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Uncovered Faith

Examples of Sunni Muslim Beliefs in Adana, Turkey

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Titel: Uncovered Faith, examples of Sunni Muslim beliefs in Adana, Turkey
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Sammanfattning: Uppsatsen handlar om obeslöjade kvinnors tro och tillbedjan i storstadsmiljö i dagens Turkiet. Den undersöker om de finns några gemensamma faktorer för tro och tillbedjan bland obeslöjade Sunnimuslimer samt vilka delar av klassisk muslimsk tro de har funnit förhandlingsbara. Uppsatsen belyser aktuell litteratur och forskning i ämnet samt använder ett inifrånperspektiv genom att intervjua turkiska kvinnor.

Abstracts: This essay is about uncovered women's faith and worship in an urban setting in contemporary Turkey. It researches the possibility of any common factors for uncovered Sunni Muslims' faith and worship as well as what parts of classical Muslim faith they have found negotiable. The essay relates to current literature and research on the topic as well as provides an insider perspective based on interviews with Turkish women.

Nyckelord: Socialantropologi, Turkiet, Islam, Sekularisering
Keywords: Social Anthropology, Turkey, Islam, Secularism

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I. Introduction

97% of all citizens in Turkey are Muslims¹. All people born of parents of different Muslim faiths and ethnicities are included in this percentage. The remaining 3% is mainly Jews or Christians by birth. A majority figure of this size may sound like a homogeneous group of citizens but any visitor to Turkey will soon notice that its inhabitants do not look homogeneous at all. The clear differences in dress code and behavior, especially among women, are stark. The outer appearance and behavior may point to ethnic or religious differences but not necessarily. A common image of a Muslim woman is that she is dressed in a way that covers all parts of her body except her face and hands. But many women in Turkey, especially in the cities, dress according to Western fashion as well as confess to a Muslim faith. A woman in Turkey dressed in Western clothes may be of one of the minorities like a Jew, a Christian, an atheist, or an Alevi Muslim who do not traditionally cover themselves. But it is even more likely that she is a Sunni Muslim that has chosen to not cover her head. The big differences in appearance and behavior among Sunni Muslims have raised my interest. M. Hakan Yavuz argues that there is not one universal way of being a Muslim since all expressions of Islam are colored by national, historic and economic factors (URL Yavuz 2004:215). Do Turkish women dressed in Western fashion represent a less religious or different type of Islam? Is their faith in God the same, in spite of their differing outer appearance and lifestyle? What factors might be relevant to study in order to explain what a Sunni Muslim in Turkey believes and how these beliefs are reflected in behavior and appearance? Which religious beliefs and behavior are common among these women?

Marvine Howe, who worked as bureau chief in Ankara for New York Times during the 1980's and returned in the 1990's to study the Islamic revival in Turkey, claims the big divide between the citizens of Turkey is between lifestyles. One of them is a more certain and strict religious lifestyle and the other is a secular lifestyle with more freedom but also more insecurity. (Howe 2000:1-2). This difference is most obvious to the outsider in the area of dress codes among women, and their different ways of relating to men. However, I want to look beneath the obvious outer differences. The term *laik* or secular is used in Turkish when referring to Turkey as a secular state and "secularists" is used for people who strongly defend secular politics and Atatürk's² heritage. People who dress and lead a more Western lifestyle in

¹ This percentage varies between different sources, the lowest quoted by Hakan Yavuz at 86% (URL Yavuz 2004:227) but Ali Carkoğlu and Binnaz Toprak's 97% seems most accurate (URL Carkoğlu and Toprak 2000).

² Atatürk, or Mustafa Kemal, founded the Turkish Republic in 1923 after defeating the Ottoman leaders and foreign rule that remained after World War I. He is still the national hero of Turkey.

Turkey many times refer to the ones who behave in a more religious and traditional way as *dindar* meaning religious or *aşırı dindar* meaning extremely religious. But there is not one term for the whole group of people who dress or socialize in a non-religious way. A woman may be referred to as *açık*, meaning uncovered or a father as *rahat*, meaning relaxed when it comes to how he leads his family and their lifestyle. I have also seen the expression *dindar olmayan* meaning non-religious but it is rarer since the assumption in Turkey seems to be that everyone belongs to one faith or the other and assuming that one is not religious due to outlook is not common. Therefore to describe a person “secular” while referring to her or his personal beliefs is not common. On the contrary it is a common opinion that Western looking people may be very religious and women with a traditional Muslim dress code may not live according to conservative, Muslim values in all areas. The outside and the inside do not always go hand in hand or as a Turkish saying goes “Faith and money are hidden” (*İman ve para gizlidir*, my translation.) Even if the Turks themselves have no standard term for people with a non-religious dress code and socializing behavior for simplicity in writing this essay, I have chosen to use the term “secular” when I refer to my target group, uncovered women born in Sunni Muslim families.

Purpose

My purpose is to find the relationships between belief and lifestyle among my target group in Turkey. Since I myself am a woman and since the biggest differences when it comes to outer appearance and behavior, are seen among women, I mainly research a female perspective of Muslim faith. I want to find out whether it is possible to identify a common denominator for Muslim identity in Turkey, with a particular focus on the identity of secular Muslims.

Question

Toward this end I compare literature on the history of Islam and different faces of Islam in Turkey in general and Turkish secularism in particular. To gain an insider perspective I interview Turkish secular women about their faith. How far have Atatürk’s secular reforms reached into the life of the individual Muslim? What other factors have formed their faith? Is it possible to be a Muslim and not follow the five pillars of Islam and other commands of the Koran and the Hadiths? How does a secular Turkish woman reason about her religious faith and how does it affect her lifestyle?

II. Method and sources

Cultural perception and identity

Culture is not something static but rather changeable and with a historical perspective it is possible to find out what did change, when and how. Culture may be changed intentionally and dramatically by a charismatic or authoritative leader like Atatürk but most of the time it is a gradual process influenced by many different factors. Culture, like history, is not final in any sense and is constantly negotiated and re-negotiated by members of society. A major point of culture is that it represents the known and familiar and as such gives us a sense of security. The question of what culture is has not one definite answer, but whether it is real or imagined, it is a topic for professional theorists. For those that live in the midst of a certain culture it is a part of their identity and normally not reflected on regularly. Les W Field quotes Jonathan Friedman, "*Culture is supremely negotiable for professional culture experts, but for those whose identity depends upon a particular configuration this is not the case. Identity is not negotiable. Otherwise it has no existence*" (Field 1999:195).

An example of Christian versus Muslim worldview

When a cultural phenomenon like applied religion is studied, it is important to remember that we are attempting to understand another society's inner being. There is a temptation to use an understanding of reality from our own worldview and apply it to our informants' beliefs. To exemplify this I want to mention a basic view of human nature that differ between Christians and Muslims. According to one Evangelical interpretation of the Bible, humans, although originally created good and in the image of God, have been born in a sinful state, that is separated from fellowship with the Creator, since the first man, Adam, ate of the forbidden fruit (The Holy Bible, Genesis 3). There is nothing a human can do or perform by herself such as good deeds or religious acts to reconcile with God again. The way to become free from this sinner status is to accept Jesus' death and resurrection as the atonement for one's sins and thus the relationship with God is restored again (The Holy Bible, Romans 3:22-26). Islam, on the other hand, teaches that humans are born pure and inclined towards goodness. There is no idea of original or inherited sin but it is the society that is to blame for destroying this natural goodness of humans (URL Mattson). By practicing the five pillars of Islam, a Muslim will become a better person and her faith will increase (URL Wikipedia). Through resisting sin and by doing good deeds throughout her lifetime she will increase her chances of reaching Paradise.

Personal experience of religion and secularism

As humans, underlying beliefs and values affect our lifestyle and behavior in many different ways. A point of reference for me personally is how different Christians view the authority of the Bible and its values and how that affects our different lifestyles. In my home country Sweden, there are many people associated with the Christian faith, but a Christian lifestyle may look very different depending on how one interprets the Bible. Although, I am aware that the movement towards secularism in Sweden started in a different historical and cultural setting than in Turkey I have personally seen examples of the struggle between religious faith and secularism. The Greek anthropologist Alexandra Bakalaki stresses the importance of anthropologists giving up "...at least part of the understandings about themselves, their society, and the world in which they were brought up" (Bakalaki 1997:516). I am aware that my own Christian, European background influences the assumptions of this paper. The process of "neutralizing" one's own background in relationship to research is an ongoing development and the reader of this text must consider my as well as her own cultural lenses and academic training while reading. Only the people of Turkey has full rights to their culture, but my hope is that this social anthropological study can be used as an eye opener, not only for myself but to other readers as well.

The translation of culture

Applied religion is only one part of a culture, but a very important one in a country like Turkey. I believe I can come to a better understanding of how Islam is applied in everyday life by studying, observing and interviewing Turkish Muslims. The fact that culture is experience-based patterns that cannot be captured in words makes this task challenging (Hornborg 1994:330). Added to this challenge is the fact that culture keeps changing and that variations inside a culture are many (Bakalaki 1997:510). If culture, including religion, is an experience that is hard to articulate, the practice of religion among secular women seems even more difficult to observe and study due to the absence of more overt signs of religiousness or faith. To make this task more manageable I have limited my study to what some urban, middle class or upper class, uncovered Sunni Muslim women in Adana, Turkey believe and how they express their faith. I believe deep conversations give a more realistic picture than my own observations and conclusive comments given by the foreign community in the city. Even though all written texts inevitably reduce an event or experience, I try to reproduce the life and feelings of my informants and not make them too abstract. James Clifford states that, "*Whatever else ethnography does, it translates experience into text*" (Clifford 1986:115). In

all translation we lose some of the original text, or in this case, the original event and entirety of the conversation. The interviews were done in both English and Turkish. Neither of these are my native tongues and my informants' English is limited as well. Due to both language and cultural differences between my informants and myself there is interpretation on both parts, which adds to the hermeneutic character of this social anthropological study.

Since I am a woman it is possible for me to approach female informants and interview them face-to-face. My background as a married, mother-of-two, practicing Christian will influence my perception of the situation for secular Turkish Muslims but I am aware of my own perspectives and therefore ask open-ended questions in order to find my informants' perspectives.

Relationship to informants

I would deceive myself if I thought my informants perceived me as a neutral researcher. Due to my Scandinavian look, my nationality, my behavior and sex I will have attributes ascribed to me that I might not necessarily identify with myself. I may explain the importance of anthropology as a scientific study or how other cultures fascinate me but in the end my informants will put me into a frame of reference where they think I fit. As a woman I have easy access to friendships with other women in Turkey. The way I dress is similar to secular Turks' but different to a practicing Muslim. As a married mother there are many points of common references to women my age. Since most of my informants do not have a frame of reference for Sweden, they think of me mostly as a European, which to them equals that I am a Christian. I have so far understood that their view of Europeans and Christians do not necessarily fit with my own view.

Frame of references and informants

I will build this paper on literature about Islam in Turkey, both from books and relevant electronic articles. A lot has been written on this topic and the challenge has been to narrow it down and specify it. I want to use deep interviews in order to personalize the big picture I gain from the literature. Then I will compare my informants' perspectives with the literature I have gathered. To my finding, there are many texts on Islam's history, Islamic movements, and political Islam in Turkey but relatively few anthropological studies on secular Muslims' faith and lifestyles in contemporary Turkey. I therefore believe my text will add a more varied picture than a homogeneous description of Turkey as a secular nation with a Muslim majority

provides. I have interviewed six uncovered women, living in Adana, Turkey. They are all born and raised in Sunni Muslim families but two of them no longer attach any religion to their beliefs. Their ages vary between 25-45 years old and they are all married and have children. Four have a university education and they all belong to middle class or upper middle class families. Four of them grew up in Adana, one in Gaziantep and one in Germany (her family moved to Adana when she was 14 years of age). To protect their identity I have given them fictitious names. Four of them were working at the time of their interviews, one is a housewife and the oldest informant is retired. I had a friendship with three of them prior to the interviews and the other three were recommended to me through common friends.

Before the interviews I prepared open-ended questions and since my informants were born in Sunni Muslim families I used the Sunni Muslim beliefs as a starting point for my interviews such as the five pillars of Islam as well as the six articles of faith shared by all Muslims (URL Wikipedia). I also included a few questions relating to family since my informants are married and to politics since Islam has a legal aspect and is not uncommonly used in politics. I received inspiration to the questions from the literature I have studied as well as observations and conversations I have had during the two years I have lived in Turkey. During the interview I took notes, which I later recorded in the computer. The atmosphere during the interviews was open and polite but due to the sensitivity of the topic, the informant sometimes got emotionally involved, defensive or even aggressive. I did not perceive the defensiveness or aggressiveness directed towards me but towards fellow Muslims with a more visible religious lifestyle. I adjusted the previously prepared questions depending on informant and atmosphere and one of the interviews flowed freely without my structured questions.

III. Frame of reference

Cultural Levels

When we try to understand culture we are tempted to stereotype people into groups depending on their behavior. We may come to an understanding that satisfies ourselves but just as we think we have understood something we learn something new that challenges our previous understanding. To avoid limiting ourselves to a superficial understanding of culture by only watching a group's appearance and behavior we need to try to find their underlying beliefs, assumptions and worldview. If we are successful, we will have reached a more complicated, richer and probably more truthful understanding of that particular group's culture. Edgar Schein refers to this by writing,

“...culture is to a group what personality or character is to an individual. We can see the behavior that results, but often we cannot see the forces underneath that causes certain kinds of behavior, so does culture guide and constrain the behavior of members of a group through the shared norms that are held in that group” (Shein 2004:8).

Religion and Culture

It is well known that we humans have a need for stability, consistency, and meaning and many times religion fills this need (URL Yavuz 2004:213). Most religions have old scriptures guiding the lives of its followers. However, these scriptures were recorded in a certain culture at a certain time. Some parts of that culture are accounted for in the holy text, some are not and many phenomena or occurrences in our times are not even mentioned. Although considered holy words or even a revelation directly from God by its followers, they were transmitted orally or written by humans at the same time or many years after the actual revelation or incident took place. Many parts of Holy Scripture are quite clear on different issues but if read in a literal sense I believe we will soon find ourselves quite confused. This is why I believe all old and historic documents, religious or not, need to be interpreted. That is, the actual meaning at the time of writing must be researched, and possibly applied in our own contexts. How, and if, this interpretation is to be done and how religion is to be applied is a well-debated question, as the reader of this study will soon find out. Religion is used for different reasons according to M. Hakan Yavuz, Professor of Political Science. *“...religion can provide individuals with a sense of identity, a blueprint to lead their lives, a sense of security, and, for many, a box of tools to resist oppressive social and political conditions”* (URL Yavuz 2004:213).

As I wrote previously we may begin studying a culture with the things that are easy to observe that is all the phenomena that we see, hear, and feel. However easy it is to observe this level of culture it is much harder to decipher the underlying values and assumptions (Shein 2004:25-26). Some of these underlying values can be found in the Holy Scriptures of the observed religion and since many values and norms have direct references to these Scriptures, people may also be able to refer to particular parts of the religious texts when they try to explain their behavior or beliefs. The way that Holy Scripture is interpreted, and indeed, what parts of these texts are emphasized, must, however, be contextualized.

Who is a Muslim?

“The Religion in the sight of Allah is Islam” (Koran 3:19)

If anyone desires a religion other than Islam, never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost.” (Koran 3:85)

These are the two verses in the Koran that are referred to by *The Islam Page* as the foundation of the profession of Muslim faith (URL [The Islam Page](#)). The lowest common denominator of Sunni Muslims is to say and believe that there is no God except Allah and that Mohammed is his Messenger. According to *The Sunnah Islamic Page* on the Internet it is also important to perform the duties of Islam, which is to do what Allah and his Messenger tell you to do and stay away from the things they tell you not to do (URL [The Sunnah Islamic Page](#)). The above profession of faith in Allah called *Shahadah* is one of the five pillars of Islam and is the most basic foundation of Muslim identity. However, what Allah and His Messenger have further told man to do is the question under debate between Muslim scholars as well as lay people.

Different kinds of Islam

Lester R. Kurtz quotes a Hadith reference to a Muslim character, *“The Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings, defined a true Muslim as one who harms no one with his/her words and actions, and who is the most trustworthy representative of universal peace.”* (URL [Kurtz 2005:375](#), al-Bukhari Book 2 Hadith no:9). As stated earlier, Yavuz acknowledges the universal principles of Islam but argues that there is not one way to salvation but, instead there are many ways of being and becoming a Muslim due to the different cultural circumstances in which Islam is found (URL [Yavuz 2004:213, 215](#)). Ali Bardakoğlu, the head of the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey agrees with Yavuz in this and believes that it is important to study religion as lived and living human experience (URL [Yavuz 2004:228](#)). Whatever it takes to reach God is for God alone to decide but Islam is practiced in very different ways all over the world. Different interpretations of the Koran has lead some nations to apply Sharia Law and forced dress codes and certain religious behavior on women and men while other nations with a Muslim majority try to shun Sharia like the plague. As this paper will show, there may be many different applications of Islam even within one nation.

Turkish Islam(s)

Arab invaders brought Islam to Central Asia in the eighth century (URL [Yavuz 2004:219](#)). The Turks were of different nomadic groups that probably practiced Shamanism and emigrated from Central Asia to present day Turkey before and around 1000 AD. One of these

Turkic tribes, the Selçuks, invaded Persia and it was in Baghdad around this time that a Selçuk leader, Toğrul Bey became a caliph, the leader of the Islamic world. Under the leadership of different Selçuks, the Islamic Turkic tribes conquered more and more of present day Turkey. After a time of Mongolian rulers, different Turkmenic tribes ruled Anatolia. Then Osman, son of the founder of the Emirate of Ertuğrul, founded the Ottoman dynasty, which played a central role in the Sunni Muslim world until Mustafa Kemal Atatürk turned the falling empire into a secular republic (Swan 2003:52-58). The Kemalists introduced a state-controlled Islam, which is referred to as laicism as supposed to secularism, which separates state and religion (Ahmad 2003:84). This way the Kemalists could use religion to further their nationalistic goals. Apart from this historically described, political, and official side of Islam there are different local layers of Islam in Turkey. The Sufi orders have played an important part in making the universality of Islam a local experience for the Turkish people. Yavuz claims that, “*Out of necessity, the early Turkish Muslims accepted and embraced the pre-Islamic traditions and combined them with their own in a form of Sufi mysticism.*” and that strict Islamic law was less prominent (URL Yavuz 2004:220). There has been and still is a tension between orthodox and heterodox interpretations of Islam in Turkey. The orthodox Islamic view of statehood has been used politically both during Ottoman and Republican times. Etga Uğur refers to three major intellectual roots of Islam in Turkey, the theological school of *Maturidi*, the Islamic legal school *Hanafi school of fiqh*, and the spiritual aspect of Islam, *Sufism* (URL Uğur 2004:328). The basic role of Islam in the Ottoman Empire was a legal one although Sufism was practiced among the common people the whole time and had the role of helping people understand Islam through a personal experience with God (URL Uğur 2004:331). This division between formal and political Islam on the one hand and civil Islam on the other continues till this day. The formal having a more orthodox view of Islam while the civil is heterodox and influenced by syncretism and mysticism (URL Uğur 2004:333).

By referring to Turkish Islam(s) in plural I use M. Hakan Yavuz’s and other scholars’ understanding of the different ways Muslims craft and create their own ways of being Muslim at the same time recognizing the universality of the Koran and the hadith literature (URL Yavuz 2004:218, Yilmaz 2005:385). Fetullah Gülen, the leader of a big, civil religious movement in Turkey today also supports a unique form of Turkish Islam by saying, “*Turkish Islam is composed of the main, unchanging principles of Islam found in the Qur’an and*

Sunnah, as well as in the forms that its aspects open to interpretation assumed during Turkish history, together with Sufism...” (Yılmaz 2005:395)

Atatürk and Secularism

Secularism in Turkey is most often connected with Atatürk and his reforms but the secular face of Turkish Islam was well established during the end of the Ottoman Empire (URL Heper and Toktaş 2003:157). Atatürk and other intellectuals of his time dreamt of a secular state reminiscent of the European nations and although a Muslim in personal belief, he wanted Turkey to be a totally secular political nation. Secularism was understood as making religion private and not part of any public life, social or political. The form of secularism that was applied was a very militant approach to religion patterned on the French form, laicism, meaning no religious influence on any public life. The idea of having a slogan of “*In God we trust*” printed on bills would never occur in Turkey and a president’s wife bearing a veil is still unthinkable to many secular Turks. The founders of the new state, inspired by the Enlightenment, saw religion as something backwards and they wanted to teach the new Turks to think logically instead of dogmatically (URL Heper and Toktaş 2003:157). The idea was that the new nation should be based on reason and science and the pillars of Kemalism³ were secularism and nationalism (URL Uğur 2004:340).

Clothing reforms

When Atatürk introduced his reforms in the 1920’s he addressed dress code among other things. He desired a European identity for Turkey and believed clothing represented cultural identity. Thus he debated the headscarf and even banned the *fez*⁴ (Howe 2000:102). He argued that a woman could be chaste and honorable even if she did not wear a headscarf quite contrary to the common belief at that time. Western clothes became a symbol of modernism initiated by the elite male leaders (Kadioğlu 2005:27). The issue of clothing in relationship to religion is still a burning question in Turkey that I will cover later in this paper.

Atatürk and Islam

Atatürk was not against Islam. He believed in secularism and freedom of religion, but he did not believe in absence of religion according to the former Head of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz, interviewed by Howe (Howe 2000:40). Atatürk did believe in

³ Kemalism is the political ideology referring to Atatürk’s surname; Mustafa Kemal.

⁴ A hat typical of the Ottoman empire

a unique Turkish form of Islam which is why he had the Koran and its commentaries translated into Turkish. Later the Republican leaders also had the prayer calls changed from Arabic into Turkish⁵. The ideology of the first regime in Turkey consisted of six “arrows” - Republicanism, Nationalism, Populism⁶, Laicism, Statism and Revolutionism/Reformism (Ahmad 2003:193). The Kemalists assumed these ideologies and cultural change could be introduced through legal means but this has produced some unexpected results in society. Religion is still very much alive in Turkey as 55% of the population considers themselves religious and only 2.7% non-religious (Yilmaz 2005:392-3, URL Carkoğlu and Toprak 1999). The result of secularism is rather that a large part of the population in Turkey takes “*religion as a system of belief and morality rather than a prescriptive set of political rules*” (URL Heper and Toktaş 2003:158). In other words, many Turks today view religion as a personal belief but not a way to rule a nation, which is exactly what Atatürk strived towards. However, there are many exceptions of this belief among different groups in Turkish society. Uğur argues that even though the Kemalist project succeeded in minimizing the influence of religion over politics it failed in assuring religious freedom and that political Islam is a product of this failure (URL Uğur 2004:337). Somehow the representatives of Islam that were accused of being backwards and conservative in the beginning of the 1900’s are in different ways accusing the present day Kemalists and ultra secularists of today for being backwards and traditional (Yilmaz 2005:406).

National and Religious identity

Every day Turkish primary school children shout out the Turkish national oath in school yards and classrooms in chorus:

*I am a Turk. I am honest. I am hardworking.
My principle is to protect the younger and respect my elders,
To love my nation and my people more than myself.
My ideal is to rise and go forward.
Oh! Great Atatürk!
“I promise that I will walk without ceasing in the path you paved,
Towards the goal you showed”
May my existence be a gift to the existence of Turks.
“Whay a joy to say I am a Turk” (My translation)*

The last line is a slogan by Atatürk often cited in all kinds of institutions and public places. Although many democratic nations may not practice such an explicit way of shaping a national identity as the example above, it is well known that educational institutions together

⁵ Since 1950 the prayer calls are in Arabic again in Turkey (Swan 2003:58).

⁶ Populism means promotion of the interests of ordinary people

with media are powerful value shaping forces. Yılmaz Esmer quotes Inglehart and Baker in his article on Islamic Civilization “*Despite globalization, the nation remains a key unit of shared experience, and its educational and cultural institutions shape the values of almost everyone in that society*” (Esmer 2002:286) Benedict Anderson’s often quoted definition of a nation is that it is an “imagined political community”. The reason for its being imagined is that most of its inhabitants will never meet or know each other but they still imagine themselves to be part of the same community (Anderson 2000:21). Communities need common factors to feel that they belong together. While Islam and the caliph of the Islamic world were primary unifying factors during the Ottoman times, I would argue that Atatürk and his principles of modernity and nationalism have been the unifying factors in Turkey for the last 80 years. This is not to say that Islam has stopped being a unifying factor altogether for the population of Turkey, religion being one of the many national symbols that keep people together⁷ (URL Uğur 2004:335). The present prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, goes as far as calling Islam the glue that holds together society. A majority of the Turkish people believe that being a Turk equals being a Muslim. In fact, 84 percent of the population respect and love Atatürk and the same percentage attach importance to religion (Howe 2000:21). So while Islam continues to be important in many people’s daily lives, the imagined Turkish community rests just as much on the heritage of Atatürk. Although coming from an Islamist background, Prime Minister Erdoğan makes a similar division between personal faith and politics as that of Atatürk. His party defines secularism as an orienting principle for the state but not for the individual. They also reject using religion for political benefits according to statements made in leading Turkish newspapers in 2001. However, it has to be said that many secular Turks believe that Prime Minister Erdoğan is still inclined towards political Islam and that he practices dissimulation. (URL Heper and Toktaş 2003:176, 160)

State controlled Islam

In a similar way that nationalism includes religion in its existential values, *Turkish Islam sees the existence and preservation of the state as a vital instrument for the existence for Islam and the Muslim community* (Yavuz 2004:220). An important point to make is that in Turkey, Islam does not control the state but the state controls Islam. The Turkish state does not see a conflict between religion and modernism⁸ (Yılmaz 2005:388). A clear example of that is the

⁷ Language and culture were other national symbols that Atatürk promoted.

⁸ Modernism here defined by Yılmaz as the modern nation-state, secularism, democracy, and no public role for religion.

Directorate of Religious Affairs whose main task is to control Islam in accordance to the needs of the nation-state (Yilmaz 2005:389). The state supervises religious education in primary and secondary schools as well as universities, it controls the nation's 86 000 mosques, and *imams* and *muftis*⁹ are state employees. The Directorate also provides the sermons read in each mosque on Fridays (Yilmaz 2005:390). In short, the aim of this office is to unite society, regulate places of worship, and enlighten the public about religion and produce correct information (URL Baristiran 2004:20). It should be noted that The Directorate only deals with Islam and not with the minority religions of Turkey. The Turkish state does not officially recognize *Sharia* law but it has a council called The High Council of Religious Affairs that serves under the Directorate. The role of this council is to issue *fatwas*. These *fatwas* are official, religious advice to the people on how to deal with modern issues. They are provided by the state in order to avoid uneducated religious people using religion to manipulate others for their own purposes (Yilmaz 2005:391).

EU

Kemalism emphasizes nationalism or more specifically, a Turkish national identity and becoming a European is included in this goal. Interestingly, different ethnic and religious groups in Turkey today are unified in their desire to join the EU. The Islamists believe they would have greater religious freedom should they join EU since the Turkish military would lose its power. Although the Kemalists are afraid of losing power, they cannot go against their own goal of becoming European (URL Yavuz 2004:225).

Levels of Islam

In order to understand Islam in Turkey better I would like to make a distinction between political, civil, and personal Islam. Political Islam represents the idea of including *Sharia* law in modern day politics or as Metin Heper and Şule Toktaş define it, "*Islam shaping public law and public policy*" (Heper and Toktaş 2003:160). We can see examples of this form in Iran and until recently in Afghanistan. People involved in political Islam are mostly referred to as Islamists in media and literature. Political Islam has been fought against by the secularists and especially by the military since the foundation of the Turkish Republic. Civil Islam, on the other hand, would be the different movements in society trying to promote Islam through non-political means. They may be active in education or aid work in different non-governmental organizations. Fethullah Gülen and his movement is an example of this form of

⁹ Preachers or leaders of the Muslim prayer.

Islam. And finally, personal Islam refers to the different ways of practicing the Muslim faith in one's personal life. Examples of personal Islam are what you believe, how you dress, how you practice the five pillars of Islam, how you get married and how your social life is organized among other things. These three faces of Islam will of course interfere with and influence each other. Although I am focused on the personal face of Islam in this paper, I will give a reference to political Islam and civil Islam as well.

Political Islam

The Koran is not only a guide how to live your life but it is also a constitution, a legal code, and a civil law for the society of Muslims. This is what makes religion so hard to separate from secular politics in Muslim countries according to Yılmaz Esmer (Esmer 2002:289). As I wrote earlier, the Turkish state does not officially recognize Muslim law but it tries to control religion by interpreting Islam to its own ideology (Yılmaz 2005:387). Many are not satisfied with this system and think that Turkey would prosper more if the moral of the country were formed in line with Muslim values. According to Yavuz, during the first period of Kemalism (1924-1950) *most Muslim intellectuals resisted any form of novelty and modernist interpretations of Islam* (URL Yavuz 2004:227). Religiously oriented parties started in 1969 who did not believe religion was compatible with secularism (Heper and Toktaş 2003:160). Due to their strong religious platform they were repeatedly shut down by the Constitutional Court for breaking the secular constitution. New religious parties, often with the same leader but under a new name, have arisen from the old ones and although strongly religious, their ideologies and political programs have gradually moved towards secularism. When the Virtue party was dissolved in 2001 the two factions within the party (the Conservatives and the Innovators) started two new parties. The leader of the Innovators, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, had been a very popular mayor of Istanbul and his new party, the Justice and Development party, managed to win the national elections in November 2002, thus making him Prime Minister (Ahmad 2003:206). He claims to believe in a secular republic and a democracy based on rule of law but his reference is a value system derived from mystic Islam. Heper and Toktaş argue that Prime Minister Erdoğan considers Islam to be a means of moral self-improvement but his Muslim faith does not necessarily mean that he is in favor of political Islam (Heper and Toktaş 2003:169). Prime Minister Erdoğan's Islamist roots and present secular politics can be seen as both his greatest asset and his greatest weakness. According to Uğur, he needs to denounce his roots in order to not threaten the secularists but utilize them in order to keep foreign Muslim governments favorable towards Turkey (Uğur 2004:341).

Civil Islam

Sufi networks and orders have been active in community building through education and social services since Ottoman times and have also been the core of Civil Islam according to Yavuz (Yavuz 2004:220). The largest civil movement in present day Turkey is the Gülen movement (Yilmaz 2005:394). Fethullah Gülen shows intense commitment to his faith but supposedly also great tolerance towards non-practicing Muslims and non-Muslims. Although claimed to be non-political in nature, this movement has had a transforming influence on both the present form of state Islam and the Islamist movement by its focus on dialogue between civilizations and cultures (Yilmaz 2005:386, 406). Gülen's movement has a strong Sufi flavor and he emphasizes spiritual practice and morality more than ritual and dogmatism (Kurtz 2005:377). The fact that there are both civil and Islamist movements in Turkey prove that Turkey's democratization project has succeeded to some extent. According to Ayşe Kadioğlu this contradicts Ernest Gellner's view that Islamic societies are immune to secularization (URL Kadioğlu 2005:25). If Turkey were lead according to Sharia Law, the people would not have the opportunity for civil movements. Kadioğlu defines civil movements as a "*medium of open communication and normative integration*" (URL Kadioğlu 2005:24). She has studied three Islamic Non-Governmental Organizations that work with human rights, mainly with the right to wear headscarfs in public places. The headscarf issue is a hotly debated issue in Turkey and therefore deserves a special focus.

The Headscarf Issue

Women in Turkey are not allowed by law to cover their heads in any public place such as educational institutions, hospitals, or courthouses. The idea is that the state is secular and neutral and therefore no religious symbols should be used in state-operated institutions (TEMPO 2006:37). The women who wear a headscarf either have to take off their scarves while studying or working or choose to not study or work at these institutions. While a personal issue for most women, the headscarf issue has turned into a public and political warlike debate starting in 1981 according to Howe (Howe 2000:103). The war has been more or less intense but was revived again in the end of the 1990's (URL Kadioğlu 2005:29). One of the events that heated the debate was that a young woman belonging to the Virtue party entered the Grand National Assembly to give her oath as new member with her head covered. The sitting president Bülent Ecevit, normally a soft-spoken person, then shouted "*This is not a place to challenge the state!*" (TEMPO 2006:34, my translation). His point was that while

no one interferes with someone else's private clothing style or beliefs in Turkey, the Great National Assembly was not a locality for one's personal life but rather the highest establishment of the state (TEMPO 2006:34). When private religious expressions are not allowed to be visible in public places, I believe secularism has indeed been applied in its most radical way.

Headscarf as a symbol

There are different styles of head covering in Turkey. While the secularists, feminists and military see the *türban*¹⁰ as a symbol of radical Islam that threatens the values of the secular state, the religious Muslims that are led by the different religious parties, wear the headscarf as a symbol of cultural identity and protest against Western influences largely seen as immoral (Howe 2000:103). Although there are those who wear the headscarf as a political sign, most would wear it because of personal belief or tradition. Before the Turkish republic was proclaimed, women were secluded in their houses while the men were in charge of any public activity. One of Atatürk's goals was to make women visible and active in the public sphere. Kadioğlu claims that it was a change imposed on the Turkish women that may not have been the desire of the women themselves.

It is obvious that the Republican women in Western clothes are not necessarily modern in terms of their values. They were pulled to the public realm as the images of modernity. Similarly, the türban is not necessarily tied to a traditional and hence submissive worldview, but rather represents activism by these women who resist being used by a modernization project from above. Hence, the türban is a post-Kemalist phenomenon that represents a means for women's re-seclusion in the aftermath of their debut in public life as a result of the Kemalist reforms (URL Kadioğlu 2005:27).

AK-DER, one of the civil associations that Kadioğlu interviewed, which works for the right to wear headscarves in public places, claimed that by being active in the public realm as students and in various professions they protect their personal rights as women (URL Kadioğlu 2005:30).

Headscarf equals Muslim?

The weekly Turkish magazine TEMPO focused in on the headscarf debate in their May 4, 2006 issue. According to them, the discussion on the headscarf ban has reached the question "*Who is more Muslim, the one with full Muslim covering, the one with only a headscarf or the one without any head covering?*" (TEMPO 2006:30, my translation). The magazine let believing Muslim women, both covered and non-covered, share their views on the connection

¹⁰ A *türban* is a voluminous scarf, closely framing the face to show no hair and pinned closely underneath the chin (Howe 2000:102).

between headscarves and level of Muslimness. The question is not only about the headscarf but also covers the different clothing styles between covered women. So what does the Koran really say about covering your head with a scarf? Since it is not useful to quote the original Koran in Arabic in this paper, I will quote an English translation of the Koran.

And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and do not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or the male servants not having need (of women), or the children who have not attained knowledge of what is hidden of women; and let them not strike their feet so that what they hide of their ornaments may be known; and turn to Allah all of you, O believers! so that you may be successful (URL Koran sura 24 verse 31).

The consensus of all the interviewed writers and professors in this article is that it is the Confession of Faith in Allah (the *Shahadah*) that makes you a Muslim and gives you the right to go to Paradise, not the wearing of a veil. However, it is sinful to not cover your head and you will have to make up for it by doing good deeds according to the writer Emine Şenlikoğlu who wears the full covering, *çarşaf*, herself (TEMPO 2006:30) Zehra Türkmen, another writer, who wears the *türban* and an ankle long coat, argues that women without head covering are people who know the truth but do not live according to it or possibly women in need to become aware of these things (TEMPO 2006:30). Professor Beyza Bilgin, herself without head covering, but in other ways dressed modestly considers herself “covered” according to the Koran. She argues that a head covering is not compulsory in Islam and the way to interpret “covered” in Islam has changed over the centuries. She says, “*The scarf is not a religious phenomenon, it is a social one*” (TEMPO 2006:30). A prominent Islamic scholar in Turkey, Dr. Yaşar Öztürk, makes an important distinction between Islamization “the religion of the Koran” and Arabization “the religion of tradition” (Howe 2000:42). Professor and writer Amina Wadud from the USA, herself a covered Muslim and supporter of Liberal Islam, argues that the Koran needs to be interpreted continuously and that the rules from 7th century Arabia cannot be used in leading the world today (TEMPO 2006:24-25, URL Liberal Movements 2006). The different clothing styles and lifestyles that Muslims in Turkey practice prove the difficulty of interpreting old scripts for today’s context.

Do Islam and Secularism mix?

Voices in favor

Liberal Islam is an interpretation-based form of Islam (URL Wikipedia). Although Liberal Islam is a common name in scholarly terms it does not mean that a complete consensus exists between liberal Muslims. They interpret the Koran and the Hadith from a personal perspective

and look for the ethical and pluralistic intent of the Koran rather than the more commonly used literal interpretation (URL Wikipedia). Let me point to five tenets of liberal Islam that have emerged according to the Wikipedia Internet page.

1. *The autonomy of the individual in interpreting the Quran and Hadith*
2. *A more critical examination of religious texts, as well as traditional Islamic precedents*
3. *Complete gender equality in all aspects, including ritual prayer and observance.*
4. *A more open view on modern culture in relation to customs, dress, and common practices*
5. *In addition to use of Ijtihad, the use of the Islamic concept of fitrah, or the natural sense of right and wrong, is advocated.* (URL Wikipedia)

Supporters of Liberal Islam also believe in the separation of religious and political authorities. They argue that religion is something private and individual and that religion should not have transcendental privilege to determine public policies. In the Turkish state version of Islam, there is no conflict between religion and secularism. The Directorate of Religious Affairs have shaped Turkish Islam to fit the secular nation-state (URL Yilmaz 2005:388-389). Fethullah Gülen does not perceive secularism as non-Muslim. His movement accepts the separation between the sacred and secular and how it affects social life (URL Yilmaz 2005:388-395). In 1998, the Gülen Foundation organized a convention with the theme “Islam and Secularism”. At this convention a declaration was made that reinterpreted Islamic theology to respond to the challenges of modern times. It was stated that,

...revelation and reason do not conflict; individuals should use their reason to organize their social lives; the state should be neutral on beliefs and faiths prevalent in society; governance of the state cannot be based on the dominance of one religious tradition; secularism should expand individual freedoms and rights and should not exclude any person from the public sphere (URL Yilmaz 2005:400).

Voices not in favor

Although the movement of liberal Islam can see the possibility of combining Islam and secularism, there are other voices who claim that they do not blend. Kadioğlu refers to Ernest Gellner’s claim that Islam is immune to secularization and thus cannot converge with Western models in her article on *Civil society, Islam, and Democracy in Turkey* (URL Kadioğlu 2005:25). Although Kadioğlu believes Gellner’s assumption to be wrong, one of her Turkish informants agrees with him:

Turkey is a bottle; Islamic lifestyle and Western lifestyle are like olive oil and water in a bottle. The executives of the Republic always shake this bottle in order to mix these two lifestyles. But, with these practices, they mislead Turkey (Kadioğlu 2005:30).

The present Prime Minister Erdoğan does not believe one can be both a secularist and a Muslim since some secularists claim that the source of “right” is man while a Muslim believe that source is God (URL Heper and Toktaş 2003:173-174). His party defines secularism as an

orienting principle for the state but not for individuals and religion as one of the most important institutions of humanity (URL Heper and Toktaş 2003:176). In his view, Islam and secularism do not mix but both exist parallel on different levels in society. Heper suggests in an earlier article that,

...a marriage between Islam and democracy in Turkey can be consummated if the radical secularists stop trying to impose their preferred life-style and set of values upon the Islamists, and if the latter do not undermine by word or deed the basic tenets of the secular democratic state in Turkey” (URL Heper and Toktaş 2003:178).

As these two divisions suggest, the question of whether Islam and Secularism can mix or not is still a debated question. The ongoing struggle between Kemalist secularism and the military¹¹ on one side and societal Islam on the other proves that this is not a simple question (URL Yavuz 2004:227). The more visible sign of differing dress codes and lifestyles for Turkey’s 97% Muslims also points to the same conclusion. Below are the views of a few Turkish women on how faith affects their own life.

IV. Presentation of Empery

In 1999, Toprak and Carkoğlu conducted an often quoted sociological research project addressing religion, society and politics in Turkey for the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV). As a result of this research they claim that the people of Turkey in general are religious and made up of believing Muslims. However, the majority sees religious belief and worship practices as something limited to personal life and they do not approve of religious influence becoming visible in the public sphere. At the same time, they do not want the government to interfere with their personal belief and worship practices. (URL Carkoğlu and Toprak)

Religious Beliefs

All of my informants believe in God in some way or the other and their descriptions of him are quite similar to each other. He is described as the Creator, as omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, unchangeable and the One in control of everything. He is before everything and above everything. God forgives and is helpful. *Fatma* started her description of God with his Oneness which is a foundational Muslim belief of God. Added to these traditional Muslim beliefs they had some unexpected descriptions. *Evrin* referred to a book by Shirley McLaine which mentions a power that keeps the protons and electrons together and how that is how she

¹¹ The military is the appointed guardian of secularism in Turkey.

perceives God. *Zeynep* described God as someone unreachable. Although she expressed that God is very important for her because of who he is, she also believes he punishes us sometimes like parents have to punish their children. This is an unusual comparison since, unlike Christians, Muslims do not believe in God as a father. Even if *Meryem* has left the Muslim faith she was very clear about her belief in God. She started describing God as the Creator of everything but soon enough described him as someone you can feel inside your own heart. She described God in a more personal and intimate manner compared to *Fatma's* and *Zeynep's* descriptions of an unreachable and magnificent God. For *Meryem*, God is the only one she talks to about everything and the closest one to her. When she needs help, she prays to God and knows that he will answer. *Aynur* differs most in saying that she believes in a power which she prays to but is not sure if it is God or not. Her husband is an atheist and challenges her faith with logical arguments. He says that if she believes in God, she also needs to believe in the Koran and everything else in Islam but she is sure about not being a Muslim anymore.

Judgment Day, Paradise and Hell

The belief in Judgment day was also very strongly held by most of my informants. It is described as a day when each person will be asked for what they did or did not do, their actions will be weighed against each other and then judged. After this day, some will go to Paradise and others to Hell. *Zeynep* expressed a strong fear of this day due to her many sins. Even *Meryem*, who is not a Muslim, believed that this is the day when evil people will be judged. The basic belief of Paradise and Hell is described in wide terms of Paradise being a good place and Hell a bad place. *Zeynep* and *Fatma* believe these places are like the Koran describes them where Paradise is like a wonderful garden and Hell is a burning fire. *Fatma* had heard that those that do not perform the ritual prayer five times a day will have to make up for it in Hell. *Selin* and *Evrin* have a more non-literal belief of Heaven, not necessarily a green garden but very positive and a place which lacks all evil. *Evrin* thinks the idea of the garden is due to Islam's origin being in Saudi Arabia where there is so much desert. *Selin* thinks that Hell means punishment but not literally a fire but spiritual punishment. On my question whether fasting and *namaz*¹² makes a difference for their lives after death they agreed that they do except *Meryem* who just sees them as a form of worship. The others see them as their debt to God for creating them although only two of them practice them on a

¹² *Namaz* refers to the ritual prayer performed five times per day.

more regular basis. Zeynep says fasting for a whole month during Ramadan and praying five times per day are not compatible with today's lifestyle and that she cannot perform her job as a teacher well if she fasts. She is aware that it will be counted as sin and is afraid of the consequences on Judgement Day. Evrim refers to the fact that she was not raised with these habits and agrees that it is hard to combine work with fasting and ritual prayer. She and her husband give to the poor to make up for their not fasting and performing *namaz*. She hopes that she will not go to Hell because of this since she believes in God and does good things to others. She further explains that there are different levels in both Paradise and Hell and everyone will go to a level that matches with their life on earth. Selin, who recently started performing *namaz* herself explains this ritual in a logical manner:

Before we do namaz we clean ourselves. Cleanliness means health in our religion. If we clean ourselves and do namaz five times a day we are reminded of God regularly and therefore will do less mistakes and thus get to a better place after death.

Prophets of Islam and Angels

Although Muhammed is the most revered prophet of Islam, there are many others prophets in the Koran. Many of their prophets are also important men in the Old and New Testament, for example Adam, Noah, Abraham, Daniel and Jesus. My informants believe that they were real, historical persons and although normal like us they were extra close to God and chosen by him. They were able to obey most of the rules of Islam and are examples for Muslims of how to live. Evrim describes angels as God's helpers. "*The do not have their own personality or will, nor their own life like we humans have*". Selin finds it hard to believe in angels since they are spiritual beings and not visible but she still believes in them since the Koran says that they exist. Apart from the Death Angel who takes our souls when we die there is a Judgment Angel. Zeynep and Fatma explained how one angel sits on your right shoulder and another on your left. They write down all good things you do and all bad things you do. On Judgment Day, what they have written down will be accounted for and everyone will be judged accordingly.

Sins and Good Deeds

Since sins and good deeds here on earth are believed to have such a crucial importance for the life after death for Muslims, I asked my informants about their understanding of these concepts. They had both general and specific ideas. To Selin, sin is everything that is harmful including lying but there are lies that are not counted as sins. For example a lie in order to unite a husband and wife is a harmless lie and therefore not counted as a sin. Evrim do not

think of sins as literal, extreme rules to be followed but rather a general explanation that sins are things you do that hurt yourself or other people. Zeynep includes bad thoughts or deeds done to animals as well as to people. Fatma's answer was the most surprising to me. She paused for a long time and then said,

Very difficult question. Everything is sin for us. There are so many sins, for example to wear short sleeves, to talk to men, to not cover our heads. Everything is sin. Sevap (good deeds) is to help the poor, to be of help to people, to do good. But everything is sin. The biggest sins are adultery, suicide, and alcohol. To not cover your head [for a woman] is a sin but I don't know how serious of a sin it is.

Sevap is to be good and fair to yourself and others. Meryem had the most relativistic opinion in stating that sin and good deeds may differ from person to person. What is sinful for her may not be sinful for someone else but she also believed that there are certain things like stealing, lying and killing that are definitely wrong for everyone. Aynur was upset about the whole idea of good deeds. She claimed that Muslims only help others in order to earn points for Judgment Day. She believes this is selfish, “*we should help others because they are fellow humans*”.

Fate

Fate is a very strong underlying assumption in Turkey that determines one's attitude to life dramatically. Fate is also one of the six articles of faith in Sunni Islam and means basically that God has decided everything beforehand and everything that happens can therefore be explained by destiny. It does not only affect the way to explain why certain things happen in life but also the way to talk and act on a daily basis. When making an appointment to meet for coffee later in the week with a neighbor or asking when my photos will be ready at the photographer's, the agreement may be followed by *Inşallah* or “If God sees it appropriate” or “If God gives His permission.” Some interpret fate as an excuse not to be cautious in traffic or before a test in school. To my understanding, the belief in fate is clearly related to the will of God for Muslims and not depersonalized like in the West. Selin mainly shared about the relaxing aspect of belief in fate. “*You cannot change things in life because someone else is in control. You cannot change yourself or others but maybe you can change your job*”. Fatma also claims a strong belief in fate. She explains about her belief like this:

If I'm not able to buy a cell phone, it is because of fate. If I can't marry, this is fate. But I also believe some fate happens with our help and depend on us. An example of this is how I married my husband, Ismail. We were engaged when I was in my late teens but then we broke up. Then I got engaged to another man but I broke up with him after six months. Some time later I was approached by a woman who wanted me to marry her son. I agreed and was just about to receive a ring to establish this relationship when I met Ismail at a wedding party with some relatives. We talked with each other and agreed to get married. This fate happened with the help of my own actions.

Evrin and Zeynep believe both in fate and that you are in control of your own destiny. They think that some things have been decided beforehand, like when and how you will die. Evrin believes God gives options to choose from and each option has its own destiny. She applies this belief to the fact that she went to university to study, had she chosen not to study; her life would have followed a different path. Zeynep also believes that we can change parts of our fate and that it is wrong to just be passive. While Aynur thinks our destiny is definitely in our own hands and not decided beforehand by God, Meryem still believes God is the one bringing people to life and deciding when to die. But she agrees with Aynur in that we can affect our own lives. *“God gave us a brain and the ability to reason, people just use fate to explain about the unknown”*.

Some Non-Muslim beliefs

A common belief I found that was not at all referred to in the literature but came up during my interviews was the belief in *nazar* or the energy of eyes. Selin explained it to me as conscious or unconscious jealousy. The most common example is if a healthy baby gets too much attention from well-wishers and later suddenly dies, it was *nazar* that took the baby. It means that one of the well-wishers, maybe not even aware of it herself, got jealous when she saw the baby and this evil energy was released. To protect from *nazar*, Turks put small, blue, eye-formed beads on babies' clothes, children's report cards in school, cars, and flower bouquets. It is also common to wear these beads as jewelry. Both Selin and Fatma claim that *nazar* is a Muslim belief. However, Selin explains that the belief that the blue bead will protect from the energy of eyes is a traditional Turkish belief¹³. According to her logical explanation, the bead has no magic power in itself but since it is colorful, it distracts the attention from the person or item of admiration to itself and thus the energy of someone's eyes will be on the bead instead. Selin gave two examples of the power of *nazar*:

You cannot protect yourself from nazar but it is real. I will tell you of two examples. One day I had a visitor who admired my vase. As she did that, it broke in two. Sometimes when people come to my home, they admire my paintings. If my paintings fall down or are tilted after they leave I know they had strong nazar.

Fatma also brought up the common practice of fortune telling in coffee grounds. Although she says that she does not believe in it herself, she practices it regularly out of curiosity. She said

¹³ According to research I have done on the Internet I have not been able to find any source that connects the belief of *nazar* with Islam or the Koran but rather that it is a belief from ancient Turkish mythology from shaman Turks in Central Asia.

that fortune telling is definitely a sin according to the Koran. Aynur claimed there is very much superstition and belief in sorcery in Turkey and especially among religious people. She works as a teacher and when it was time for the university entrance exam, some of her students went to a sorcerer instead of studying to prepare for it. Aynur continues, “*There is a lot of talk about Satan and evil spirits and they use it to scare us. I do not like this talk and their scare tactics*”.

Religious Practices

The five pillars of Islam

The area of the five pillars of Islam is clearly a source of satisfaction if performed regularly, or a cause of bad conscience if not. I sensed the four confessing Muslims to battle with this while the two having left the Muslim faith, clearly did not. The Muslim confession is the most easily performed of the pillars. After that comes giving to the poor which all informants claim to practice. They gave different examples of giving alms. Fatma explained about a set percentage of your income related to the size of your family that is to be given during the month of Ramadan. Zeynep believes in this way of giving, too and adds that it gives them benefits for the Other World. She adds that one should actually give to poor people in one’s surroundings all year round. Others give to poor and needy through charities and occasionally to beggars in the street. Selin and Fatma claim they fast and perform the ritual prayer more or less regularly but Evrim rarely and Zeynep never. Zeynep says,

I believe a Muslim should do the ritual prayer and fast during Ramadan but I cannot. I know it’s not good; it would be good if I could but I cannot. I believe respecting people and animals are as important. Your heart is more important than namaz and fasting. A good Muslim respect all people and don’t treat people differently. These rituals are important for Muslims but you also have to not lie and not gossip, otherwise your namaz and fasting won’t count.

Selin, in her late twenties, started fasting and doing the ritual prayer after she had her daughter less than two years ago. She found herself worrying all the time for her daughter’s health and life and needed some way to find peace. After having tried yoga she decided to search in her own religion. Since then she tries to do *namaz* everyday and also to fast during Ramadan. She finds fasting nice since it is a way to restrain yourself, not only from food and drink but also from lying and gossiping. She adds, “*If you loose your temper due to fasting from food, your fast will be in vane, just foolishness.*” Meryem used to practice these rituals when she was young but since she has left the Muslim faith, she does not anymore. None of my informants have done a pilgrimage to Mecca. They claim it is very expensive and therefore only done by those with extra financial means. It is also usually done when you are older since you have to

keep all the rules of Islam afterwards according to Evrim. Many share the opinion that they will start fasting and praying when they get older and closer to death. Zeynep's mother did not use to do *namaz* when she was younger but started doing it regularly around the age of 50. Now she is trying to catch up for those lost years by praying more than five times a day. Aynur's mother, although only a Muslim in name all her life and leading a very non-religious life, has recently started performing the ritual prayer. Aynur believes her mother does it out of fear of death. When I asked her if she herself would start doing *namaz* when she got old, she did not consider it to be very likely. Apart from the pillar of ritual prayer, which is done by prostrating on the floor towards Mecca while reading written prayers in Arabic, there is a personal prayer style which is more like talking to God with your own words in your own language. This style of prayer is something all of my informants practice, Muslim or not. Evrim shared how she prays every night and thanks God for her family and everything and even Aynur, not sure of what kind of power she believes in, prays.

Prohibition of Alcohol

In Islam there is a prohibition to use any alcohol and religious Muslims do not even eat chocolate with alcohol. However, Carkoğlu and Toprak's study shows that 66.6% of the Turkish population still believes you can be a Muslim even if you use alcohol (URL Carkoğlu and Toprak 1999). My Muslim informants support this prohibition with the logical explanation that you may hurt yourself or others if you get intoxicated. A few believed that using alcohol is sinful but only one of them abided by this prohibition. The most important was to not get drunk but a glass of wine was fine for the rest of them. Selin even claimed that scientifically, wine raises your blood count and that whisky is good for your heart therefore she did not see a problem with drinking alcohol with moderation. Zeynep said "*To drink is a sin but we're not extremely religious about this. May God forgive*". Fatma does not drink at all since it is a sin to her but her husband drinks beer and raki sometimes but usually not enough to get intoxicated. She has chosen not to interfere with him on this matter.

Sheep slaughter

There is a tradition of slaughtering a sheep at the Muslim festival of sacrifices to commemorate Abraham slaying a ram instead of his son Ismail. Muslims who can afford it slaughter one sheep per family member and the meat is shared with neighbors and poor people. Some see it as a sacrificial ritual that will earn you points for Paradise, others as a way to share with the needy that cannot afford meat. Evrim and her family offer money equivalent

to the value of a sheep to the poor instead. Her husband does not believe it is ethically right for today's Turks to slaughter so many sheep in one day.

Interest on loans and savings

There is a Muslim belief that it is not right to receive interest on savings and loans since you did not work to earn that money. My informants made a clear distinction on interest from a bank and interest on a personal loan. Bank interest is not a problem since it is a business like any other business. But usury or interest on a loan given to a person is generally seen as a sin.

View of the Koran

The original language of the Koran is Arabic. During Ottoman times, Turkish was written with Arabic script and literate, practicing Muslims had an advantage of already knowing how to read the prayers and scriptures in the Koran. Atatürk both abolished Arabic script for the Latin alphabet and had the Koran translated into Turkish. This has had some interesting effects on the view of the Koran for Turkish Muslims. To my understanding, the most common belief is that since the language of the original Koran is Arabic; the Koran should be read in that language. There are private courses as well as courses on television that teaches how to read the Arabic script of the Koran. However, to learn how to understand or speak Arabic is only for scholars. When I have visited gatherings with practicing, believing, Muslim women in homes in addition to fellowship and a meal, they usually have a time when they read the Koran together. After some time of initial chatting, they all make sure they have their headscarf on, even a visitor like myself was handed a scarf because otherwise the angels would not come and be present in the gathering. Then someone in the group started chanting a part of the Koran in Arabic. After the reading they read a memorized prayer in Turkish together while holding their palms lifted up. Sometimes a Muslim teacher came and taught on a certain topic like fate or lying. When I asked a practicing Muslim friend why she prefers to pray in Arabic she said that it is counted as a good deed and that she will earn God's love by praying in the Koran's original language. At the same time she had no doubt that God understands and listens to prayers in Turkish, too. Of my uncovered informants, only Fatma can read Arabic and has read the Koran four times. She has not read it in Turkish and although generally quite sure of her Muslim beliefs, she is not sure what the Koran says on different topics. She had never thought about if the Koran should be interpreted or read literally. When I asked what she thought about the idea that the Koran allows a man to have up to four wives and how we should understand that today she thought about it for a long

time. After some time she concluded that polygamy was not a command by God but it is not a sin either. She finished by saying that her husband had read the Koran in Turkish and he would know more. The other five women had read parts of it in Turkish but found it very difficult to understand. Selin read commentaries of the Koran instead but has also memorized some Koran prayers in Arabic and their meaning in Turkish. Evrim believes it should be read in Arabic but since she does not know it she had to read it in Turkish. On my question if the Koran should be read literally or interpreted, Selin claims that the Koran is very open to interpretation but it has to be done by someone with a great knowledge of language, Islam and at the same time is up-to-date with the modern times. There are different translations of the Koran into Turkish and she herself owns the one done in Atatürk's time. Evrim believes in what the Koran explains and that it gives direction to people about how to live, how to worship, pray and do the ritual cleaning. She continues to explain how the ritual cleaning was taught in a time when people were not as hygienic as today but the cleansing is actually for both body and soul. Zeynep has a hope of reading the whole Koran one day and she thinks the Koran should be interpreted literally. However, since it is not clear what God meant on certain topics when he gave the Koran to Muhammed, it needs to be interpreted. Herself a secondary school teacher, she is upset with uneducated Muslim teachers who interpret the Koran to their own liking. *"We, Secularists want a new, understandable translation of the Koran"*. She finishes by saying that she believes in everything the Koran says. Meryam, who has left her Muslim faith, says she has read the whole Koran in Turkish and agrees that it needs to be interpreted, *"if we read it literally, we would be like Iran"*. Aynur started reading the Koran to understand what it said about women and men but did not like what she read.

Then I started reading the Bible because I wondered why European countries are so developed and why our nation is so behind due to our Koran. But I did not like it when it said that the woman was created out of the man's rib so I stopped reading the Bible, too.

Headscarf usage and underlying beliefs

According to Carkoğlu and Toprak's study, 59% of Turkey's citizens have the opinion that every Muslim woman should cover her head, but on the other hand they do not see a hindrance to uncovered women counting themselves as Muslims (URL Carkoğlu and Toprak, 1999). Of my six informants, only Zeynep and Fatma believe it is actually sinful to not wear a veil. Their excuse for not covering their heads is personal style, work (as a teacher, Zeynep is not allowed to be covered at work) or the impossibility of following all of Islam's rules. Both of them grew up in families where the mother covered her head. Selin's mother did not cover her hair and Selin believes she is covered the way she dresses. On the day of the interview she

wore highwater pants and a short-sleeved t-shirt. She cannot understand the fuss about hair, in her opinion, her hair is not sexy and does not draw male attraction to herself. Evrim is uncertain whether a bare head really is a sin for a woman. She claims personal style as her main reason to not wear a veil and refers to not being raised in a family where people cover their heads. She believes having the intention of not drawing male attention is the most important. Even Fatma refers to the heart being the most important and that covered women sin in other ways but adds that there are those that can keep all the rules. She basically states that she does not want to wear a veil and even if she wanted to, her husband does not want her to do it. Meryem refers to Atatürk's reforms, how he wanted women to wear normal clothes. *"We are the children of Atatürk. We don't believe the covered women are real Muslims. I have never worn a veil but I used to put in on when I did namaz. I do not believe a veil relates to your faith anyway."* Meryem considers herself modest in dress, that is, never bare shoulders or mini-skirts, but she does not relate this to religion. Anything done in the extreme with the purpose of drawing attention to yourself is sinful to her. Aynur had a feminist view of the veil and the underlying belief of not drawing male attention.

To not cover your head is not sinful. When it comes to clothing, I believe in aesthetics. Why should only women cover their heads? My husband's hair is very nice and other women may be attracted to him because of it. If I need to cover my hair, he should also cover, then I do not have a problem with it. I get very upset about this. It is unfair that men can wear shorts but women have to wear layers of clothes until they sweat and smell badly. If men can wear shorts, I can wear miniskirts!

Zeynep divides the uncovered women in Turkey into two groups. Some are religious Muslims and practice the five pillars of Islam while others, like herself, does not wear a veil and do not practice the religion due to laziness. She believes faith comes from the inside and that the Koran only commands women to cover in general terms. She does not like those that cover everything except their eyes.

Turkish versus Muslim identity

With statistics as high as 97% belonging to Islam I wondered if it even is possible to be a Turk and not a Muslim. Would national or religious identity come first or would they be on a par with each other? My interviewees are all Turkish by ethnicity as well as nationality (that is not Kurdish, Arabic or one of the other minorities in Turkey). My question was unexpected and no one seemed to have given it any previous thought. Almost like a play with words, my informants tried out different answers. For the believing Muslims, the religious and national identity were on a par but if they had to make a choice, Zeynep and Fatma were Muslims first while Evrim and Selin were Turkish first although without excluding their Muslim identities. They did not believe one could be a Turk without being a Muslim except for Evrim who

acknowledged the non-Muslim minorities in Turkey. (In spite of many years with the official line of neglecting ethnic identities for the benefit of a common, national Turkish identity, the minorities themselves would probably not claim being Turkish by ethnicity but only by nationality, my comment.) Obviously, Meryem's Turkish identity comes first. She views religion as something depending on the country you are born in. At the same time, she makes herself an exception by saying that although being born in Turkey she is not a Muslim. My last and most differing informant was Aynur, who gave me some unexpected information.

In fact, there are many non-Muslim Turks but no one dares to say it because everyone will call them betrayers of Islam and our people. For example many are atheists; others follow other religions such as Buddhism or Jehovah's Witnesses. When I told my mother that I do not believe in the Koran anymore she was shocked and immediately asked God to forgive her for not raising me properly. The fact that I have left the Muslim faith will count as a sin on her part. I also told her that my husband is an atheist and then she said, "That may be OK but please, do not let anyone else know about this". People will not say that they do not believe in Islam out of respect for their parents and fear of what people will say.

Meryem's leaving Islam and something Zeynep said could confirm Aynur's statement. Zeynep guessed that it probably was possible to be a Turk and not a Muslim but that it would not be well received. *"People will think it is weird. We are so used to everybody being a Muslim but we do have religious freedom."*

Secularism

Secularism is shortly defined as the separation between state and religion or in the case of Turkey, the state controlling religion. In other words, secularism is the foundation of the Turkish Republic's project of becoming contemporary. It implies Islam to be on a personal level regarding belief and worship contrasted with advocates of Political Islam who prefer Islam to play a more visible role even in the public life (URL Carkoğlu and Toprak 1999). The aim of the Turkish Republic was to change religious basic assumptions about politics and women and make these similar to Europe's values. It has been a long process but most of my informants believe the Turkish people are less religious now than before the introduction of secularism. They believe the Ottoman government forced religious beliefs and practices on people. Due to this everyone practiced religion without questioning while today it is possible to reason and question religion. Evrim believes the level of religiosity in the society depends on politics more than anything else. Her mother says the religious climate in Turkey now is stronger than when she was young in the 1960's. Like 55% of the population of Turkey, Selin considers herself to be religious. She also thinks that most of the Koran is logical and she will follow the things she reads that suit her. Her attitude towards the Koran goes very much in line with my earlier presentation of Liberal Islam.

Education

The Turkish education system is definitely secular in nature according to all informants and they are pleased with this. “Religious Culture and Morals” is taught one class per week from grade four until eight (URL Baristiran 2004:25). This class teaches Islam rather than other world religions and therefore children of a different religious background may be excused from this class according to Evrim. However, since secularism is such a strong value at Turkish schools, Islam is taught from a Kemalist perspective and there are more quotes from Atatürk than the Koran (URL Baristiran 2004:27-28). All schools are accountable to the Ministry of Education but there are private schools in primary education with a religious profile, *dershanes* (a kind of private teaching institute) run by religious foundations, and there are also religious vocational high schools run by the state to educate students to become *imams* or *hatips* (preachers or leaders of the Muslim prayer). Since 1976, girls may also enter this school and in 1998 almost half of the student body was female (URL TESEV *İmam Hatip Okulları* 2004:9-10). Although vocational in name, the Imam Hatip Schools function more as an alternative to other high schools for children from religious families since it gives religious training alongside general education (URL TESEV *İmam Hatip Okulları* 2004:9, 16).

Another reason for female students choosing this school is that they are free to wear veils. In addition to this general education, the mosques also have summer courses to teach children about Islam. None of my informants could even imagine sending their children to a religious school for general education. Zeynep believes religion is totally different from education.

“Religion is something personal between you and God while a school is a public institution that needs to be separated from religion.” She takes sides in the popular opinion that religious schools brainwash their students towards political Islam. Fatma agrees, she does not want her children to become extremists and therefore prefers regular schools. She wants them to make their own choices about religion when they are older. Selin does not believe religious schools teach scientific facts and that they force their students to perform religious rituals. She will therefore choose secular schools for her child when she is older.

Gender Equality

When I presented my question about gender equality to my informants, I did not specify between their personal views of gender equality or how they perceive gender equality in Turkey today and therefore they understood the question differently. Where possible, I try to make it clear what their references were. The two oldest of my interviewees believe men and

women are equal based on our humanity and us being created with a mind and an intellect by God as equals. Selin believes the sexes to be basically equal but sees a difference between men and women concerning suitability for different occupations. *“For example mining would be difficult for women while mothering is difficult for men.”* To care for children comes more naturally to women according to her and she gives an example of a man she saw in the supermarket,

This man had his child sitting in his shopping cart. At the cashiers, the bar code of an item didn't work so he left the cart with his baby sitting in it and went back to change the item. I don't believe a mother would have done that.

Evrin does not think men and women are treated equally at any place in the world but she does not see it as a problem related to religion. Everywhere men are more often promoted and get better jobs and women tend to look at what is best for their children before their own career. She thinks that having children do not affect men in the same way as women; men do not get distracted as easily. Zeynep and Meryem believe the inequality between the sexes is due to the belief of *namus* or honor. This is a strong value of honor or chastity relating to women's sexuality and virginity for religious Muslims. The original idea of *namus* was protection but instead it left women behind in development and according to Zeynep many men still see women as second-class people. She believes it is uneducated religious teachers who spread this belief. Fatma agrees that there is no gender equality in Turkey. She sounds quite bitter when I bring up the topic. *“Men can do whatever they want and are superior to women. They may move around freely, even late at night but women cannot. Even though it is a sin, it is more accepted for men to cheat on their wives but women must not”*. She concludes, *“Women are oppressed by men in Turkey.”*

Value of work and family

As stated earlier, the reforms in the early times of the Republic made it possible for women to enter any education and profession. Although many Turkish women are still housewives, I have not met one Turkish woman who does not think it was a good reform. In fact, 77% in Turkey believe the republican reforms lead to progress (URL Toprak 2001:3). A good woman is described as a good mother and wife. She cares for her family and makes sure they are fed and clean. Added to caring for her family and entertaining guests she may work outside the home. Her morals are also important and Fatma adds that she is altruistic, unselfish and self-sacrificing. She makes herself an example of a good woman who supports her husband in every way, tries to save money and does not talk back at him. All of my working informants

value having a family very strongly. Selin goes as far as calling it a basic human need and she does not believe a career can satisfy you in the same way. Her reference is single women in movies and she thinks they look very lonely in spite of their success at work. Meryem agrees and expresses how wonderful and unique the experience of motherhood is. *“A mother’s love is the greatest of all, it means a lot of sacrifice because a mother always loves and protects her children. A single person can never experience this!”* Zeynep however believes work could satisfy a single woman but she would still need the help and support from her neighbors, she cannot live totally independent. Although a single woman may be personally satisfied, the society would not look well on her according to Zeynep. Single women are less free and need to be more aware of their behavior and reputation in Turkey. For example they need to be careful of what men they are seen with and what time they come home at night. Selin adds that divorced women also have a difficult time due to the same reasons. She mentions a divorced neighbor who is discussed all the time by neighbors. Once when the neighbor visited Selin, without being asked, she started explaining about who the man was who had visited her the day before. Meryem specifies that it is not necessarily the single status that gives a woman less reputation, it is the way she lives. *“If she lives like a decent woman, there is no problem.”* The only housewife in the group had the only differing opinion whether a single person can have a satisfied life without having a family of her own. She immediately stated that it is even better to be single since Turkish men oppress their wives.

Child rearing and Religion

All of my interviewees claim they raise their children according to secular values. Selin and Evrim learned what they know about Islam’s doctrine and memorized prayers in school. Neither of their sets of parents have strong Muslim beliefs but Evrim says she learned Muslim values from her family. In the area of religion, Selin and Evrim want their children to make their own choices when they are older. Meryem had the same opinion when her children were small. She taught them about God but not about Muhammed and they saw her do *namaz* when they were small but she never told them to do it. Now her children are grown-up and according to the way their mother raised them, both have chosen a faith on their own, which happen to be different from their mother’s. Meryem herself learned about Islam from her family, religion classes in school and from books but left the Muslim faith due to some bad experiences in life. She believes Islam is empty and reasoning brought her to the faith she has today. Zeynep learned about child rearing when she got her education in teaching but says she cannot apply it very well. Although a believing but not practicing Muslim, she says that she

would like to teach her children about Islam but lacks knowledge about it. She could imagine sending her teenagers to the mosque for a religious course but she would be very careful in choosing the religious teacher first and so far, it has not worked out due to other priorities. She herself learned about Islam from her own family as a child and was a practicing Muslim for a while in her youth. Her mother still hopes she will come back to a practicing faith some day. Fatma is not sure how she learned about Islam. She says she picked up bits and pieces everywhere, for example by going with her mother to religious meetings and other visits related to rites of passage. She is the only one that claims to teach her children about fasting and praying and about what is sinful or not.

Sex segregation from a religious Muslim's view

There are many Muslim practices about how contact between the two sexes should be conducted. Because of the extensive nature of this topic, a brief explanation is necessary before presenting my informants' views. My information comes from an interview I made for a previous essay. This informant is a strongly religious Muslim whose family tries to practice sex segregation. According to *Hamide*, the Koran prescribes this out of protection for the woman. It is the same underlying belief that is the foundation for covering your head and body while other men are around. A woman may not look at or talk to another man apart from her husband in a way that may be understood as flirting. This includes not shaking hands with other men while greeting each other although it is common practice for less religious Turks. A woman may have close relationships only with her own husband, father, father-in-law, sons, brothers, nephews, or very old men. Hamide's social life consists mostly of neighbor women, relatives or wives of her husband's colleagues. When she and her husband have families visiting, they prefer men to meet in the living room and the women in a smaller sitting room but she explains that due to the different lifestyles of Turks, it is not always possible. When my family visited her family in their summer house she set a separate table for the two men present claiming it would be too crowded if all sat at the same table. At all Turkish weddings and big parties there is a lot of dancing but a covered woman is not supposed to dance if there are other men in the room according to her. When Hamide herself got married there was a curtain between the men and the women during the reception dinner but this is quite unusual to my understanding. Religious Turkish women are not against dancing *per se* but only against dancing in the presence of men other than their husbands. I recently attended a *henna night*, a kind of bridal shower where all the bride's female relatives and friends came together to bid farewell to her. This particular one was attended by both covered and uncovered

women. The bride-to-be herself is uncovered but a practicing Muslim. The henna night was held in a public place and there were over 100 women attending. The only men present there were the discjockey, the bridegroom-to-be and the fiancé of the bridegroom's sister. Most of the night there was dancing but only about 15 of the women danced. Later, Hamide explained to me that she and the other covered women did not dance due to the three men present in the room.

Sex segregation from my informants' views

None of my uncovered informants practice sex segregation like this and they had quite strong feelings against it. Selin;

Most Turks don't practice this. We practice this only in the mosque because the Koran tells us to but not in our social life. Sometimes we do divide men and women but it is because the men want to watch football and we don't, or we have to look after our children. Sometimes the men want to play cards so they do and we do something else in a different room, then we play after them.

My family and I have visited with Evrim and her husband many times and I have not perceived any difference between the way families socialize in my home country Sweden regarding relationships between the different sexes. Evrim stated that she has no bad intentions or interest in flirting with other men. If they think badly of her because of her clothing or her talking to them it is not her fault but their problem. My interviewees see no problem in shaking another man's hand while greeting. Meryem thinks the rule of sex segregation is nonsense and absurd and went as far as to say that people that think like this are strange and perverted. Zeynep shares Meryem's strong feelings on this subject,

I get very angry about people who practice this. I hate this. If you are a good Muslim you won't look at other women in a bad way. There should be no need to force this separation. Many men who behave like Muslims on the outside cheat on their wives. I hate this.

Fatma's response was very honest,

No, we don't practice this. Our religion is a very nice religion but in fact if I followed all its rules I would have to totally cover myself, read the Koran and do namaz all day and never lie. I can't do it all. We socialize mixed and dance together.

Aynur brought up the related topic of *namus* or honor. One of the reforms in the early Turkish Republic was to bring women out in the public and to prove that a woman could be chaste without wearing a veil (URL Shissler 2004:115-116). Aynur thinks it is a very harmful belief that a daughter's virginity and chastity is so important for the family that they, especially the father protect her from everything. She claims that there are many parents who oppress their daughters by forcing them to wear a veil and keep them at home in order to protect their honor. Since these girls desire freedom, they start leading double lives and lie to their parents

about where they go. To get away from the oppression of their fathers they will marry the first man that proposes. Aynur finishes her explanation by saying that she finds it very sad because how can you make a healthy choice about marriage when you come from such an unhealthy situation as this?

Politics and Sharia Law

Not surprisingly, my informants do not believe that Sharia, or Islamic Law, can be used at all times in all contexts. They all claim we need to look at our own times when it comes to politics since people and situations change constantly. Evrim said that the Islamic Law is not complete and that the Ottoman politicians used this law for their own purposes. *"That's why Atatürk had to change the constitution. Religion is such a sensitive topic for people and can therefore be easily abused by politicians."* She was especially concerned about the idea of women's rights and the right for men to practice polygamy in Sharia. Selin explains the reference to polygamy in the Koran with reason,

It was written during war time when there was a lack of men. Then men married more than one wife so they could be supported, it was needed for the women. But we cannot interpret it like that today.

Meryem insists that Sharia cannot be used anywhere today and the countries that do are very backwards. These comments can be compared with the results of Carkoğlu and Toprak's sociological study where as many as 21,2% want Sharia Law to replace the present Civil Code. However, this figure is probably misleadingly high because when the respondents were asked about specific parts of Sharia, their answers in favor of Sharia all came out lower. For example, respondents in favor of polygamy were 10,7%, in favor of divorce according to Islamic Law 14%, in favor of smaller heritage for daughters 13,9%, and in favor of punishment for adulterers by stoning according to Islamic Law only 1,4% (URL Carkoğlu and Toprak, 1999).

Prime Minister

My informants generally prefer a secular prime minister but as long as he or she has the best for Turkey in mind, it does not matter to Evrim and Fatma. Selin has the opinion that a secular prime minister would act more logical in every area. She is not sure about Erdoğan's intentions and thinks he uses religion in politics. Meryem wants the whole world to know Turkey as a secular country and is very clear that she prefers a secular prime minister. When Turkey got a religious prime minister in 1995 (Necmettin Erbakan and Tansu Çiller coalition, my comment) Aynur seriously feared that the time of freedom in Turkey had come to an end.

She had reason to fear since among other religious statements, Erbakan praised the Islamic revolution in Iran and promised to lead a revolution in Turkey that would be painful but unavoidable (Ahmad 2003:169). With few exceptions, politicians in Turkey are generally men. Evrim believes women are not given the opportunity and since politics are considered “dirty work”, most women are not interested anyway. Ironically, the only female prime minister ever in Turkey, Tansu Çiller, was accused of serious corruption. Selin and Meryem think suitability for political posts has nothing to do with sex but rather with education. Selin even believes women are more successful than men not necessarily due to intelligence but ability to work hard. Tradition is a great obstacle for women to get involved in politics. Zeynep is the only one who believes women are less suitable for politics since, according to her, women are more emotional and think less logically compared to men.

Turkish Islam

According to most of my references, Islam in Turkey has always been seen as a tolerant religion. Carkoğlu and Toprak also claim that Turkish people have an unusually tolerant understanding of the Islamic faith. Extremist Muslims only make up to 2.7% of the population. 89.2% believe there are good people among non-Muslims and 41.8% even believe that if non-Muslims do not sin, they are able to enter Paradise. Most importantly of all, 91.5% of Turkey’s population believe it is necessary to establish an environment tolerant and peaceful towards different beliefs in order to have peace (URL Carkoğlu and Toprak 1999). As a foreigner and representative of a different faith I have been met with both tolerance and interest from neighbors and people I meet in daily life, both from religious and secular Muslims. Some avoid the topic of religion altogether, some see the need to inform me of Islam and some even try to convince me of the superiority of Islam in their opinion. My informants also claim that Islam is a tolerant religion and that Turkey has always treated non-Muslims in the country well, even during Ottoman times¹⁴. Evrim even started her description of Islam by saying it is a tolerant and flexible religion. My religious, older neighbor asked me about Christianity the first time we met. She started mentioning the prophets of Islam and when she found out that I knew about them she was pleased and quickly concluded that we share the same beliefs. Should we discuss it further there would obviously be many differences as well but my point is that she had a tolerant attitude of inclusion, not exclusion. Tolerance may be hard to measure but the fact that Turkey has so many different expressions

¹⁴ This is a very disputed area so I will leave it as an opinion of my informants.

of Islam as well as other religions coexisting with each other speaks for itself, the unifying factor being the nation state. Back to Carkoğlu and Toprak's study, 83.5% of the population would not be disturbed if the majority of the women and girls in their neighbourhood were covered and 66.3% would not object if the majority of the women and girls in their neighbourhood wore miniskirts. Selin told me about the Fatih district in Istanbul where all women are covered and other areas that are totally European in dress code as an example of religious differences in Turkey. She said she had friends that were covered in school but they do not see each other anymore and none of her present friends are covered. On the other hand, having friends of a different lifestyle and being tolerant of others are not necessarily the same.

V. Analysis

Faith and Practice

Those of my informants that confess to a Muslim faith share the same basic articles of faith as classical Islam. Although they firmly believe the five pillars of Islam to be a must, they are less faithful in practicing them which I perceived led to a bad conscience in some cases.

Other beliefs and practices of Islam such as alcohol prohibition, wearing of a veil, not receiving interest on savings, sex segregation, slaughtering a sheep at the Muslim festival of sacrifices are the areas where secular women differ the most from more religious Muslims in Turkey. Most often these women refer to the modern times they live in, Atatürk's reforms, personal style, or inability due to work for not keeping these traditions. Some offer money to the poor or try to do good deeds as a substitute for these, others postpone a more religious lifestyle to an older age. All in all, they have more freedom in making their own choices in matters of lifestyle now but the insecurity of not knowing how things will be in eternity sometimes disturbs them. The informants that did not confess to the Muslim faith were, if possible, even more private about their faith and even more free in forming their lifestyles. They did not see religion as having any effect on a life after death but rather spoke of goodness and humanity as foundational values.

University teaches reasoning

It is likely that, and much research points towards the fact that women with a university education have processed their beliefs more than women without a degree. I would agree, both for religious and secular Muslims but with different results in belief and practice. However, I do not claim to have proof of this since only two out of six interviewees did not have a higher education. One of them did differ compared to the others in having more

traditional religious beliefs and lifestyle. She was also the only housewife which could point towards less interaction with people of a different mindset.

Politics

The attitude towards politics, religion and Atatürk's reforms were similar between the informants. All were positive towards, some even devoted admirers of Atatürk and were pleased for the equal possibilities to study and work outside the home. They did not want religion to influence politics and they viewed Turkey to be more advanced compared to other Muslim countries that apply Sharia Law. The reigning, religious party in Turkey has had to accept the fact that Islamic politics will not do in secular Turkey and that adaptation and compromise is necessary. It is not their task to help people reach Paradise but to lead a country in the 21st century.

Identity issues

For the believing Muslims, their religious and national identity basically go hand in hand. I believe their majority status give them the assumption that everyone is a more or less religious Muslim unless born in a family with a different religious background. I assume this is related to the number of unrecorded cases of non-Muslims among ethnic Turks. Since the Muslim identity is so strong in the country, the number of Turks that have left the Muslim faith are hidden in statistics out of fear or respect for parents. If you want to lead a secular lifestyle, there is definitely a lot of compromising of traditional Muslim beliefs and values to do both in your personal and social life. However, I do not believe only secular Muslims have had to make these adjustments, even traditional Muslims have had to adapt to modern times. The question is rather how much religion and how much secularism you prefer in your personal mix. Finally, it is clear that belief and practice do not always go hand in hand. Some women have adjusted their beliefs to fit their lifestyle, others carry a bad conscience and fear for not living according to their beliefs and each mix is unique and personal.

V. Conclusion

When I started working on this paper, my tutor questioned if "secular" was a workable term for uncovered women in Turkey. As I studied more I learned that the equivalent word in Turkish, *laik*, is mostly used about political matters and less common when referring to people less religious or uncovered. In spite of this, I want to conclude that the term secular

actually is perfect for uncovered women in Turkey. Let me explain how the term secular relates to Turkey and its inhabitants.

First, if by secular I refer to a state separate from religious influences, then Turkey fits into the concept in many ways but not completely. The secular government, together with the military, try to control religion so that it does not become extreme and is quite successful at it. But the tension between existing religious parties on the one hand and the defender of secularism, the military on the other hand continues. An interesting point that has caught my attention is that the secular state actually promotes Islam above other religions through its educational system at the same time as they claim secularism and religious freedom.

Secondly, to use the term secular to say that uncovered Turkish women are non-religious or wordly is wrong. Few of the uncovered women describe themselves as non-religious and even fewer as atheists. They have clearly a belief in and awareness of God's existence and are more or less religious in their worship of him. Their knowledge of Islam varies even if they have chosen to not submit to all of its commands and rules. Not all uncovered women of Sunni Muslim decent are believing Muslims, some of these women have left Islam but not necessarily God.

Finally, if I use the term secular about my target group with the meaning that they see religion as something personal and not something that needs to be shown in public or that is imposed from the state, I believe I have found a good word to describe them. I agree with Marvine Howe that the big divide between the citizens of Turkey are more on lifestyle than beliefs. The average Turk has a strong sense of spiritual matters and God plays a big part of that spirituality but the way it is expressed differs. It is as wrong to assume that uncovered women are less religious as assuming that all covered women are extremely religious. I would also say that although God is important in my informants' lives, they are less submissive to what Muslims generally perceive to be commands of God. They have taken adaptation to Western values and lifestyle a step further than their covered sisters without losing a general belief in God and his sovereignty. Secularism has definitely changed the face of Islam in Turkey and the level of submission to God according to the commands made by the Koran varies significantly.

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