Role of Turkish Islamic Organizations in Belgium: The Strategies of *Diyanet* and *Milli Görüş*

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ABSTRACT

Immigration of Turkish guest-workers to Western European countries in the 1960s and 1970s laid the ground for the emergence of various transnational religious organizations. This paper examines transnational organizations of Turkish origin that gained major support and membership in their host societies. Drawing upon a case study on Turks in Belgium, it shows that in the last four decades these organisations went through various transformations depending on the dynamics in their respective immigrant communities, host societies and countries of origin. This essay captures the role and self-adaptation process of Turkish Islamic organisations vis-à-vis the changing environment both in their host countries and countries of origin. It focuses on two Turkish transnational organisations in Belgium: The Islamic Federation of Belgium (IFB) and the Turkish Islamic Foundation of Belgium (TIFB). This essay concludes that political structure in the countries of origin constantly induces transnational organizations to further adopt and position themselves according to changing circumstances.

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Immigration of Turkish guest-workers to Western European countries in the 1960s and 1970s laid the ground for the emergence of various transnational religious organizations. The transnational practices and allegiances promoted through various immigrant based organizations have considerable influence over both the country of origin and the receiving country. In this essay, I will focus on the impact of two specific transnational organizations on the management of religious diversity in Belgium: The Islamic Federation of Belgium (IFB, known as Milli Görüş) and the Turkish Islamic Foundation of Belgium (TIFB, known as the Diyanet). These organizations have been selected on three bases. First, they by far constitute the two most popular religious organizations amongst the Turks in Western Europe. Second, it is assumed that their different transnational loyalties would distinguish their discourses from each other. Hence, they allow us to understand the in-

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ternal differentiation between groups that are lumped together under a single heading of Muslims for the purposes of policy implementation. Third, their different trajectories of emergence in the context of political and institutional opportunity structures of the receiving country are expected to affect their strategies for migrants' transnational practices, which are also being shaped by – and shape – their political institutional environment[1]. Hence, this essay, by employing two angles of approach, transnationalism and political opportunity structure (POS), seeks to expose these organizations' contrasting discourses vis-à-vis the local Turkish community, the Belgian political structure and last but not least each other.

Belgium provides a significant case study due to the co-existence of a body representing an institutionalized Islam, the Muslims' Executive of Belgium, alongside the branches of transnational Muslim organizations. I mainly focus on this particular body and strive to reveal the cyclical relationship of influence between the Muslims' Executive and these Turkish Islamic organizations.

Conceptual Framework

Although this essay does not aim to test a particular theory, an attempt which would have required either a longitudinal or comparative study, it is still informed by the juxtaposition of two perspectives.

The first theory is the well-known Political Opportunity Structure (POS), which, with an overtly simplistic formulation, advocates the formative influence of *the* context in the claims-making of different movements. The main premise of the POS, the political context determines the contours of social movements, is a major contribution to this essay. While acknowledging the explanatory power of the POS, I also agree with Boussetta,[2] who argues that too much focus on institutional aspects may lead scholars to perceive of these movements as representatives of one holistic community and thus disregard the internal differentiations among them, which is equally significant for their decision making and strategies. In this paper, I attempt to redress the issue of internal differentiation by examining two different Turkish Islamic organizations.

This is where this research connects with another literature: transnationalism. My presumption is that the internal differentiation within the Turkish community

in Belgium can be better understood by scrutinizing the transnational ties of the community members. A closer look at the associative life of Turkish immigrants would reveal that it is virtually a replica of the political cleavages within the Turkish Republic: from secular to "Islamist", from left-wing to right-wing, from Turkish nationalist to Kurdish nationalist and from Sunni to Alevi; all tendencies and movements one may find in the Turkish political arena are in fact represented in Belgium[3]. Therefore, these organizations "transgress national boundaries; they operate at multiple sites and across a geographic scope ranging from the local to the global. In this sense, they are truly 'transnational'."[4] What is also central in this field is that the agents of transnational practices are non-state actors such as networks and organizations that cut across national borders.[5] Hence, including a transnational perspective allows this essay to confirm a legitimate concern with Turkish Islamic organizations.

To summarize the theoretical section, I do not consider Turkish Islamic organizations as passive agents who are entirely shaped by exogenous factors. Rather, I conceive of them as agents capable of both adapting to the structures surrounding them and affecting those very structures that influence them. As stated by Meyer, "the wisdom, creativity, and outcomes of activists' choices—their *agency*—can only be understood and evaluated by looking at the political context and the rules of the games in which those choices are made—that is, *structure*."[6] To rely on a POS framework is, thus, significant in order to uncover the impact of the context.

On the other hand, I do not take the POS to mean that each and every ethnic group in a given society will develop identical processes of identity-making. Admitting the host country's structure plays a considerable role in the expression of identities, I believe it is not the sole determinant. Hence, transnational literature allows me not to be deluded by an absolutist POS framework and pay attention to different dynamics that are equally important in the strategies of organizations. These factors, grossly identified as transnational loyalties, include the relations with the country of origin, with 'sister' organizations in other European countries and among different organizations. The investigation of these ties would help trace their mass impact on the 'target' community as well as on the structure, which by definition seeks to influence the very community.

Belgian Political Structure

Since the issue at stake is the Turkish Islamic organizations in Belgium, the structure under scrutiny needs to be the legal culture vis-à-vis religious diversity and its very concrete outcome: the institutionalization of Islam.

Approach to religious diversity: Institutionalization of Islam[7]

In Belgium religious diversity is regulated based on two principles enshrined in the constitution. Whereas Article 19 guarantees the freedom of worship and its public exercise, Article 21, on the other hand, details the state's non-interference principle;

> «The State has no right to intervene neither in the appointment nor in the setting up of the Ministers of the cults»[8]

This framework is complemented by two further provisions. Article 181 establishes that the salary and pensions of clergymen are to be paid by the state. Lastly, Article 24§1 promulgates the obligation for public schools to teach any of the recognized religions or non-confessional ethics.

As the latter provision states, this educational right is attributed only to recognized religions. The same goes for the funding of the ministers of the faith and of the property belonging to the religious community. Therefore, apart from a symbolic affirmation, official recognition considerably alters the social position of and opportunities offered to a religious community. Various conditions are required in order to obtain recognition.[9] First, the faith should have a satisfactory number of believers (several tens of thousands). Second, it should be sufficiently structured to be able to appoint a representative organ, which would conduct and represent the faith in the relations with the civil authority. The two other criteria are to be established in the country for a considerable time period (several decades) and to have a social utility.

An official recognition can solely be granted by a legislative act upon request of the representatives of the faith. It should be underlined that the recognition only entails the worldly (temporal) aspects of the faith, hence, the representative organ is held responsible for appointing ministers, religion teachers, chaplains and administering budgets. The objective is to grant the state an interlocutor rather than establishing a theological authority[10].

Islam was recognized in Belgium with the act of 19 July 1974, which amended the previous 1870 law on the recognition of faiths. This pro-active recognition has made Belgium the second European country after Austria to recognize Islam. The first body that received support from the Belgian state was the 'Islamic and Cultural Centre' (ICC). Although it was attributed considerable power by the Belgian state pending the appointment of an interlocutor, in the eyes of the Muslim communities, Saudi Arabia-dominated ICC has never been a legitimate organ.

Not only because an overwhelming majority of the Muslims in Belgium did not belong to Wahhabism but they also did not feel represented by a committee composed of Muslim countries' ambassadors and chaired by Saudi Arabian ambassador.[11] Belgian government's delay in realizing the problem of legitimacy of the ICC as well as its treatment of Saudi Arabia as a "Muslim Vatican,"[12] have led many to conclude that the recognition of Islam was really a symbolic step towards Arab oil-producing countries at the time of the oil crisis.[13] The situation involving on one side a *de facto* functioning ICC and, on the other side, an alienated Muslim community has for a long time remained in deadlock.

The process leading to the foundation of the Muslims' Executive in 1999 has been a rocky road because of ICC's unilateral election of an organ and its subsequent refusal by the Ministry of Justice, establishment of several transitory committees, and an initial provisional Executive. The provisional Executive organized elections in order to finalize the task of selecting a religious leader for Islam. The distribution of seats was separated along ethnic lines. Since no official account of Muslims is available in Belgium, there are only estimates of turnout for this first election. Nevertheless, it must have been considered sufficiently representative, because by May 3rd 1999, the Belgian state recognized the Muslims' Executive as its official interlocutor. [14]

Was this the happy ending of a thorny process for Muslims in Belgium? One would rather be tempted to state the opposite. Problems have stretched over years, the Executive has been re-composed several times due to various disagreements, malfunctioning, and, according to some, the state's interferences. The last startling event took place in 2008 when the Executive was disbanded for a few months due to corruption and fraud claims.[15]

Since March 2008, the Executive has been trying to survive with extremely limited funds, which is a legacy of its predecessor. It has been given the task of developing a detailed project on the best possible way to institute a representative organ for Muslim communities in Belgium. Apart from holding consultations with different stakeholders, the Executive is mostly focused on the procedure of recognition of mosques. So far, 43 mosques in Wallonia, 16 in Flanders and 5 in Brussels Capital Region have been recognized, and almost 50 more mosques are awaiting recognition.[16] It has also managed to appoint 12 imams, 3 for mosques associated with *Milli Görüş* and the others for Moroccan mosques. This process is underway and there is still room for the appointment of 50 imams in Wallonia and 19 in Flanders.[17]

In theory, the Belgian political structure is open to the recognition of religious diversity within its territories and offers a favorable environment to its Muslim minority(ies) for self-realization. Despite this apparent institutional openness for inclusion, the failure of several attempts in practice has severely undermined the prospect of a positive development. It is also believed that the Belgian state disrespected its constitutional obligations and that it has interfered in the internal affairs of the Islamic faith. Both my interviewees and field experts have noted a number of instances to that effect.[18] First, the would-be members of the Executive have been subjected to the Ministry of Justice's screening process, which had the authorization to reject "unwanted" candidates. This exercise, which has not been in place for other faiths' representatives, seems to be boosted by the Belgian state's fear of fundamentalism spreading in Belgium. The screening also sends confusing messages to the Belgian society as to whether Muslims should be scared off. Secondly, the very fact of conducting elections has been considered as something the state is pushing. According to Kanmaz, "attempts to achieve control were translated through the need for 'representativeness,' a condition that is stipulated in no other regulation and has been enforced in no other 'recognized religion.'"[19]

The Belgian example demonstrates how an inconsistent application of a formally inclusive policy may result in unexpected and counterproductive outcomes. Even the establishment of a representative organ after 25 years of chaos was unable to restore order; internal conflicts prevailed within the Executive. It has suffered from bad governance filled with clientelist attitudes and ideological divergences. This constant 'in limbo' situation severely undermines the legitimacy of the Executive and subdues its authority. At the end of the day, it is highly questionable whether the process of recognition has been to the benefit of Muslims at all. The scandals and internal disagreements have strengthened negative and essentialist depictions of Islam, and also, pushed Muslims into a more marginalized position in Belgian society.

Conforming to the transnationalist theory, the marginalization of a community forges a 'reactive ethnic formation' through migrant associations.[20] This line of reasoning seems to be reinforced by the case of Turkish immigrants in Belgium. The precarious economic and educational situation[21] coupled with the highly concentrated residential habits[22] of the Turkish community made it possible for Turkish immigrants to keep very close ties with their 'home' country and to develop analogous 'homeland' organizations. In analyzing the influence of these organizations, Manço argues that by channeling the social dissatisfaction and the fear of assimilation towards ideological or denominational certainty, the

Muslim communities in Belgium find an answer to their quest for their identity, to their demand for valorization and to the need for recognition.[23] Thus, Turkish communities in Europe are generally characterized by a strong associational life, dense social networks, and a strong sense of community.[24] The aforementioned study also confirms that eighty percent of the Turks in Belgium see themselves as a genuine community and over two thirds are found to be active in one or more organizations.[25] Furthermore, this firm identification with their country of origin does not seem to decline with the length of residence.[26] However, the allegiances of members of the first generation may be "qualitatively different from those of members of the second and third generation who may have developed a homeland political standpoint from afar."[27]

Notwithstanding this, the associational life of the Turkish community entails a high level of diversity with many interconnections. When it comes to 'religious services', it is possible to come across the followers of different movements such as Süleymancis, Nurcus, Kaplancis, Alevis.[28] Nevertheless, two organizations stand out: TIFB and BIF. They are the so-called roof federations, which contain a considerable number of mosque-associations covering ninety percent of Turkish mosques. A Turkish-run mosque in Europe is a place of worship as well as a place where people get together and engage with their community;[29] therefore, these organizations play a significant role in forming the opinions of Turkish immigrants.

An inquiry into the strategies of TIFB (Diyanet) and IFB (Milli Görüş)

Turkish Islamic Foundation of Belgium (TIFB)

The Turkish Directorate for Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) initially did not engage in founding of mosques in Europe and showed little interest in extending its influence beyond Turkey.[30] However, by the 1980s, this strong organization in Turkey had acknowledged the permanency of a Turkish "émigré" community in Europe. This realization has been accompanied by an additional one: Other Islamic and anti-Kemalist movements, which have been suppressed in Turkey yet freely active in Europe, have implications for politics back in Turkey.[31] In Belgium, the TIFB, an association organically linked to the Turkish Directorate for Religious Affairs was established in 1982, and is comprised of 62 mosque associations - according to its sources.

TIFB, by definition, only focuses on activities related to Turkish Muslims. Structurally, it is headed by the religious affairs unit of the Turkish Embassies.

The associations in Europe related to the *Diyanet* are often postulated as acting on behalf of the Turkish government, which allows the latter to retain a certain degree of influence over the Turkish Muslim immigrant community

Its *imam*s, who have completed their religious training in Turkey and who have followed a language course prior to their arrival, are civil servants whose salaries are paid for by the Turkish government. They usually hold these positions for four years. As a consequence of this organic link, the officials who have gone through the Republican educational system profess a secular Kemalist approach to Islam.[32] TIFB is very keen on stressing the compatibility of Islam with European democratic values and the separation between state and religion. The principle of secularism within TIFB is championed to the point of presenting it as "*the real application and the essence of Islam*."[33]

The activities of TIFB are geared towards the preservation of the cultural and religious identity of Turks abroad.[34] In that sense, TIFB provides a variety of services that are not necessarily restricted to the religious realm. Similar to the tasks of *Diyanet* in Turkey, it builds and operates mosques, employs imams, organizes religious events (*hajj*/*'umra*, *adha*), provides burial services and religious education for children, offers evening meals (fast-breaking) during the month of Ramadan, etc. In addition, it engages in socio-cultural activities, which are expected to enhance familiarization with the Turkish culture. Two components in this respect appear essential: religion and language. TIFB considers them to be intrinsically linked and dependent on each other, "*A society cannot survive without faith and faith can only be transmitted through language*."[35] In order to ensure the survival of these fundamental values, TIFB teaches not only Islamic religion but also the Turkish language.

The Turkish language and Muslim faith are to be preserved over generations and to be prized. Therefore, TIFB seeks "to guide and teach the religious beliefs and practices of Islam to generations born and brought up in different non-Turkish socio-cultural environments,"[36] which are considered "of *fundamental* difference.'[37] This rather essentialist approach to culture leads TIFB to define integration in more structural terms as well. Integration equals abiding by the laws of the receiving country, speaking perfectly the local language, and having good neighborly relations. An appropriation at the level of discourse is also striking, even though a majority of young Turkish immigrants have acquired Belgian nationality, in the eyes of TIFB, they are "*Turkish nationals who need to be acquainted with*

the culture of their 'motherland' and to speak their 'mother tongue' before they can grasp the culture of the country of residence."[38] Belgian nationality seems to be relevant in legal terms rather than in substantive aspects of citizenship issues. Parallel to that, Turkish nationality is always accentuated in speeches, which address "fellow citizens" instead of Muslim brothers or sisters.

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The associations in Europe related to the *Diyanet* are often postulated as acting on behalf of the Turkish government, which allows the latter to retain a certain degree of influence over the Turkish Muslim immigrant community.[39] Although determining to what extent the official Turkish policy line is perpetuated in the discourses of TIFB could be the subject of a study in itself, one can easily discern points of resemblance in a common approach towards the community. For instance, the speech delivered in February 2008 by the Turkish Prime Minister in Cologne, where he qualified assimilation as a "crime against humanity,"[40] clearly resonates with TIFB's perception of the use of Turkish language in mosques as "*a human right.*"[41]

The Islamic Federation of Belgium (IFB)

The Islamic Federation of Belgium is the official association that reflects the perspective of *Milli Görüş,* which is a major movement among the religious Turks in Europe. The first immigrant associations with an Islamist appeal emerged in the early 70s in Germany. Whereas the process of federalisation started in 1975, the well-known denomination took place in 1985 with the establishment of *Avrupa Milli Görüş Teşkilatları* in Cologne.[42] Though literally *Milli Görüş* can be translated as 'National Vision', the term 'Milli' does not refer to a nation but to the Koranic notion of "Millet," which denotes a community that is unified around Prophet Mohammad and the values he conveys.[43]

Milli Görüş was initially established as an Islamist movement, which was highly critical of Turkey's secular regime. Its activities were heavily oriented towards homeland politics and mainly took the form of supporting –both financially and literally- political parties sharing the *Milli Görüş* vision. *Milli Görüş* strives to Islamize all areas of life without further distinction between private and public spaces. Hence, Turkish Islamism, first and foremost, opposes the contemporary Kemalist-inspired regime[44].

Photo: AA, Dursun Aydemir

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Organizations linked to *Milli Görüş* are now very widespread among European countries and have established a popular support-base. In Belgium, it officially operates, since 1986, manages 30 mosque-associations, according to its sources. Turkish immigrant organizations are much larger in Germany in terms of their size and are perceived as agenda setters for those in other European countries.[45] *Milli Görüş* in Belgium is equally characterized by a twofold structure: on the one hand, the organization relies upon local associations who enjoy relative autonomy and, on the other hand, on an international network headed by IGMG (Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş) in Germany. Thus, the transnational aspect proves itself much more relevant when it comes to IFB. As Ostergaard-Nielsen finds that, in many instances, "there are more contact and co-operation within the different ethnic, religious or party political organizations than between adverse movements within one country."[46] The relationship between IFB in Belgium and IGMG is a perfect example of this intense co-operation. A number of the members hold seats in both federations. They organize common events such as pilgrimage trips to Mecca and IGMG follows closely local activities of IFB. It is not surprising to encounter the officials of IGMG in Ramadan dinners in Brussels or its press releases wishing success to the Muslims' Executive.

By the mid 1980s, *Milli Görüş* re-casted its agenda and began concentrating on the issues of the societies in which the Turkish-Muslims lived. Therefore, its orientation shifted gradually to a search for ways to address the challenge of perpetuating Muslim identity and lifestyle.[47] Nevertheless, their ideological stance continues to be shaped by politics in Turkey. The president of IFB reiterates that his organization does not maintain "*a formal or organic link with any political party in Turkey but only ties of love.*"[48]

IFB offers a broad range of services which are indeed akin to those of TIFB such as Koran courses, religious education for children and youths, language courses, mosque services, funeral funds, *hajj* pilgrimages, etc. It also coordinates boarding schools six times a year in which youngsters are taught about the basics of Islam. Although the classes are instructed by a local voluntary staff composed of teachers of Islam, they follow the standard curriculum based on the books published by IGMG. These schools strictly apply the principle of separation between boys and girls like the majority of the events organized by IFB.

Contestants in the 'religious market'

TIFB and IFB can best be described as competitors in the same 'religious market', akin to Kastoryano's ethnic market,[49] with slightly differentiated services to provide. They are not only stakeholders in this market but they also operate as the loci where the identity is invented and re-constructed. Their distinct identity articulations should thus be seen as part and parcel of the strategy to position themselves in a particular segment of the market. Their discourse towards each other reveals itself significant with a view to uncover these strategies.

IFB with its emphasis on applying Islamic principles in every aspect of life distinguishes itself from TIFB and its secular understanding of Islam. Its rather holistic approach to religion postulates that Islam provides the guiding principles for a Muslim to pursue his or her life. IFB embraces a perception of what they call a '*Filterless Islam*,' understood as a close adherence to the literal interpretation of the foundational texts of Islam. The expression '*Filterless Islam*' entails certain disenchantment with the way Islam is taught and lived in Turkey. It is in the belief that Islam's basic ideals and practices are being curtailed in Turkey since they are thought to be in contradiction with the state's policy. IFB claims to challenge this restriction and "*portray Islam as it literally is, as it is delimited by Allah not the state.*"[50] This discourse is significant not to determine which organization is theologically more correct but to demonstrate two points: First, IFB by implicitly undermining TIFB's policy or even its very existence opens up space for itself in

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the religious realm. It uncovers a niche in the market prior to IFB and thus legitimizes its own creation. In the same vein, Interviewee D, through an analogy of restaurants in the Turkish neighborhood, contended that "*their menu is richer.*" IFB also draws attention to its differences by stressing formal aspects of religion. Food, dress code, and even the decoration of the home have to be solidly Islamic.[51] Second, while there is growing effort to add the immigrant political agenda to the homeland political one,[52] there are consistent allusions to the situation in the country of origin. These two agendas overlap and reinforce each other.[53] IFB's firm defense of women wearing headscarves[54] in Belgium cannot be separated from a similar claim in Turkey.

Another instance of disparity -or difference of strategy- between TIFB and IFB is that IFB's discourse is not motivated by an appeal only to Turkish fellow citizens. It rather positions itself as the religious service provider for Belgian Muslims as a whole. Situating itself in the service of all Belgian Muslims requires IFB to modify the substance of its activities. Within this perspective, IFB has recently developed two projects targeting a wider public. First, it has established Muslim kindergartens in about ten mosques for children to become familiarized with Muslim figures and Prophet Mohammad from early childhood.[55] Second, it teaches Koranic courses in the local languages of Belgium, namely in French and Dutch, a practice frowned upon by TIFB. At the time of writing this paper, this type of classes was only available in a few classes and was in a trial period. Nevertheless, IFB anticipates that, in a few years' time, the classes in Turkish might be obsolete and may be removed from the curriculum altogether. The idea of developing Islamic literature in European languages is taking precedence over the promotion of the Turkish language itself. If one would have to differentiate between *Diyanet* and *Milli Görüş*, it could be said that the order of importance for *Diyanet* is first being Turkish then Muslim, whereas *Milli Görüş* is focused on being primarily Muslim; ethnicity and nationality are of lesser importance.[56] IFB's moves targeting the global *Ummah* expand beyond the borders of Belgium. IFB not only maintains close relations with other Islamist organizations like the Muslim brotherhood[57] but also engages in humanitarian projects in various parts of the Muslim world.

Notwithstanding that IFB is characterized by a clear Turkish frame of reference, its discourse entails a number of connotations pertaining to the 'fatherland'

and is distinctly patriotic. In much the same way as Kemalism can be defined as secular nationalism, *Milli Görüş*'s Islamism can be considered a form of religious nationalism.[58] Yıldız further claims that the employment of the term 'Milli' was intentional: "In so doing, it took the advantage of the function of nationalism in Turkey as an umbrella for the articulation and expression of religious identity; it used a dual discourse by ascribing the national to the religious."[59] A number of examples can be given supporting this position. Particularly, when it comes to the sensitive issues of Turkish politics, IFB maintain a remarkably similar attitude to the official Turkish line. For instance, IFB issued a press release following a proposal in the Belgian parliament to incriminate denial of the Armenian genocide.[60] It has participated in the organization of a demonstration, entitled "Condemning the Terror- Invitation to Solidarity," which aimed to protest against the killing of 12 soldiers by PKK in an ambush in the Southeast of Turkey at the end of October 2007. The event in question led to violent reactions in Brussels where Turkish youngsters' protest degenerated into acts of vandalism (breaking the glass windows of cafés, throwing stones at the police, beating up journalists, etc.) IFB was keen on condemning both acts of terrorism and acts of vandalism. Nevertheless, it should also be stressed that nationalist ideology receives a great deal of support in the Turkish neighborhood of Brussels[61] and, therefore, a counter-discourse is not a viable strategy either.

Milli Görüş's relationship with the Turkish state has also improved over time. There seems to be a consensus in the Turkish community –including TIFB officials– that *Milli Görüş* has toned down the radical elements of its discourse. In 2003, under the AKP, a party that finds its roots in political Islam, the Foreign Ministry issued a memorandum to Turkish Embassies asking them to maintain equal distance with all immigrant organizations. Hence, Turkish diplomatic officials who have for a long time ignored, or who have been instructed to ignore, *Milli Görüş*'s activities have recently began attending its dinners. IGMG officials attending these events emphasize the message of 'Turkish unity abroad.'

A similar rapprochement can be noticed between TIFB and IFB, at least in the rhetoric, despite the aforementioned ideological differences between them. Due to TIFB's organic link with the Turkish state, it is very vulnerable to changes and movements within the Turkish polity. Avcı argues that as the political circumstances change in Turkey, it may reduce the "adversarial" nature of the relationship between *Milli Görüş* and *Diyanet* and even lead to the acceptance of *Milli Görüş* as partner for the Turkish state.[62] Avcı suggests that the impetus for a rapprochement between these two organizations elucidates the significance of homeland politics

in redefining the nature of relationships in the host country, hence, the need to take into account transnational ties. In a nutshell, this section demonstrates the different discourses emanating more from the different transnational allegiances. Nevertheless, being informed by two approaches, this essay also aims to point out the shift in Islamic organizations' discourses that occurred due to the changing political climate in the host country. The following offers an examination of their stance towards the Executive while bearing in mind their sensibilities previously outlined.

Interplay between TIFB, IFB and Muslims' Executive

Organizations related to *Diyanet* have generally held cooperative and friendly relations with the receiving states. However, TIFB's relationship with the authorities could be altered if its prerogatives were to be withdrawn. As such, a number of issues could become controversial in the rapport with the Muslims' Executive. TIFB was reluctant to participate in the first elections held in 1998. It considered that the criteria for candidate selection were poorly determined, which allowed every self-declared Muslim to run. TIFB officials hold the view that a representative body for a faith should be comprised of members of the mosques or at least people who make regular use of religious services. Therefore, TIFB is not fond of the idea of having general elections to determine the members of the Executive. Instead, it is suggested that they should be drawn from people already active in the established Islamic federations and mosques. Each and every organization should select its members from its mosques independently and should be represented proportionate to its size.[63]

Besides the issue of electoral competence, the current scheme is also not appreciated because it concerns matters of utmost importance to TIFB. Muslims' Executive jeopardizes the way things have been dealt with so far since it addresses an all-encompassing entity without further differentiation, namely Belgian Muslims. TIFB, on the other hand, stresses the uniqueness of Turkish Muslims and strongly opposes the disappearance of the cultural differences between different Muslim communities. It should be noted here that TIFB describes the particularities of each Muslim community in national cultural terms rather than religious. The emphasis is on cultural distinctions for "*Islam is one and the same everywhere; it does not differ according to the country context. What could differ is the way nationals of a country espouses Islam.*"[64] Or in a motto-like sentence of Interviewee C, *"Islam does not have nationality, Muslims do."* This perception explains why TIFB unequivocally confronts denominations like Turkish Islam or Belgian Islam. Belgian Islam cannot be viewed as the translation of a uniform and unique

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Belgian Muslim identity. For TIFB, an institutional authority like itself should avoid practices that create homogeneity, instead, it should celebrate diverse practices[65] as part of the richness of Islam. This is in line with TIFB's practice of bringing imams from Turkey, who are familiar with Turkish cultural practices of Islam. Hence, this would support the idea of autonomous units under one framework-organization for the future representative organ, expected to come in early 2010. The comparison made with the federal structure of the Belgian government, overwhelmed with disagreements between the two constituent communities, is used by TIFB to legitimize the need for autonomous but confederated units. To apply this claim to the conceptual framework of this essay, the political structure of the Belgian state –federal system- and the difficulties experienced in managing multiethnic societies are used as justification to alter another structure - the Muslims' Executive.

In general, TIFB assumes a self-appointed spokesperson role on behalf of the Turkish community. Although it is true that it holds the highest membership rate and runs the majority of Turkish mosques, the image that TIFB is the representative of a supposedly 'unified Turkish community' is exaggerated in order to give TIFB more leverage in the Muslim politics of Belgium. To give an example, TIFB often defends its practice of bringing *imam*s from Turkey saying, "*they are the most respected figures in the Turkish community and imams trained in Belgium could not acquire such an intimate connection.*"[66] On the other hand, the literature on second generation Turks[67] shows how *imam*s sent by the *Diyanet* are not integrated into the local communities because of their limited command of the local language and the brevity of their stay in the host country. This is intrinsically connected with the second and third generations' level of command of the Turkish language and TIFB's policy of maintaining Turkish as the official language of its mosques. It remains to be seen what concrete measures TIFB will take in order to bridge the gap between the different generations and how it will preserve its influence. While IFB*'s* aforementioned incentives seem to address this shortcoming, TIFB has taken an initiative consistent with its ideology by supporting for the establishment of two international theology departments in Turkey and by funding a number of young Turkish Belgian students.[68]

This strong identification with the Turkish community is illustrated through the narrative of events. For instance, the reluctance of TIFB to participate in the 1998 elections was interpreted as the Turkish community's disapproval of the

process, while TIFB's participation in 2005 elections was used to overcome the Turkish community's image as an obstacle. Although this may be the general trend in the Turkish community, the institutional approach needs to be analyzed as well. Initially, TIFB did not see any benefit in participating in such an organ because it did not need any financial assistance from the Belgian state to pay the salaries of its *imam*s.[69] And it was perceived as it could minimize the role that Muslims' Executive played in Belgium. Nevertheless, the endorsement of the Executive as an official interlocutor for the Muslim communities led TIFB to present itself once again as a window of opportunity. A well-organized TIFB actively participated in 2005 elections[70] and Turks have gotten 40 of the 68 seats, despite the fact that Moroccans were the majority in terms of population. This illustrates how an organization can alter its strategy because of the political structure in the host society. TIFB soon realized that opting out would lead nowhere and that participating might offer the occasion to shape decisions consistent with its interests. This was particularly important in the light of the fact that its 'rival' organizations like IFB participated in the 1998 elections.

Unlike TIFB, IFB welcomed the establishment of Muslims' Executive from the very beginning. For IFB, there was a clear motive: to benefit from the material advantages offered by the Belgian state. IFB mosques are financed by the donations of its members and so are paid the salaries of imams. Therefore, the recognition of their mosques alleviated the financial burden that was borne by its members. Moreover, since IFB functions were based more on a 'global *ummah*' logic, an institution addressing all the Muslims in Belgium did not clash with its ideals, the way it did with the ideals of TIFB.

Despite the differences of approach towards the very existence of Muslims' Executive, TIFB and IFB have indeed become more involved with each other owing to it. First, Muslims' Executive offers a platform, which brings them into more regular contact, hence, spatially opening the possibility of dialogue and co-operation. Second, the very discourse on the Turkish community acting as a unitary actor has helped to bring about its realization. This is true for both sides. IFB for instance prior to the elections proposed to put forward candidates without any manifest affiliation. TIFB, which had declined the proposal at the time, recently coordinated visits to different Islamic groups under its new head of religious affairs. In every occasion, there seems to be an agreement to 'act together.' The TIFB with the collaboration of other Islamic groups can now address all of the Turkish community.[71] They indeed seem to be acting together during the consultation process for the new body. The formation of the Muslims' Executive has shifted

power relations and redefined the notion of the 'main rival.' TIFB has now realized that the Executive is an organ that can be oriented to meet their needs and goals, especially when carried out in cooperation with other Muslim organizations. For example, Turks holding the upper hand in the Executive could eventually benefit both groups to help prioritize the recognition of Turkish mosques. This situation comes closest to Boussetta's idea of infra-political dynamics. Boussetta[72] argues that mosques ensured the election of their pre-selected candidates and hence controlled electoral uncertainty through informal infra-political agreements and compromises. This view has also been confirmed by the Interviewee F who is a member of the current Executive and identifies him/herself as 'independent.'

Of crucial importance to both TIFB and IFB now is the project, which plans to create a new representative organ for Muslims by early 2010[73]. TIFB has, intentionally or unintentionally, contributed to the dysfunction of the current Executive's insistence on a confederated body with autonomous communities. Two separate projects being proposed are noteworthy: the system of general elections backed by the Moroccan community and the selection of representative members of the umbrella federations themselves put forward by the Turkish side.[74]

The configuration of the new body will be vital to both organizations and it will impact their very survival. A new organ free from their influence may become a threat to their established patterns and to their vested interests in Belgian society. They fear that if this new organ assumes their responsibilities, it may render them obsolete. As Sunier argues "their continued existence depends to a large extent on their capacity to constantly recreate and reformulate their indispensability both towards their membership, and towards society as a whole."[75]

Conclusion

Throughout this essay, I have sought to underline the existentialist dilemma that these two Turkish Islamic organizations deal with. Appealing to the new demands of the ethnic groups, particularly the issue of integration into new societies is essential for the survival of these organizations. Therefore, various expressions of Islam are upheld to the extent of being re-invented by the Turkish Islamic organizations whose raison d'être is dependent on the very existence of this diversity and their claim to be the legitimate representatives of it. These disparities, which are admittedly determined by their transnational ideological loyalties, are equally perpetuated with the intention to emphasize their essentiality. However, their task becomes harder over time since mosques have begun losing their appeal to the younger generations, who barely speak Turkish, and who are hardly interested in

the subjects discussed. Though their 'imagined community' is still connected to Turkey, their concerns are 'local'.

These discourses are influential in demarcating their boundaries and in differentiating themselves in a competitive 'religious market'. Nevertheless, their different strategies vis-à-vis the Turkish community do not necessarily stop them from coming together to deal with 'common' concerns. This is particularly the case when it pertains to the political opportunity structure that they operate in. As it is seen in the example of Muslims' Executive, both TIFB and IFB pursue their institutional interests in the midst of these national and transnational contextual factors. So far, the framework of Muslims' Executive seems to have fostered an increased co-operation at least in rhetoric between these two groups for it is perceived to be the preeminent strategy for the well-being of both.

Belgium is in a new phase of giving the floor to Muslims in order for them to design a representative organ. Will the general elections system win over the model suggested by the Turkish Islamic organizations that are keen on protecting their autonomy? I would neither take a normative perspective advocating for a movement to prevail nor could I state decisively which direction the new organ will take. Surely, the new design will be indicative of the political clout that TIFB and IFB have over the Muslims' Executive and their ability to alter the structure. The president of the current Executive affirms in different meetings that they are aspiring for 'a representative, reliable and apolitical organ'. In either case, Belgian state would carry on maintaining official contacts with it simply because it needs an interlocutor. Therefore, given the generational gap and past events discussed in this study, being in an overarching framework which would be tailored to the demands of the communities, could be the ultimate strategy of survival.

Appendix I

This essay relies on two types of data. The first two sections make significant use of the secondary sources such as recently published surveys and academic studies. The last section on the other hand leans on a qualitative research method which is used to analyze primary data gathered through in-depth interviews with the leaders and officers of the Muslim organizations and many informal discussions during the participation in the events organized by them in September 2008 (Ramadan). The interviews have been conducted in two different periods: February and September 2008. There has also been a follow-up interview about the updated situation with the President of the Muslims' Executive. Since the aim of the analysis is to shed light on the discourses and strategies as they are perceived

by these organizations, semi-structured interviews appeared as the most adequate technique. Although the accurate picture of the 'reality' might differ from these interpretations, they are equally significant to understand what has happened and what is likely to happen in the future. In total, seven interviews (3 from TIFB, 1 from *Milli Görüş*, 3 from Muslims' Executive) have been conducted in the local headquarters of both organizations in Brussels. The details of the background of the interviewees and their group affiliation can be found in the appendix II. They have also been supplemented by an online documentary including press releases and public speeches of the same figures in order to cover what might have been left out during the interviews.

Appendix II

Interviewee A is a high-ranking official from TIFB. Male, in his forties, he holds Belgian nationality. The interview with him took place in February 2008 in his office and lasted approximately one hour.

Interviewee B is a high-ranking official from TIFB. Male, in his forties. The interview with him took place in September 2008 and lasted approximately one hour.

Interviewee C is a high-ranking official from TIFB who has previously been in the Muslims' Executive. Male, in his thirties, he holds Belgian nationality. The interview with him took place in September 2008 and lasted approximately one hour.

Interviewee D is a high-ranking official from IFB. Male, in his fifties, he holds Belgian nationality. The interview with him took place in February 2008 in IFB's premises and lasted approximately two hours.

Interviewee E is a member of the Muslims' Executive. Male, in his fifties, he holds Belgian nationality, is a teacher of Islam, initially affiliated with TIFB. The interview with him took place in September 2008 in Muslims' Executive premises and lasted approximately two and a half hours.

Interviewee F is a member of the Muslims' Executive who identifies herself as an 'independent,' while at the same time admitting her *Milli Görüş* 'origins'. Female, in her thirties, medical doctor, she holds Belgian nationality. The interview with her took place in September 2008 in her practice and lasted approximately two and a half hours.

Interviewee G is a member of the Muslims' Executive. Male, in his fifties, he holds Belgian nationality, is a teacher of Islam, initially affiliated with TIFB. The interview with him took place in September 2008 prior to a Ramadan dinner organized by IFB and lasted approximately one hour.

Endnotes

1. K. Ostergaard-Nielsen, "The Politics of Migrants' Transnational Political Practices", C*onference on Transnational Migration: Comparative Perspectives*, Princeton University, 30 June-1 July 2001, p.1

2. H. Bousetta, "Institutional theories of immigrant ethnic mobilisation: relevance and limitations", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol.26, No.2 (2000) p. 229-245.

3. U. Manço, "Des organisations socio-politiques comme solidarités islamiques dans l'immigration turque en Europe", *Les Annales de l'Autre Islam*, Institut national des Langues et des Civilisations orientales, No.4 (1997) p. 97-133.

4. G. Avcı, "Religion, Transnationalism and Turks in Europe", *Turkish Studies*, Vol.6, No. 2 (2005) p. 201.

5. See T. Faist, "The Border Crossing Expansion of Social Space: Concepts, Questions and Topics", in T. Faist and E. Ozveren (eds.), *Transnational Social Spaces: Agents, Networks and Institutions* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004) p. 3; Portes, A. "Introduction: The Debates and Significance of Immigrant Transnationalism", *Global Networks,* Vol.1, No.3 (2001), p. 181-194.

6. D. Meyer, "Protest and Political Opportunities", *Annual Review of Sociology*, No.30 (2004), p. 128

7. See an updated account of the Islam in Belgium in U. Manço, M. Kanmaz, 'Belgium', in J. S. Nielsen (eds), *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe.* Vol. 1, (Brill: Leiden, 2009) pp. 35-47.

8. Author's translation from the original text of the constitution.

9. The information that follows is taken from the Federal Home Office's website and translated by the author. Available at http://www.just.fgov.be/fr_htm/information/htm_justice_a_z/cultes.html

10. Six religious groups have hitherto received such official recognition: the Roman Catholic, the Protestant, the Anglican, the Israelite, the Orthodox and the Islamic religions.

11. M. Renaerts, U. Manço, "Lente institutionalization de l'islam et persistence d'inégalités face aux autres cultes reconnus", in U. Manço (eds.) *Voix et voies musulmanes de Belgique*, (Brussels: Publications des Facultés Universitaires, 2000) p. 88.

12. Renaerts, Manço, "Lente institutionalization... "

13. Bousetta, "Institutional theories..., " p. 240.

14. See Arrêté royal portant reconnaissance de l'Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique on http://staatsbladclip.zita.be/moniteur/lois/1999/05/20/loi-1999009579.html

15. The prosecutor has recently announced that there will not be a follow-up of the investigation for the accused.

16. Based on my interview with the President of the Executive. The scarcity of the number of recognised mosques in the Flemish region is due to the additional integration and language criteria imposed.

17. Based on my interview with the President of the Executive.

18. See for instance M. Kanmaz, "The Recognition and Institutionalisation of Islam in Belgium", *The Muslim World*, No.92 (2002), p. 99-113; Bousetta, "Institutional theories…," p. 229-245.

19. Kanmaz, "The Recognition…," p. 110

20. A. Portes, *et. al,*. "The study of transnationalism: pitfalls and promise of an emergent research field", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol.22 No.2 (1999) p. 232.

21. Turkish immigrants are worse off in terms of education and employment compared to their Belgian counterparts and also compared to other immigrant communities such as Moroccans with

regard to the former. A number of studies confirm this; U. Manço, A. Manço, "La scolarité des enfants issus de l'immigration musulmane: difficultés et actions positives" in U. Manço (eds.), *Voix et voies musulmanes de Belgique,* (Brussels: Publications des Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, 2000) p. 41–54; Manço, U. *Populations musulmanes de Belgique et la stratification du marché du travail* (2001) retrievable from http://centres.fusl.ac.be/CES/document/WEBCES/DocsMembres/UM/220%20Insertion%20musulmans%202001.pdf; H. Bousetta, L-A. Bernes, "Muslims in the EU: Cities Report, Belgium", *Open Society Institute, EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program* (2007) retrievable from http://www.eumap.org/topics/minority/reports/eumuslims/background_reports/download/belgium/belgium.pdf; A. Kaya, F. Kentel, *Belgian-Turks: A Bridge or a Breach between Turkey and the European Union?*, (Brussels: King Baudouin Foundation, 2007)

22. Manço and Kanmaz also show how the policies of the municipality the Turkish community is residing in can contribute to their marginalisation. See U. Manço, M. Kanmaz, "From Conflict to Co-operation between Muslims and Local Authorities in a Brussels Borough: Schaerbeek", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol.31, No.6 (2005) p. 1105-1123

23. Manço, "Des organisations..., " p. 111

24. D. Jacobs, *et al*, "Political Participation and Associational Life of Turkish Residents in the Capital of Europe", *Turkish Studies*, Vol.7, No.1 (2006) p. 145.

25. Jacobs, *et al,* "Political Participation…," p. 155-156.

26. Kaya, Kentel, *Belgian-Turks*…,p. 52. Nevertheless the transnational attachment and the belonging to the host county should not be seen mutually exclusive. The same study reveals that 42% of Belgian-Turks feel equally close to their country of residence and of origin. Timmerman also endorses that 'Turkish girls who are, objectively speaking, closely integrated into Western society do not feel less Turkish'. See C. Timmerman, "Secular and Religious Nationalism among Young Turkish Women in Belgium: Education May Make the Difference", *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol.31, No.3, (2000) p. 333-354.

27. E., K. Ostergaard-Nielsen, "Transnational political practices and the receiving state: Turks and Kurds in Germany and the Netherlands", *Global Networks,* Vol.1 No.3 (2001) p. 266

28. See an account of different movements in Belgium in T. Koutroubas, W. Vloeberghs, Z. Yanasmayan, "Political, Religious and Ethnic Radicalisation among Muslims in Belgium", in M. Emerson (eds.) *Ethno-Religious Conflict in Europe: Typologies of Radicalisation in Europe's Muslim Communities* , (Brussels: CEPS, 2009)

29. Manço, "Des organisations..., " 103.

30. J. Doomernik, "State, politics and Islamic institutions: Turks in the Netherlands and Germany, " The Muslim Communities Project, *CMEIS Occasional Paper*, No: 52, (1995) p.10.

31. Doomernik, "State, politics…,"; Avcı, "Religion, Transnationalism…," p. 208.

32. See the opponents of this view in Manço, "Des organisations ..., " p. 97-133; N. Ogelman, "Documenting and Explaining the Persistence of Homeland Politics among Germany's Turks," *International Migration Review*, Vol.37, No.1 (2003) p.163-193 ; Avcı, "Religion, Transnationalism..., " p. 201-213.

33. Based on my interview with Interviewee C. He supported this view by pointing to the history of Islam and to the absence of a theocratic state after the Prophet Mohammad.

34. Avcı, "Religion, Transnationalism…," p. 208.

35. Based on my interview with Interviewee A.

36. A. Dere, "The PRA of Turkey: The emergence, evolution and perception of its religious services outside of Turkey", *The Muslim World*, No.98 (2008) p. 292.

37. Dere, "The PRA of Turkey…" my emphasis

38. Based on my interview with Interviewee B

39. J. Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe*, 3rd edition, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 71; Avcı, "Religion, Transnationalism…," p. 208

40. See for instance http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/sondakika/8211132.asp?gid=71&sz=13789

41. Based on my interview with Interviewee B

42. Manço, "Des organisations..., " p. 115 See p. 114-125 for more detailed information.

43. For further see http://www.IFBif.be/tr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=29&Itemid=63, or in English http://www.igmg.de/verband/islamic-community-milli-goerues/what-does-milli-goerues-mean.html

44. C. Timmerman, "Secular and Religious Nationalism among Young Turkish Women in Belgium: Education May Make the Difference", *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol.31, No.3 (2000) p. 339.

45. G. Avcı, "Religion, Transnationalism…," p. 204

46. Ostergaard-Nielsen, "Transnational political…," p. 271

47. J. Doomernik, "State, politics and Islamic institutions: Turks in the Netherlands and Germany," The Muslim Communities Project, *CMEIS Occasional Paper*, No: 52, (1995) p. 9

48. Based on my interview with Interviewee D

49. R. Kastoryano, *Negotiating Identities: States and Immigrants in France and Germany*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002)

50. Based on my interview with Interviewee D

51. C. Timmerman, "Secular and Religious Nationalism among Young Turkish Women in Belgium: Education May Make the Difference", *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol.31, No.3 (2000) p. 344.

52. See the analytical distinction proposed by Ostergaard-Nielsen, "Transnational political…," p.261-281.

53. E., K. Nielsen, "Transnational political…"

54. Very recently, the use of headscarf in public schools has been banned in the Flemish region. *Milli Görüş* alongside with the Muslims' Executive has been much more vocal against the ban than *Diyanet*. See for instance http://www.IFBif.be/tr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=379:igmg-perspektif-roeportaj&catid=82:basn-acklamalar&Itemid=530

55. The actions that mirror the host society institutions but that place them in an Islamic framework leads to criticisms that *Milli Görüş* establishes 'parallel societies'. See for instance; S. Kroissenbrunner, "Islam and Muslim Immigrants in Austria: Socio-Political Networks and Muslim Leadership of Turkish Immigrants", *Immigrants & Minorities*, Vol.22, No.2&3 (2003) p. 188-207.

56. Avcı, "Religion, Transnationalism…," p. 209

57. Manço, "Des organisations..., " p. 120

58. C. Timmerman, "Secular and Religious Nationalism among Young Turkish Women in Belgium: Education May Make the Difference", *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol.31, No.3 (2000) p. 340.

59. A. Yıldız, "Politico-religious Discourse of Political Islam in Turkey: The Parties of National Outlook", *The Muslim World*, No.93 (2003) p. 201.

60. See http://www.belturk.be/go.php?go=30d0fcb&do=details&return=summary&pg=3

61. For more see Kaya, Kentel, *Belgian-Turks…*" p.40 who argue that nationalism appears 'to be the most efficient strategy to cement the fragmented structure'.

62. Avcı, "Religion, Transnationalism…," p. 210

63. Based on my interview with Interviewee C and Interviewee B

64. Based on my interview with Interviewee B

65. The typical case of differences that appeared almost in all my interviews is the inability of Turks and Moroccans to start fasting the same day due to their difference methods of calculation of the beginning of Ramadan.

66. Based on my interview with Interviewee A

67. See for instance Kroissenbrunner, "Islam and Muslim Immigrants..., "p. 188-207 and Manço, "Des organisations..., " p. 97-133

68. See for instance http://www.belcikadiyanet.be/du/tr/node/826

69. Negotiations are still underway on this issue. Up to present, none of the imams brought by TIFB are paid by the Belgian state.

70. An additional reason for the high number of Turks is the fact that Moroccan community boycotted election due to what they perceived to be an unfair dismissal of the previous assembly.

71. Based on my interview with Interviewee B

72. H. Bousetta, "Institutional theories..., " p.242.

73. In the absence of an agreed reform, the Minister of Justice has recently extended the mandate of the current Executive till the end of 2010.

74. Based on my interview with the President of the Executive.

75. T. Sunier, (1995) "Turkish Islamic organisations and the Dutch state: new opportunities?", The Muslim Communities Project, *CMEIS Occasional Paper*, No: 52, p.29.