also functions as a social worker, a religious and social advisor, family consultant and spiritual care expert. Giving answers to questions about religion is now a small part of his work. However, the educational background of imams is not sufficient for the wide range of the roles and functions they assume.

Turkish civil religious communities (*cemaats*) first explored the need of Turkish immigrants in Europe to religious services, and began employing imams in Europe in the 1970s. The Turkish government began to employ imams in the 1980s and finally, European governments began to discuss "homemade imams" in the 1990s; some "test driving" imam training programs have been implemented as of 2000.

The position and authority of the new *imam* – not only in Europe, but also in native Turkey – have changed. Expectations placed on an imam in Europe are greater than those placed on an *imam* in Ankara; a mosque in Europe is first a Turkish district, and second a religious place, with the *imam* as the central figure of this sphere.

New imams are imams without a district in the Ottoman sense but the new districts also require a new generation of imams. Imam training programs and the authorities which appoint imams should consider the

needs of the districts in further religious guidance, rather than just covering the basis of performing daily prayers correctly. Unfortunately, today imams are without districts, but also the districts are without imams.

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