

The Making of a Good Citizen and Conscious Muslim through Public Education: The Case of Imam Hatip schools

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There have been many debates about İmam Hatip schools¹ in Turkey, as they have been politicised from the beginning of their history.² But what kinds of strategies are used for educating pupils in these schools, what kinds of identities are being cultivated and what kinds of world views these pupils carry, as compared to their counterparts, are seldom discussed (Subaşı 2003a). The aim of this chapter is to illustrate how and what kinds of identities are being constructed within the educational culture/s of these schools.

Ideologues and reformers of the Turkish Republic, established in 1923, paid special attention to education in order to create a secular, modern society (see also Gök's article and Appendix 1, this volume). They saw education as the pivotal institution, which would pave Turkey's way to becoming a member of contemporary civilisation (Akşit et al. 2000: 59, Subaşı 2003b: 150). The Republican People's Party (CHP) wanted to educate religious functionaries who would be supporters of the secularist principles of the Republic (Tanilli 2005: 98). Secularist principles were stated in the Republican People Party's programme in 1931 in a strict manner:

¹ *İmam* is the name given to the religious leader of an Islamic community and *hatip* is the name given to an Islamic preacher. İmam Hatip schools started as educational institutions by giving courses only. Later they were changed to schools and included both intermediate and secondary school levels. Periodically, in their history, the intermediate parts of these schools were closed down. From 1997 onwards, they have been functioning only as secondary schools, typically called *lycées* in Turkey.

² The latest news to appear in the media was the placement of intelligent students from poor families at İmam Hatip schools against their wishes. The students had completed their compulsory education at boarding schools in the countryside, free of charge. The Minister of Education denied the news at first, but took back his words later on by warning the Local Directorates of National Education (Tuesday, 5 September 2006, Hürriyet).

The Turkish Republic is a state mechanism which does not function according to religions and religious principles but on the basis of social life itself, its positive necessities and needs. Religion should have no influence on the state and its worldly affairs. This basic way of thinking is called secularism (Eyüboğlu 1998: 61).

In the light of these principles, İmam Hatip schools started as vocational courses and later on turned into public schools. During the government of the Republican People's Party, religion was banned altogether from the schools for fourteen years between 1935 and 1949 (Kuzu 2000: 115). The Democratic Party, on the right of the political spectrum, had promised religious freedom to the masses after the transition to democracy in 1946, and saw İmam Hatip schools as the most suitable project to realise this aim. After all, these public schools were already established and ordinary people had supported them by working in their construction and through personal financial donations. This would be an opportunity to mobilise religious circles by educating their children as conscious 'exemplary Muslim youth' (Koçkuzu 1995: 131).

There is resistance to İmam Hatip schools among secularist circles³ because they are considered to be institutions where pupils are first and foremost cultivated as religious persons and only secondarily as citizens. In contemporary Turkish society young people do not consider family or schools as institutions, which teach them how to be 'good citizens' (Konrad Adenauer Foundation 1999: 30-33). A recent survey on conservatism (Yılmaz 2006: 8) pointed out that we have not learned much about how to respect different lifestyles in our society. As many as 42 per cent of the Turkish population have stated that a woman who calls herself a Muslim should cover her head; whilst 36 and 28 per cent respectively stated that they would be annoyed to come across Turks who did not fast in Ramadan and who did not pray. All these figures point to the image of a society which despite changes taking place, at least partly holds on to conservative religious values and is reluctant to accept different lifestyles. These facts and figures may partly explain the resistance among secularist circles to İmam Hatip schools.

In Turkish society there are three formal options to obtain religious education: Koranic courses affiliated with Diyanet,⁴ İmam Hatip schools and religious courses given at the mosques. In addition to these formal options, there are informal courses offered by several religious communities and sects. Education in the İmam Hatip schools more than half of the lessons are on religion such as

³ I refer to secularist circles as parts of the Turkish public which are attached to Republican secularist principles which demand that Islam should not influence the state and its worldly affairs.

⁴ The prominent Turkish historian Berkes (1998: 484-485) argues that, the setting up of Diyanet, Directorate of Religious Affairs, in 1924 is a sign of the importance given to *diyanet* (piety) as a factor of enlightenment whereby the medieval fetters on religious expression would be eliminated and all political and legal considerations would be severed from matters of piety. The administration of matters concerning beliefs and rituals of Islam belonged to Diyanet, whereas the independent existence of *şeriat* (religious rules) was abolished by putting civil relations under the legislative jurisdiction of the National Assembly in 1926. Diyanet would function as an institution of public service rather than as a spiritual body or religious community. For an interesting and enriching comparative discussion of the institutionalisation of secularism in four different Western countries, namely, France, Germany, Britain and the Netherlands, see Mannitz (2006).

the Koran, *hadith* (the Prophet Mohammad's sayings), Arabic and other subjects which have to do with the philosophy of Islam and the narration of the Prophet Mohammad's life. The remaining lessons follow the national curriculum. Girls attending these schools wear the *turban*,⁵ which is considered a political emblem/symbol of Islam among secularist circles. Until 1997⁶ girls and boys were being educated in separate-sex classes. This has been criticised, since the goal of national education is a unified education in mixed-sex classes.

I interviewed in depth two male school principals, two female teachers (giving history and literature lessons) and one male teacher (giving religious lessons), working at İmam Hatip schools in Istanbul, about the mission of their schools. I also conducted in-depth interviews with two female and two male pupils about the education provided in these schools. My individual interviews were followed by two group interviews, one with four males and another with four female pupils.⁷ The dominant theme that emerged in my single and group interviews with İmam Hatip pupils as well as with principals and teachers was the 'superior morality' that was taught to İmam Hatip pupils, in comparison with ordinary secondary school pupils. Most of my informants said that they were not happy with the way things were changing in Turkish society in terms of morality and they still considered the education given to them as superior because of the Islamic morality they automatically gained through their religious education. As a 21-year-old female informant said:

Pupils identify with moral principles in a better way at İmam Hatip schools. They learn principles such as respect for elders, respect for parents.... In recent years there have been influences from outside via shows on TV and people's imitation of the West. People are being forced to change and pupils at İmam Hatip schools are no exception to this. Despite all that, İmam Hatip pupils have an advantage because they get educated in a different milieu.

⁵ Turban is the Turkish word for a head-covering tied at the back of the head. Head-covering prohibition in schools is known as the 'turban issue' in Turkish society.

⁶ The military coup of 12 September 1980 propagated on the ideology of 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' whereby Islam was considered the basic value which supported the 'national culture' and it was expected that this would strengthen Islam. The military at that time tried to combat the influence of leftist ideologies by adopting this thesis and by introducing obligatory 'Culture of Religion and Ethics' courses in schools from the fourth grade (see also Gök's Appendix 1, this volume). On 28 February 1997 a process started to weaken the strong influence of 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' by the introduction of several sanctions (Atacan 2000: 113-116). The extension of obligatory primary education from five to eight years is considered to be one of these sanctions, which has resulted in the abolition of the intermediate parts of İmam Hatip schools.

⁷ I interviewed the school principals in their offices. One of the schools was located in an upper-middle-class and the other in a lower-middle-class district in Istanbul. The female teacher in literature worked at the school which was attended by lower-middle-class pupils, whereas the female teacher in history and the male teacher in religion were working at the school in the upper-middle-class district. The pupils I interviewed were attending a private university in Istanbul, a branch of an American overseas university. The girls had chosen this university in order to be able to wear the *turban*, as it is forbidden at Turkish universities. My informants came from different regions of Turkey. They had all completed İmam Hatip Schools in their hometowns. The two female and two male students I talked to were each 21 years old. The female group was composed of four females aged 20, 21, 23 and 25. The male group was composed of four males aged 19, 21, 28 and 35.

Before going on to pupils' understandings of what Islam meant for them and what they gained from the education provided in these schools, it could be illuminating to start with the voices of the principals' and teachers' concerning the mission of İmam Hatip schools.

İmam Hatip schools and the Islamic culture

The school principals I talked to complained about the fact that a good number of Turkish citizens were not particularly aware of the educational model of the İmam Hatip schools, which was a mixture of religious knowledge and the positive sciences. This, they thought, could also be due to their own weakness as they could not make their voices heard but instead became stigmatised as supporters of Islamist ideologies (Gökaçtı 2005: 24-25). School principals represented the second-generation İmam Hatip school graduates, as they had themselves chosen to study at these schools by taking other İmam Hatip pupils in their villages as their role models. Coming from villages, they had found an opportunity to study at boarding schools in the nearby towns free of charge. These schools had already become an alternative to teachers' schools in the 1960s and 1970s by taking over the children to be educated in villages as İmams and Hatips. Meanwhile, being a teacher lost status as the salary earned was very low.⁸ Gradually, religious families took over the İmam Hatip schools where their children were able to learn religion as well as the positive sciences and could continue to study at university starting from 1983. The class basis of the families of first-generation pupils were craftsmen, small traders and farmers (Akşit 1986: 31). Due to internal migration and social mobility, second- and third-generation pupils climbed up the ladder and started studying at Anadolu İmam Hatip schools in the towns where there was a high quality of education.⁹

School principals told me that, against the wishes of their teachers who would have liked to prepare them for entrance to teachers' schools, the pupils preferred to study at İmam Hatip schools. This decision was due to the better status the İmam had in the village compared with the teacher, who had an almost negative image as the 'bearer of positivist philosophy'. The same reason was repeated by the male teacher giving religious lessons at the İmam Hatip school in the upper-middle-class district in İstanbul. He argued:

⁸ Mine Tan (2000: 79) argues that the process whereby teachers have been made to lose status in Turkish society has also affected females, and the well-educated females have avoided choosing this profession where they could find better jobs. The small number of female teachers in underdeveloped parts of Turkey has resulted in families' reluctance to send their daughters to school.

⁹ In 1973 İmam Hatip schools were named İmam Hatip *schools* by law. In 1983 their graduates were given the opportunity to take the central university examination and choose whatever specialty they liked at university level. Also, starting from 1985, special so called *Anadolu* İmam Hatip schools, where a foreign Western language was taught in addition to all the other courses, were initiated and the quality of the schools improved (Ünsür 2000: 247-248, see also Gök's Appendix 1, this volume). Until 1976 girls were not allowed to study in these schools, as they could not function as religious functionaries according to Islam. As a result of a parent's legal fight and victory, girls started attending İmam Hatip schools as well (Çakır et al. 2004: 75). In the school year 2003-2004 girls made up almost 42 per cent of the İmam Hatip pupils (ibid.: 76).

Why did my father send me to the İmam Hatip school? It was because teachers' school graduates at that time were positivist people. They were discussing and fighting with ordinary folk, sometimes going to extremes even if they were wrong. İmam Hatip graduates had not yet formed an image... If the first child went to the teachers' school, the second child went to the İmam Hatip school.

In this argument, it is possible to trace the roots of a polarisation in terms of the function and status of the İmam versus the function of the teacher or the meaning of religion versus the meaning of science in the lives of people in the countryside in Turkey. Kemalist secularism aimed to free people from the social control of traditional *Gemeinschaft* values, which were represented by the İmam, as well as the patriarchal family and the *mahalle*, the smallest administrative unit in the Ottoman Empire. Teachers, on the contrary, were representatives of the new values of *Gesellschaft*, the secular Turkish society and the republican ideals of the nation-state. The weakness of Kemalist secularism derived from its paying little attention to the enormous emotional role Islam played in the formation of Turkish folk identity (Mardin 1981: 191-219). Mardin argues that even the possibilities of social mobility in the new society could not compensate for the lack of existential security the people derived from religious belonging. The ontological insecurity of the Turkish people in times of social turmoil could only be compensated by Islam, in the form of cosmology as well as of ideology and ethos.

When religion plays such an enormous existential role for some circles, it becomes easier to understand how they consider İmam Hatip schools to be 'their' schools. The female teacher of literature working in the lower-middle-class district in İstanbul argues that religious families which are sceptical about public schools prefer to send their children to İmam Hatip schools where they can be sure that their children will interact with children of families holding similar values – whereas, in public schools, there is a mixture of cultures. Rumours are spreading in society that girls attending public schools in İstanbul are at risk of losing their virginity, as birth-control pills are being sold at pharmacies in huge numbers.

The female teacher argues that İmam Hatip schools are the best alternative to receive religious education, as they are controlled by the state. She describes the Koranic course she has attended, in the form of a boarding school, as a total institution¹⁰ where she was about to lose her dignity because of the lack of freedom due to students' subjection to a total discipline. She said:

I could not throw a ball. I could not skip. 'You are a girl. Don't show off your breasts,' they ordered. I could not talk loudly. I could not laugh. I could not chew gum. Everything was a sin.

According to her, families sometimes sent their unruly children to İmam Hatip schools, so that they would be put under the control and discipline, which they could not manage to give them at home. School principals and teachers I talked to argued that they could forgive some of their pupils' 'misbehaviour' outside

¹⁰ Goffman (1961: 13) calls the total institution 'a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life.'

school such as smoking a cigarette or holding a girl's hand, but people living in the neighbourhood wanted to see İmam Hatip school pupils as models of 'exemplary Islamic morality'. It might, the school principal working in the lower-middle-class district argued, be due to the fact that *İmam* means religious leader, the person who is going to lead people, so the public have expectations of the pupils who are attending our school. They approach them as bearers of a mission.'

After the military coup in 1980, lessons in 'Religion and Ethics' became obligatory starting from grade 4 in primary school, and the objective was to cultivate identities in line with the 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis' (Güvenç et al. 1994: 103-107). However, this was a lesson given only for two hours a week, and it could not compensate for the religious education provided at İmam Hatip schools. As the principal working at the school in the upper-middle-class district put it:

All pupils attending school should learn religion and ethics but we are different in the sense that we have vocational courses. We teach pupils *kul hakkı*¹¹ first of all, in the very first lesson. We teach them to respect people. We teach it from the Koran, then we teach the same thing in our *hadith* courses, then we teach it in *tefsir*, the interpretation of the Koran, then again we give examples from the life of our prophet Mohammad. In these courses we repeat the same thing so that our pupils learn by heart, for example, what *kul hakkı* means.

The principal argued that teaching Islamic morality in this way was only possible through education in school. Although some families were better in teaching children to act morally, generational conflicts sometimes made communication impossible between a father and son or a mother and daughter. At İmam Hatip schools all the pupils learned to respect their elders and their teachers.

According to the arguments of the administrators, İmam Hatip pupils were, on the one hand, still being cultivated in line with Islamic morality, but, on the other hand, they were under the impact of popular culture as society was also influenced by global culture through the media. For example, the male teacher in religion argued that it was difficult nowadays to teach Arabic to the pupils, whereas English had become the most popular subject. The female teacher in history who was working in the upper-middle class district suggested that the change in behaviour of İmam Hatip school pupils ran parallel to changes in the behaviour of Turkish youth all over the country, especially in the large cities. She said:

We know that a whole generation has changed... This is a rapid change. Although I am only 30 years old, I feel as if I am getting old. In my time, we did not have boyfriends, we did not flirt, we did not use make-up. We did not do things, which were considered 'shameful' by our society. The only difference between an ordinary public school student and İmam Hatip school student today is her wearing the *turban*. Their outlook, the series they watch on TV, their make-up, the books they read, the calendars they use are all the same. Some time ago, I asked my students to bring a calendar to the classroom. One girl

¹¹ *Kul hakkı* is a religious term meaning that everyone has a right before God due to her/his being human.

brought a calendar with a Tarkan¹² poster on it and she said, 'Look at him, look at him, my teacher, so that your soul will feel better.' I had to admit that I was too old for such things. In former times we had more conservative pupils. They were shy. Now they are relaxed.

She suggested that the pupils at her school adjusted rapidly to being educated in mixed-sex classes as well. However, as the number of male pupils was less than the females, in many classes the girls dominated and in others there were only girls. Acar and Ayata (2002: 95), who conducted a study on comparative school cultures in Turkish society, state that at İmam Hatip schools, 'while such strict sex segregation is considered a "must" by most, male teachers of religious subjects are the most ardent supporters of the practice.'

The school principals and teachers in my study argued that single-sex schooling was better for pupils, as they got the chance to concentrate on their courses rather than being distracted by a girl's or boy's physical presence. However, as Acar and Ayata state, this is a rather different argument from a pedagogical strategy, because at İmam Hatip schools the pupils are socialised to continue 'sex-based segregation in all public sphere activities' (ibid.).

The female schoolteacher in literature whom I interviewed was somewhat ambivalent on this question, although in the end she also preferred single-sex schooling:

I am in favour of education in mixed-sex classes because otherwise they don't have the opportunity to learn about the other sex. We are living together in our society, we are together on the bus, in the shopping centre. Why not in the school? In single-sex classes there is no distraction because there are no boys or girls... I don't know. There is a moral degeneration in our society. Sexuality and male/female relations are at the top of the agenda in cinemas, on TV and in printed material. Our children have started to be conscious of their sexuality at a very early age. Then they get dissatisfied. Homosexuality starts. I think it may be better to have sex-segregated classes.

However ambivalent this teacher may be, in the end she comes to the conclusion that sexual segregation is a way of contributing to healthier sexual relations and a better morality, which in turn could lead to a better society. So, her attitude regarding co-education or sexual segregation is tied to her preoccupation with young people's sexuality.

İmam Hatip schools and the Islamic morality

İmam Hatip school pupils talked to me at length about the preoccupation with young people's sexuality at school. They gave examples from their teachers in religion who, spent at least fifteen to twenty minutes at the beginning of their lessons every day, giving them advice about life, about sex education and relations with the other gender as well as about respect for the elderly and about avoiding bad habits such as smoking and using swear words. Especially

¹² Tarkan is a world-famous popular male Turkish singer who is considered sexy by female audiences.

in the holy month of Ramadan, poorer pupils were sent to rich families to lead the prayers and to earn pocket money. Poorer İmam Hatip school pupils, together with their teachers, were invited for dinner by families in the smaller towns. Richer pupils attending İmam Hatip schools helped poorer students in their schools financially. Pupils argued that all of these practices were part of Islamic solidarity and morality and led to a family-like atmosphere in the school. A 21-year-old male informant told me:

In every lesson our teachers in religious subjects had conversations with us about religion, about our expectations from life, about relations with females. One of our teachers had told us that it was sin to masturbate. I have had this in my mind all the time and I never did that.¹³ If you bring a person in front of me, I can also open doors to him/her about life from what I can recall. The simplest thing our teachers taught us was to respect parents, to respect elders. I keep in contact with my teachers since graduation. At school I felt as if I were in a family. Our teachers could be our parents or our friends when necessary. I could borrow money from them if I needed to. I would never be able to do that in an ordinary public school.

An İmam Hatip school pupil's construction of his/her identity as 'moral' becomes apparent in terms of the construction of the 'other', the ordinary school pupil. Giving advice to pupils about sexual conduct seems to be an informal part of the education at İmam Hatip schools. Despite these expectations, it was found in a recent project that more than half of the school pupils had boy- or girl friends. This ratio included even boys and girls attending İmam Hatip schools (Şen 2005: 68).

Another 21-year-old male informant complained about the fact that İmam Hatip School pupils were also constructed as 'the other' by the public:

I smoke cigarettes. If somebody sees me smoking, he criticises by saying 'What kind of an İmam Hatip school pupil are you that you smoke!' I sit and have conversations with girls. They say 'What kind of an İmam Hatip school pupil are you that you talk to girls!' They are looking for passive İmam Hatip school pupils, as they think that İmam Hatip school pupils cannot be so different from the others. I am friend with my father but I respect him so much that I don't even cross my legs in front of him. I don't smoke in front of my elder brother. Our family life differs in that respect. Whereas, a public school pupil smokes in front of his family. He has not learned to respect them.

Although this informant is critical of the construction of the İmam Hatip school pupil as 'the other', he does the same for the others. He puts forward respect for the family as the most important value, which differentiates an İmam Hatip school pupil from pupils in ordinary public schools. In a study about Turkish youngsters' most important values which made life meaningful for them, the

¹³ In 1984 I was involved in a nationwide research about the problems and expectations of young people attending secondary school. Among the İmam Hatip school students, approximately 7 per cent of males and 15 per cent of females had said 'I don't even want to hear about sexual subjects'. Dating of boys and girls who were not engaged was considered a 'sin' by 47 per cent of males but by 32 per cent of females. Dating was considered 'immoral' by 20 per cent of males but by 43 per cent of females. These answers showed that, in terms of the valuation of sexual relations, a significant number of males referred to the concept of sin whereas a significant number of females referred to the concept of morality (Gökçe 1984).

top three values chosen by them were: family by 70 per cent, education by 40 per cent and partner/lover by 32 per cent. These values were followed by: fighting for ideals 28 per cent, occupational achievement 27 per cent and children 22 per cent. Religion/belief was chosen by 21 per cent of the young people and came seventh in ranking (Konrad Adenauer Foundation 1999: 43). In the same study it was found that 90 per cent of Turkish youth believed in Allah and Islam. Only 5 per cent stated that they had doubts about religious rules. However, the percentage of those who practised religion regularly in parallel to learning about religion as an intellectual occupation was quite low. Of those who thought or read about religion regularly, only 14 per cent stated that they went to mosque regularly and 32 per cent said that they prayed regularly. They were youngsters coming mainly from families with lower socio-economic backgrounds. All of these findings pointed to the fact that religion had a significant place in the lives of a majority of Turkish young people, but within the paradigm of a secularised lifestyle (ibid.: 72-75).

As an answer to what Islam meant for them, a 21-year-old male İmam Hatip school pupil said that Islam meant morality for him in one word. All of my informants gave similar answers to this question. A 23-year-old female informant said:

Islam means to live by taking the morality of the Koran and our prophet Mohammad as our best examples... It is life. It is the path which directs us to happiness, to perfect life by regulating our life here and hereafter.

During our group discussion, female informants argued that, however bad the manners of an İmam Hatip school pupil might be, he/she would experience an inner conflict, which would depend on the dilemma about the material world he/she was living in and the spiritual world to which he/she belonged. In this way, they differentiated themselves from pupils in ordinary public schools:

Religion regulates interpersonal relations as well as relations between communities through moral principles. The very first verse in the Koran says: 'You will not lie, you will not talk behind people's backs, you will not gossip...' The verse which regulates interpersonal relations says: 'We have divided you into communities so that you will understand each other better...' At İmam Hatip schools they plant the seeds. The seeds will ripen in time and bear fruit. Islam has a big role in this...

This pupil almost takes for granted that İmam Hatip school pupils will have a better morality because of religious instruction. This statement is doubtful because it implies an argument that all religious people have good morals or as if one could not have good morals without being religious. In a study on Islamic education in Turkey, Akşit (1991: 151) observed that graduates of İmam Hatip schools conceptualised sciences in terms of dichotomies such as 'spiritual-Islamic' versus 'material-Western' sciences, the faithful versus unbelievers, immoral society in crisis versus moral society at peace. In his study, he also pointed out that only 10 per cent of İmam Hatip school pupils agreed that there could be good men without religious faith. As a result, 'a moralistic discourse based on an understanding of spreading Islamic knowledge was constructed in these schools as a remedy for degeneration in society' (Akpınar 2006: 140). Secularist circles were always sceptical of the

fact that when people with Islamic identities started finding posts in the state bureaucracy, the ideal of the homogenous Republican citizen would be threatened.

A debate has been carried on in Turkish society up to the present that the formative years of the Republic had been partly repressive in terms of religious identity, since the goal was to create a homogenous Turkish Republican citizen. Turkish secularism – referred to as ‘Jacobin secularism’ by liberal as well as Islamist intellectuals – is said to consist of the state’s interference in the performance of citizens’ religious functions under the guise of the separation of state and religion. Interestingly enough, when the reintroduction of religious teaching in schools was discussed in Parliament between 1947 and 1949, deputies from the ruling Republican People’s Party and the political opposition, the Democratic Party, capitulated for the same reason: lack of respect towards parents as the main argument for the introduction of instruction in religion (Mardin 1977: 288). Mardin argues that this happened despite the fact that ‘...the main argument for the liberalisation of religious policy was that there were no well-trained men of religion.’ This historical episode is an example of the fact that the notion of morality has always been involved in the debate on religious education.

The pupils I talked to said that Islamic morality became their reference point in terms of elder siblings becoming role models for them as well. Before the intermediate parts of İmam Hatip schools were closed down, younger students could turn to older sisters and brothers with all their problems about their families and courses. A 23-year-old female informant spoke about her experience:

Our parents usually dictate to us not to do this or not to do that. My elder sister at the school never did that. I took her as my role model, I observed how she talked to teachers and how she respected elders. She often paid visits to elderly and orphaned people. I appreciated her manners. I tried to make an effort to be like her.

A 23-year-old female informant stated that the degeneration of morality at İmam Hatip schools was due to the individualisation of moral conduct:

Pupils were more respectful before. Crossing legs over each other in front of elders was considered a disrespectful thing to do before. It is not the same now. For example, I come from a very religious family. It is a problem that I can cross my legs in front of my grandfather but not in front of my father... It seems that moral principles have become a bit more flexible. However, I would like to see İmam Hatip schools as they were before...

Despite changes taking place, İmam Hatip schools continued to be schools where Islamic morality formed the basis of pupils’ discipline associated with the control of their sexuality. The control of sexuality existed more in smaller towns compared with, for example, the school located in the upper-middle-class district of İstanbul. A 21-year-old male informant who came to İstanbul eight months ago argues:

There was an ordinary secondary school in our town. We saw girls and boys holding hands in the school yard when we passed by, and we wanted to do the same thing. However, we did not have the opportunity as we had our teachers’

gaze on us all the time. Forget about the teachers, there were also conscious Muslim students who would despise us if we took a girl's hand. We also wanted to dance with girls but we couldn't. I had several friends among girls only socially, but I had to go before the discipline committee because of that. However, what I hoped for then is what I am against now. I believe that ordinary secondary schools are the reason for the moral degradation in our society. We have been discussing this issue with friends for several years and worrying about what's going on in our society. Nowadays, some girls attending İmam Hatip schools pull their skirts up over their knees. If you have chosen to go there, you have to agree to wear a longer skirt, at least a bit below your knees. What will be your difference then from a pupil in an ordinary school?

At first, this male informant seems to be facing a dilemma between his wish for freer contact with females and the total discipline of the İmam Hatip schools with reference to the Islamic way of life. Yet, he resolves his dilemma in the end by rationalising and internalising the control exerted over him for the sake of a 'healthier' society. The total discipline seems to form and prevail in the lives of the pupils. As another 21-year old male informant argues:

There is something interesting in my life. I have not been able to have uncovered [without the *turban*] girlfriends at all. It does not work emotionally. Is that something coming from the İmam Hatip school culture? Is that a part of that life? I could not solve it.

Both male informants are speaking about the process of total discipline exerted on pupils within the İmam Hatip school culture, through control on sexuality and interactions with the opposite sex. Analysis of the stories shows that İmam Hatip schools, at least until 1997, have been able to educate pupils who hold on to Islamic sentiments in their lifestyles from the perspective of Islamic morality. They have also been able to educate pupils who are nationalists, due to their emphasis on rituals about the nation and the flag. A male pupil argued:

According to Islamic belief a soldier who guards the barracks does as good work as the Muslim who worships for several hours a day.

It has been stated by school principals that martyrdom in the name of the nation is considered the most superior status in terms of Islam. As one of the school principals said:

İmam Hatip school pupils don't think about their egos. They learn to love their country, respect their nation. We teach them that martyrdom is a very important status. Even more so than being a prophet. When a pupil has received this culture, he can sacrifice himself for his country.

Consequently, İmam Hatip school pupils derive pride, emotional security, identity as well as nationalist feelings basically from Islamic morality. My observations and interpretations are supported by some information from a comparative quantitative study by Sarpkaya (1998: 161-162), in which he found that İmam Hatip school pupils' favourite leader was the Prophet Mohammad followed by Atatürk, whereas public school pupils' favourite leader was Atatürk followed by the Prophet Mohammad, with a significant difference between the two. Whilst İmam Hatip school pupils chose their favourite leaders only from among Islamic-Turkish culture and history, ordinary school pupils seemed to be more internationalist in their choice. In

another piece of research by Coşkun (1999: 73-74), İmam Hatip school pupils were found mostly to read Islamist and nationalist newspapers and to follow Islamist channels on TV. All of these findings point to the formation of an Islamic and nationalist identity within the framework of an Islamic lifestyle. İmam Hatip school pupils argue, on the other hand, that their main problem is the obstacle created in Turkish society because of the acceptance of a secularist attitude in line with Turkish Republican principles, which demand the private pursuit of religion strictly separate from all public matters.

The paradox of İmam Hatip schools: Social mobility of girls

The nation-wide research on conservatism in Turkey (Yılmaz 2006) showed that the family was the core institution, which Turkish people wanted to preserve. Secular or religious nationalism symbolised by land and flag came far behind the family. The family was perceived as the institution, which gave birth to traditional norms and where these norms were expected to function properly. Turkish people turned out to be most conservative when it came to preserving gender relations/sexuality and were afraid that close relations with 'the West' could have negative influences in terms of young people's morality and family relations.

According to the same survey, although a significant number, 35 per cent, of the Turkish population held conservative values in relation to their private lives and gender relations because of tradition, İmam Hatip school pupils based their conservatism on Islamic principles. The survey also showed that, of those who defined themselves as conservative, 43 per cent defined themselves as very religious at the same time. In relation to the education culture of İmam Hatip schools, Acar and Ayata (2002: 96) found that gender differences between males and females were attributed to *fitrat* (nature), as prescribed by Islam. The same reason was repeated by the male school principals and male pupils in my study. One of the school principals argued:

Separate-sex education is not specific to the Islamic world. I have heard that there are similar schools in Europe. In Japan, I have heard, there are even special buses reserved for ladies so that they will not be disturbed. Modernity has nothing to do with these issues. These issues have to do with creation. God has created males and females. Why? It is because they are different. This does not mean that the female is a second-class citizen. Females and males have different roles. They have to play their own roles without intervening in each other's. Otherwise problems start in society.

The paradox of İmam Hatip schools had to do with modern values appropriated by female İmam Hatip school pupils as opposed to male pupils. Coşkun (1999: 98) found a significant difference between the values of female and male İmam Hatip school pupils on the place of women in Turkish society. Whilst 84 per cent of girls stated that 'women should bring income home by working outside', only 19 per cent of boys agreed with this statement. Almost 28 per cent of girls agreed with the statement that 'a woman's place is her home', against 83 per cent of boys who agreed with the same statement. These findings pointed to the fact that patriarchal gender relations were supported by male İmam Hatip school pupils, but not so much by females. My personal interviews

with İmam Hatip school graduates as well as the group discussions showed the same trend. The female pupils I talked to interpreted Islam in a much more flexible manner compared with males. For example, a 21-year-old female informant, who was criticised all the time both by girls and boys at the school because she talked to her male friends, believed that Islam was not a religion forbidding females to take part in social life in an active manner. She said:

I have always talked to male pupils at my school. Some say that talking to males is *haram*, forbidden by religion. In my view, what is important is what you talk about and how you talk... Yes, there are some limits in religion, but how you interpret the Koran is most important. Our prophet has said many things but he said everything in relation to an event. Islam is not as conservative as people might think. Our religion allows for investigation, progress and sociability.

The same informant said that some religious families would either send their children to İmam Hatip schools or not let them study at all. The same theme was repeated by another 21-year-old female informant who, after graduation, started to work as a teacher at Koran courses and met many religious families who kept asking what subjects pupils would learn at İmam Hatip schools. She mentioned that she tried hard to persuade these families to send their daughters, in particular, to these schools where religion was taught under the supervision of the state. Otherwise, she was afraid that there were several religious communities and sects, which were just waiting to brainwash them. The same informant told me about her experiences in Germany where she worked for a year as an education consultant for Turkish families:

What message did my family give to other families by sending me abroad as a seventeen-year-old girl? That I was an individual. I might have a religious identity but I did have an identity as a human being as well, which had nothing to do with religion. I continued praying five times a day and covering myself after having gone to Germany. I received some reactions from different groups who were also religious Turks and who were critical of the fact that I had come to Germany alone, as a young female... Later on, mothers came to see me and I tried to motivate them to bring their daughters up as independent persons... When our German teacher asked me where I had learned my religion, and I told him that I learned it in a school supervised by the Turkish state, he was amazed. Many Turks who had attended the course until then have had so many different voices on Islam. I was proud of myself, proud of the education I had received. I, alone, as a seventeen-year-old girl, was able to challenge the image Germans had about Turks in Germany.

Coming from a religious family, this female informant was able to travel and live alone in Germany as a seventeen-year-old girl. She became a role model for Turkish families as a young girl and as a religious person. She was herself very critical of many religious Turks who understood what they read in Koran literally without using their brains, or believed in what others said without reading the sources. She believed that, besides the socialisation she had received in her family, she had had the opportunity to learn religion in a flexible manner, thanks to the good teachers she had in philosophy, sociology and psychology who taught her to be critical of her faith.

According to her, male pupils at İmam Hatip schools were more attached to patriarchal values than females, because it was how they wanted to understand

Islam. She had applied to become a member of the discipline committee during her school years. She was then confronted with the reaction of male pupils who had not wanted to have a female on the committee, and referred to religion as being against it. She had replied to them in the following manner:

How dare you say such words to me? What kind of Muslims are you? Who has given birth to you? Do you dare to reply in the same manner to your mothers? They became silent then. People have formed such strong opinions that it is impossible to change them. I call this traditionality.

Obviously, this young girl has become socially mobile and refers to her socialisation in her family as well as to the education she has gained at the İmam Hatip school, as reasons for being a role model to the daughters of Turkish families living in Germany. She has also gained courage and self-confidence to be able to stand up to discrimination as a female in her school. Yet, she still uses the argument about motherhood as one of the reasons to gain respect and to be heard in front of male pupils.

A 21-year-old male informant argues in the same manner, by saying that motherhood is the most important duty a human being can have in life, because a lineage continues through the moral education given to children by their mothers. That is why, he argues, girls are not supposed to be used as sex objects by boys, as is common at public schools nowadays. He refers to the dominant discourse at İmam Hatip schools, which defines masculine and feminine identities as fixed entities with different functions and roles. In reply to my question about the roles of males and females, he says:

Why is a female created? What is her function? She has specific duties: to give birth to children, to fix things at home as a mother and as a wife. From this perspective, it is logical that she stays at home. Now, if we consider the reason why man is created, his duty is to bring home *rızk* (daily food, sustenance, etc.). A female has duties according to her nature. Can't she work outside? I don't want her to work outside if she is not going to cook my food, if she is not going to behave like a wife. I can bring home our *rızk*.

This pupil's understanding of the female role consists, first of all, of being a mother and a wife. That is why she is created. The results of the nation-wide survey on conservatism showed that, although 87 per cent of respondents agreed on equality between females and males, 81 per cent believed that being honourable was the most important virtue in a woman. Further, 71 per cent of the respondents thought that the foremost duty of a woman was to serve her husband and children at home, and 67 per cent said that a woman would quit work if her home duties were interrupted (Yılmaz 2006: 7). So this pupil's argument in terms of gender relations and roles does not differ much from the patriarchal attitudes held by Turkish people in general.

How, then, was the social mobility of female pupils as opposed to male pupils, which I call a paradox, created? The female informants argued that their female teachers at İmam Hatip schools supported them in studying and getting good enough marks to be able to enter universities, to have good professions and not to be dependent on anybody else. As a 23-year-old female informant said during our group discussion:

The Prophet Ali tells people to get the ‘weapons’ of the era. What is the weapon of our era? It is education. The weapon which is meant here is not the weapon used to shoot people, as some fanatics want to see it. He wanted to tell us to adorn ourselves with what would help in our progress and this is education.

The paradox was initially created such that parents sent their daughters to İmam Hatip schools because these schools were considered ‘moral’, due to the separate-sex education and religious instruction given there. However, many girls took advantage of being sent to school to continue to study at university. Some of them, who could afford it, also chose to study abroad because of the başörtü (head-cover)¹⁴ prohibition initiated by the Turkish Council of Higher Education at universities (Özdalga 1997: 481).

A long road to go but in which direction?

The circles in Turkey, which fear religious intrusion into private life, have been against İmam Hatip schools since these institutions have strayed from their initial function to educate religious functionaries and turned into institutions for alternative education. Whereas the circles, which are in favour of the İmam Hatip school model, argue that to receive religious education under the control of the state does not contradict the notion of secularism. This study shows that religious education is not only deemed necessary by pupils and administrators, since there is a demand for it, but is legitimised as the catalyst for the cultivation of nationalist and moralist feelings as well.

Principals and teachers of religious subjects at İmam Hatip schools, the majority of whom are males, seem at the same time to be the gatekeepers in the interpretation of Koranic verses and the Prophet’s words from a patriarchal perspective (Şefkatli 2000: 9). Male pupils, in particular, in the study consider their education to be superior to that of the ordinary public schools, due to the informal teaching about sexual morality they have received at İmam Hatip schools. Religious circles usually claim that the establishment of these İmam Hatip schools has been a turning point for the mobilization and education of the female population in Turkish society, who would otherwise not attend school and would be deprived of at least secondary education. Against this view, it could be argued that, as long as the patriarchally dominated culture of education exists also at these institutions, the social mobility of girls through religious education may only be considered, if at all, as the beginning of a long road, which is politicized again with the so-called *turban* issue.

My interviews and group discussions as well as findings from quantitative data show that female pupils attending İmam Hatip schools hold more flexible values in terms of religious socialisation compared with male pupils who hold more patriarchal values. Some female pupils’ strivings for greater involvement in society by demanding reinterpretation of the Koran in a more flexible manner show us that ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ can no longer be considered as dichotomous concepts with reference to their situation. Whilst the modernist outlook at the turn of the twentieth century referred to religion as part and

¹⁴ *Başörtü*: The head, but not the face, is covered over the shoulders by a scarf.

parcel of tradition, female pupils are now demanding recognition through the reinterpretation of religion. Their position may also be called 'reflexive resistance' (Carlson 2006: 325). They are demanding a reflexive entry into the domain of religion, and by putting on the veil they are also demanding recognition in society at large (Özdalga 1997, Zuhur 1992).

This struggle brings us to discussion about the necessity of learning values about democratic citizenship. The question as to whether religious identity could be considered superior to secular identity in terms of sexual morality is problematic. Citizens in a modern society are obliged to subscribe to a heterogeneous moral system, which takes into consideration human rights including sexual morality (Asad 2003: 186). If İmam Hatip school pupils consider themselves as bearers of Islamic morality as a necessity for building a 'better' society, the condition of subscription to moral heterogeneity as the defining characteristic of modern society may be challenged. Whilst secular education may prepare pupils to make and defend their identities by themselves, religious prescriptions may dominate over their self identities. To the extent that, İmam Hatip school pupils consider having individual identities as human beings in addition to their collective religious identities, they may be more flexible in their interpretation of religion.

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