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Called to Being Religious Muslims:

The Religification of Turkish Women in Norway

Keywords: religification, Turkish, women, prejudice, stereotype, Norway, first generation

Abstract This paper describes the process of religification through which assumed religious affiliation, rather than other identifications, becomes the main category of identity that Norwegian society uses to identify Turkish women living in Norway. Depending on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 41 first-generation Turkish women migrants living in Drammen and Oslo, the paper first demonstrates the variety in religious belief, identification, and adherence to religious practices among them. Secondly, it shows how their daily encounters in Norwegian society are largely shaped by the fact that Turkish womenv are primarily assumed to be religious Muslims. Many of these women feel uncomfortable being exposed to questions about religion yet, ironically, in a sense, they feel that they are being called to be more religious Muslims in the context of Norway. When they seem to diverge from the stereotype, they are told that they are not like Turks/other Turks. However, although all these women seem to differ from the stereotype, rather than leading to changes in the stereotype, they are considered exceptions.

Islam has become a central issue in debates on collective identity in Europe. Politicians from a range of European countries have portrayed Islamic beliefs and practices as incompatible with core values in Europe and their arguments have received support from certain population sectors in their respective countries (Simonsen & Bonikowski 2020; Foner & Simon 2015). The national populisms of Northern and Western Europe portray an opposition between self and other in civilizational terms that represents Islam as the other and that depends on the notion of a civilizational threat from Islam. "Liberalism – specifically, philosetimism, gender equality, gay rights, and freedom of

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speech – is selectively embraced as a characterization of "our" way of life in constitutive opposition to the illiberalism that is represented as inherent in Islam" (Brubaker 2017: 1194). In countries like Denmark, for instance, starting from the late 1990s, the "immigrant question" has risen to the top of political agendas and Islam and Muslims have become the main others of democracy and society (Mouritsen & Olsen 2013).

In this context, there is currently an expanding literature that focuses on Islamophobia in European contexts (Bunzl 2005, 2007; Fekete 2008; Taras 2012; Ogan et al. 2014; Borell 2015; Sayyid 2018; Law et al. 2019; Kaya 2011, 2014, 2020), as well as studies that focus on Islamophobia specifically in the Norwegian context (Bangstad 2014, 2015, 2016; Hellevik 2020; Døving 2020). Islamophobia is a phenomenon that has emerged during the late 20th century due to geopolitics and population movements that have brought millions of Muslims to Europe. At the heart of the Islamophobic discourse, there is the question of civilization: the idea that Islam creates a worldview which is not compatible with and inferior to Western culture (Bunzl 2005: 502). Therefore, in the case of migrants coming from Muslim-majority countries, this leads to the question of whether they can be good Europeans. This paper aims to focus on the process of religification, a consequence of Islamophobia that has so far been neglected in academic studies. Here, I demonstrate that the notion of Islam as incompatible with and inferior to Western culture operates on stereotypes about Islam which present a superficial understanding of Islam that is different from and much less sophisticated than the religious beliefs and practices of those who identify with Islam. Moreover, I also demonstrate that Islamophobia leads to the ascription of religious identity as the most important component of identity to women who come from Muslim-majority countries, even if they are non-believers or do not primarily identify with religion.

Before continuing the discussion on religification, it is crucial to examine the gender dimension of how Islam and Muslims are perceived in the European context. As Abu-Lughod (2016) discusses, among the images that people who live in Europe or the United States have of Muslim women, that of the veiled Muslim woman, in particular, illustrates their oppression in the common Western imagination. For that reason, it becomes hard to talk about the Muslim world without talking about Muslim women. Western feminists, for example, take it upon themselves to

speak on behalf of oppressed Muslim women whom, they assume, need saving. Yet, as Abu-Lughod (2016: 50) emphasizes, "projects to save other women, of whatever kind, depend on and reinforce Westerners' sense of superiority". This way of imagining women in the Muslim world ignores the variety of modes of living and believing they practice, and also ignores their agency. Muslim women are represented as part of a single undifferentiated category which is marked by being oppressed (Zine 2002). The voices of Muslim women are often absent from these debates (Bilge 2010) and there is a need for more studies on the variety of attitudes and experiences among them (Diehl et al. 2009). As Van Es's (2019) study of Dutch Muslim women demonstrates, Muslim women develop different strategies in order to break this stereotype of "the oppressed Muslim woman", such as managing their own conduct in their everyday encounters with members of the non-Muslim majority and representing themselves as modern and emancipated in order to challenge popular perceptions. In her study of Norwegian Muslim women, Van Es (2016) also demonstrates that these women's essentialist representation of Islam as a religion that empowers women is a response to public representations of Islam as oppressive.

Although religification is a crucial concept for understanding the experiences of migrants from Muslim-majority countries living in Western contexts, it can scarcely be said that there is a well-developed corpus of literature on the subject. In the few studies where the concept is used, it remains insufficiently defined and theorized, apparently considered almost self-explanatory, although conceptual vagueness and confusions remain as a result of the lack of definition. For instance, in Berglund's (2017) study, which focuses on the experiences of Muslims in Swedish public schooling, religification has been inadequately explained despite its being a key concept in the article; indeed, even the title of the article includes the term. Yet it is somewhat clarified in only one place where the author uses it, when Berglund writes, "By this I mean that the Muslim students tend to become placed in the category religious by teachers and friends" (Berglund 2017: 525). Similarly, in Francis and McKenna's (2017) work, although religification is an important term in the article and is used repeatedly, no clear definition is provided.

This problem is partially redressed in the work of Ghaffar-Kucher (2012) and a number of other studies also depend on her definition (see, e.g., Yaqoob & Sayyid 2015, Panjwani &

Moulin-Stozek 2017, Lee & Park 2017, Moulin-Stozek & Schirr 2017, Gholami 2021). Ghaffar-Kucher (2012: 38) uses the term to refer to the "simultaneous ascription and co-option of a religious identity over all other common markers of difference (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender)". In her study, Ghaffar-Kucher demonstrates that while school personnel and peers see Pakistani-American youth after 9/11 through a religious lens, the youth themselves and their families also identify more with a religious identity (rather than ethnic, national, or racial identities). Although I benefit from the term religification, my research findings mostly highlight the ascription rather than co-option aspect. Therefore, in my use of the term, religification implies that an assumed religious identity is ascribed to individuals depending on their nationality/ethnicity and that the ascribed religious identity is considered more important and defining than all other dimensions of their identities. Although religious affiliation or belief is not a core aspect of identity for many of the Turkish women whom I interviewed in Oslo and Drammen, in their interactions with Norwegians they feel that they are identified mainly with reference to their assumed religious identity: as Muslim. Moreover, they feel that there is a set of assumptions about what being a Muslim woman means, which is attributed to them regardless of their own understanding of religion or their unique characteristics as individuals. In this case, ascription of Muslim identity by the Norwegian society does not lead them to embrace being Muslim, unlike the Pakistani-American youth in Ghaffar-Kucher's (2012) study. Therefore, although identified as Muslims by the others, they reject this identification. Contrary to what Hannah Arendt suggests,[1] although they are "attacked" (stereotyped) as Muslims, they do not choose to defend themselves as Muslims. In the conclusion to this paper, I discuss the meanings of this disidentification.

Research

This paper depends on a broader research project which looks at identity, belonging, and discrimination perceptions among migrants in Norway who originate in Turkey. Rather than being the major focus of that project, religious identification was only one of the dimensions of identity and belonging that I examined, and I approached it mainly from the perspective of my own

1 "If one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew. Not as a German, not as a world citizen, not as an upholder of the Rights of Man." Arendt, H. 2005. *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism.*

discipline, sociology, while also benefiting from other disciplines, such as anthropology and religious studies. For this study, I have conducted semi-structured interviews with migrants who were born in Turkey, have migrated to Norway, and are currently living in or around Oslo and Drammen. This specific paper focuses on the responses of women to their religious identifications and how they are perceived in Norway as women from Turkey – a Muslim-majority country – based on interviews I conducted with 41 Turkish women migrants between March 2019 and August 2020. The research has been approved by the NSD. In this project, I have also been in the position of a migrant-researcher. As a Turkish migrant woman living in Norway, I interviewed other Turkish migrant women, which had both its advantages and disadvantages: on the one hand, it gave me easy access to the groups of Turkish migrants in Norway, allowed me to recruit many interviewees, and made me the recipient of opinions and thoughts that they may not have been shared with a researcher of a different ethnicity; on the other hand, as I explain below, mostly those individuals who perceive me as being from "their own group" contacted me to be interviewed. At the beginning of my research, I was a newcomer to Norway from Turkey with less than two years of living experience there, and the process of adaptation to the new country took a parallel track with my research. I became a member of several groups on Facebook which have been established by people from Turkey who live in Norway. I have attended their social activities, their dinners, parties, Turkish national day celebrations, seminars, and so on, conducting extensive observation during these events.

For my interviews, I used multiple channels to reach and recruit my respondents. I shared my call on the Facebook groups of people from Turkey that covered a range of political orientations targeting different groups from Turkey. I also used my own networks to reach people who met the criteria for my research. Additionally, I utilized snowball sampling, asking my respondents to give me the names of people that I could interview. During the period before the Corona pandemic, I conducted all the interviews face-to-face at places chosen by my respondents, meeting mostly in cafes, restaurants, or their workplaces after getting their written, informed consent. After the Corona measures, I conducted the remaining interviews either online or on the phone, and my respondents gave oral consent, which was recorded. The interviews lasted 1.5 hours on average. At the be-

ginning of each interview, I asked my respondents demographic questions (age, city where they lived before coming to Norway, marital status, children, spouse/partner information, education, legal status in Norway, citizenship). After that, I asked them questions related to their reasons for migrating to Norway, their life in Norway, their connections with Turkey, and their perceptions of identity, belonging, and discrimination. The current paper depends largely on responses related to religious identification and how the respondents are perceived in Norway as women from a Muslim-majority country. The interviews were mostly conducted in Turkish, but respondents sometimes used Norwegian and English during the interviews. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and I have translated the relevant parts of the interviews into English. The respondents have been anonymized, their names and identifying information being removed. Each respondent has been identified with the letter M and a number.

Although I shared my research ad in many groups with different profiles and political orientations, it would not be accurate to say that I have been able to interview equal numbers of people from these diverse positions and orientations. The majority of the people who reached me to be interviewed are less religious or secular Turks who are critical of the AKP government. This is, presumably, because they perceive me as a member of this group. Many Turkey-originating people living in Oslo and Drammen have at least some information about each other. During interviews, I was repeatedly told by my respondents that they knew of me or they had information about me in advance. Those who saw me as a member of "their group" were more willing to be interviewed. However, I also interviewed some Kurdish people, religious people, and AKP supporters, although they were fewer in number. Additionally, only a few women who wear a headscarf contacted me to be interviewed; therefore, most of my female respondents are women who do not wear a headscarf. Consequently, it is important to state that the composition of religious identifications that exist for this group of Turkish women may not necessarily represent the composition of religious identifications for Turkish migrants in Norway. Nonetheless, as I demonstrate in the following sections, the gap between how these Turkish women define themselves in the religious sense and how they are perceived by the Norwegian society is a very important finding in itself.

Religious Identifications of Turkish Women in Norway

During my interviews, the direct question that I asked to my respondents about their religious identification was, "How do you define yourself in terms of religious belief and also religious practice?" I emphasized that the question was related to belief as well as practices/rituals, and that I wanted them to answer it about both. In addition to their responses to this question, I have also analyzed the range and variety of responses of the 41 women to other questions about their religious identification. In the following sections, I list and discuss the different religious identifications within this group.

One woman (M16) among the interviewees did not want to respond to the question about religion. Five women defined themselves as atheists. M8 stated that after being an agnostic for a long time, she has recently started considering herself an atheist. She mentioned that while living in Turkey, she participated in Muslim religious festivities (especially Ramadan and Kurban), but she emphasized that she was celebrating them for cultural rather than religious reasons. M13 was another person who defined herself as atheist and stressed that she neither believes in God nor religion, nor participates in any ritual or practice related to religion. Similarly, M17 stated that "there is nothing related to religion in [her] life". M30 said that she is atheist, and she finds "religious cliches unnecessary and meaningless". Finally, M61 was another person who defined herself as atheist and did not want to talk any further about religion. Other than saying that they are atheists, these women had very little to say about religion and I received quite brief responses from them.

There was one woman (M23) who defined herself as agnostic, defining it as "approaching the existence of God skeptically". In a similar way to M8, she told me that she followed some Muslim practices for purely cultural reasons. Additionally, one woman (M12) described her religious identification in the following terms: "I do not know whether or not it exists, and I am not interested in it. If there exists a God and if it is a kind of God that I can accept, that God anyways will not have a problem with me. Because I am trying to be a good person…But if that God is as described, meaning, if it is a God that gets angry, punishes, and burns, I don't accept that God."

Two women (M11 and M63) identified themselves as deist. The way M11 defined it was that she has a notion of a creator which is different from the understandings of monotheistic religions. She thinks of herself as a person who does not believe in a religion or in prophets, but who has very high ethical and moral standards. However, although she does not believe in a religion, having grown up in Turkey, she selectively follows some of the practices of Islam: "In a cultural sense, we can say that I am a cultural Muslim like many other people living in Turkey…I don't fast, but I celebrate religious *bayrams*…For instance, I like the sound of the morning call to prayer (*sabah ezani*). Other things, like visiting graves, that I define as part of being a cultural Muslim…I do them." The second person who defined herself as deist is M63; however, she did not want to talk further about religion or religious identification.

The largest category included those women who told me that they believe in God/Allah/a force/creator but not in religion/religions; 16 women defined themselves as such (M3, M9, M14, M20, M24, M25, M26, M27, M37, M42, M50, M51, M53, M57, M58, M70). M24, M50, M53 and M57 all believe in a creator/a force, but also think that religions have been created by humans. M24 argued that religions exist because of their functionality, because they meet some human needs. Although she respects other people's beliefs, she personally finds the notion of a religion illogical and irrational. M3 stressed that she believes in and loves but does not fear Allah and does not believe in religions: "I do not think of Allah as related to things like fear. I look at nature and the essence of human beings. I see that beauty… And I don't relate those things to fear. About religion…I don't have anything to do with it."

Many of the other women in this group said that they have participated in some of the rituals of Islam and Christianity for either cultural and social reasons or because of the expectations of their parents and/or relatives. For instance, M25 said that she believes in Allah, but feels that she does not belong to any religion. She has her own, individual understanding of belief and she prays in her own way. Because of the expectations of her family, she calls them on religious bayrams, although these days do not mean anything to her. She also stated that she is, in fact, very critical of sacrificing of animals for Kurban Bayramı, for instance. M26 claimed that she believes in some kind of force, but not in religions. "I was born and raised in a Muslim country. My mother and father identify as Muslims. However, I am not

Muslim like them. I only believe in a force, but I don't really believe in religions. Does it make me a deist? I don't know. I have always kept a distance from those isms." However, she mentioned celebrating bayrams (Ramadan, Kurban), Easter, and Christmas, as she thinks of these as occasions that bring people together.

M42 is similar to the others in this group in the sense that she believes in Allah but does not believe in any specific religion, while noting the cultural impact of Islam. However, unlike the others, she did not refer to any practices or rituals that she follows because of that impact but, rather, the ethical principles which were her heritage from Islam: "For instance, there was this thing that was taught to me as religious knowledge. If somebody works for you, you need to pay that person before his/her sweat dries. This was taught to me as a religious principle. Or like being compassionate or having gratitude…". Consequently, she talks about living according to these principles, taught to her as a part of Islam, although she no longer identifies as a Muslim.

The second largest category includes those women who identify as Muslims but practice their religion at varying levels: 13 of them talked about partially following some practices (M6, M10, M21, M31, M32, M39, M41, M43, M45, M55, M56, M60, M64, M65), while two women (M29 and M59) mentioned following most of the practices. M6 described herself as religious, speaking in terms of belief; however, she observed that she does not practice all the rituals, like praying five times a day or fasting. She defined religion "as the way to live a humane life" and "the way of communication between humans and God", and, according to her, this communication – regarded in different ways in different societies – was named Islam, Christianity, and so on. M31 is also similar in the sense that she defined members of her family as "strong believers" without being conservative or practicing rituals such as praying five times a day and fasting. M41 also defined herself as a believer (of Islam) who followed some practices but not others: she thinks of Ramadan as an important period; she does not fast herself but teaches her children about it. She does, however, pay alms (*zekat*), as she thinks of it as an important religious practice that depends on the notion of solidarity.

M56 said that she was "born an Alevi", meaning that she was born into an Alevi family. She is part of an Alevi community and a member of an Alevi association in Norway. She talked about

participating in the activities as much as she can, but not following any religious practices in her own life. She said that "religion has a 10% impact on [her] life".

Some of them have strong attachments to Islam in terms of belief and feel guilty because of not adhering to Islamic practices. M32 defined herself as a person who loves her religion, Islam, and feels guilty because she thinks she has changed significantly since she started her university education. While she engaged in Islamic practices regularly in the past (praying five times a day, fasting), she no longer does so, and she drinks alcohol. When she gets questions from her Norwegian friends about why she does not wear a veil or why she drinks alcohol, she responds by saying that it is "between [her] and Allah". However, being questioned in this way reminds her of her dilemmas and makes her feel even more guilty about not following Islamic practices. M39 also stated that she thinks about religion all the time and does not want to forget her religion just because she is living in Norway. She talks about how much she misses hearing the sound of the calls to prayer, and yet, in spite of her strong belief, she does not consider herself a practicing Muslim and she feels guilty about it.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify what my respondents mean when they talk about a "practicing Muslim". In their responses, they mainly refer to the five pillars of Islam (declaration of faith, prayer, alms giving, fasting, and pilgrimage) as their criteria for being or not being a practicing Muslim. However, in the accounts of some, being a practicing Muslim is not limited to the five pillars but also includes other rituals, like wearing a veil, celebrating religious bayrams, not drinking alcohol, or not eating pork. They define themselves as practicing or non-practicing Muslims depending on the extent to which they engage in these rituals. On the other hand, not engaging in them does not necessarily mean that they do not consider themselves Muslim. Hence, for them, it is possible to identify as Muslim without being a practicing Muslim. As I discuss in the next section, the existing stereotypes in Norway for individuals coming from Muslim-majority countries seem to ignore this possibility: namely, identifying as Muslim while not engaging in the rituals or only partially following them.

While she identifies as Muslim, M10 does not think of herself as a very religious person, although she says that there are times when she needs religion, whereupon she prays and sometimes

fasts. At other times, she said, she does not think about these practices or religion at all. Overall, she sees religion as guiding individuals to be better humans. For that reason, she also wants her children to believe in a creator. She stated that, for her, it is not important whether they choose to be Christian or Muslim or not to believe in a religion; rather, she wants them to be good humans living according to moral principles.

M43 talked at length about religion. She defined herself as a believer, but as someone who approaches religious teachings critically. She talked about the time her parents wanted her to take weekend Quran classes, recalling that she was expelled from the course after a while because she was constantly challenging the statements of the Quran teachers. She remembers it as a humiliating incident for her parents, but she found it difficult to tolerate someone teaching her about religion in an authoritative way. This, however, does not mean that she does not take religion seriously. A couple of years earlier, she went to Mecca for *umrah*[2] on her own initiative, something that greatly surprised both her family and her Norwegian friends. She also mentioned that she has fasted during Ramadan for the last two years. She does not pray five times a day but thinks that she will feel much better if she starts to do so, noting that "it will be like a meditation". Yet she also mentioned those times when she even questions the existence of Allah. She talked about her siblings as more religious at the surface level but said that "they are not even good human beings". For her, the most important thing in life is being and becoming a good human being, regardless of religious affiliation.

This emphasis that being a good human was more important than being religious was common in the accounts of several of my respondents. M45, for instance, defined herself as a believer and told me that she partially follows the practices of Islam: she does not fast during the entire month of Ramadan but only on certain days, and she does not pray five times a day. She emphasized that she is not interested in who is practicing or to what extent. "What I take seriously is how humane individuals are, their personalities, whether they keep their promises…The rest is left to Allah; it is none of my business." M65 also mentioned that having a clean conscience and respecting others' rights is much more important than following practices like not eating pork or not drinking alcohol.

Some of my respondents also reflected on changes in their

2 *Umrah* is a religious pilgrimage that is completed at any time of the year, while Hajj occurs during a certain period of the year (July 7th-12th in 2022).

religious beliefs and identifications throughout their lives. For instance, M55 said that she is currently a Muslim, "but a bad one", considering herself "very bad" in terms of following the practices. She also mentioned a period during her university years when she "chose not to believe"; however, she came to the realization that she feels much better when she believes in Allah and religion. Therefore, she now thinks that even though she does not practice very much, it is crucial that she remains a believer.

Among the women whom I interviewed, M59 was one of those who followed Islamic practices most regularly. She fasts during Ramadan and prays five times a day, although she criticizes herself for occasionally missing some prayers and not taking her children to the mosque more often. Overall, she considers herself a good Muslim, and says that religion has a crucial role in her life. Although all of her four children were born and raised in Norway in the same family, she sees big differences among them in terms of how religious they are and the extent to which they follow religious practices. "We are very much a mixed family when it comes to religion," she observed.

Table1. Religious identification and adherence to religious practices

Responses	Interviewee
No Response	M16
Atheist	M8, M13, M17, M30, M61
Agnostic	M23
Not interested in whether or not God exists[3]	M12
Deist	M11, M63
Believes in God/force/creator but not in religion	M3, M9, M24, M25, M26, M27, M36, M37, M42, M50, M51, M53, M57, M58, M70
Muslim and partially practicing	M6, M10, M21, M31, M32, M39, M41, M43, M45, M55, M56, M60, M64, M65
Muslim and mostly practicing	M29, M59

Being a Woman from a Muslim-Majority Country in Norway

In the previous section, I demonstrated that there are a variety of ways in which my interviewees define themselves in the religious sense and in the extent to which they observe religious practices. In this section, I show that although many of them do not consider religion a major dimension of their identity and,

3 Not being interested in accepting or rejecting claims about God's existence is called apatheism (see, e.g., Rauch 2003).

in spite of their diversity in terms of how they relate to religion, these women talked about being mostly defined with reference to Islam in the context of Norway. They were also conscious that the characteristics of a monolithic understanding of Islam, Muslims, and Muslim women were attributed to them. Moreover, the accounts of my informants reveal the kinds of characteristics that are attributed to women who come from Muslim-majority countries.

It is useful to remember Berglund's (2013) metaphor of *marination* to describe Swedish society, which I claim is also, at least partially, applicable to describing Norwegian society. In the process of marination, food is soaked in a seasoned liquid before cooking and this process permanently changes the taste of the food and cannot be washed away. Berglund (2013) argues that Swedish society can be described as a society that has been marinated in Lutheran Christianity. Although it claims to have washed away the marinade, "the taste abides":

> It becomes apparent that what from an inside-Sweden perspective is presented as neutral and objective may be understood from an outside perspective as deeply Lutheran: not only in terms of the factual history of the country, but also in terms of how people think and talk about religion in society, how religion is taught and holidays are celebrated in schools, how institutions are built, who gets subsidized by the state, etc. (Berglund 2013: 181)

Similarly marinated in Lutheran Christianity, Norwegian society also seems to experience problems in encounters with people who come from Muslim-majority societies. As I discuss in another paper in detail (Yilmaz Sener 2022), most of my interviewees think that there are many prejudices against, and stereotypes about Turkish people in Norway, and that several of these are related to the fact that Turkey is a Muslim-majority country. While being originally from a Christian-majority country does not imply that a person is a religious Christian, the same principle does not seem to apply to people who come from Muslim-majority countries: they are expected to be religious. Additionally, the possibility that they may be identifying with Islam with partial or no engagement with its rituals is ignored. The fact that this possibility is usually recognized for the followers of other religions, while being ignored for Muslims, also sug-

gests that identifying with Islam is assumed to be essentially different from identifying with other religions. Moreover, although religion is increasingly considered a personal and private issue about which individuals cannot be forced to disclose their opinions and identifications in Western countries, this principle does not seem to hold if a person is from a Muslim-majority country. Their privacy is constantly violated by being questioned about their religious beliefs and practices.

As a non-religious person who is "not even remotely related to religion", M12 talks about her discomfort with being exposed to numerous questions about religion in Norway. She found it especially hard to deal with such questions and comments during the period when she was trying to adapt to living in a different society. M19 also mentions dealing with questions like why she does not wear a veil like other Turkish women and why she is different from them. According to her, Norwegians think of Turks as fanatically religious and uneducated people. Similarly, M55 is not a religious person; she does not carry out rituals like fasting, yet she talks about how she is teased by her supervisor for not fulfilling them, for not being a "proper Muslim". M14 thinks that in Norway there is a certain portrayal of Turkish people, recalling that when she first came to the country during the 1990s, she faced questions like whether she took off her veil on the plane. Thanks to the internet and an increase in the numbers of people travelling to Turkey for their vacations, this portrayal has somewhat changed for her but, she thinks, some stereotypes still remain. M50 also thinks that there is a specific portrayal of Turkey in Norway, with Turkey being associated with Islam and every Turkish person expected to be religious. She mentioned getting remarks when she eats pork or drinks alcohol. M45 talked about an experience after she and her family moved into a new house and people from their neighborhood came to meet them. The neighbors told her that they were happy to see that they were not a Muslim family. When she told them that they were, her neighbors were surprised and asked her questions such as whether her husband beat her and why she was not wearing a headscarf.

M23's family lived in Germany for ten years when she was a child, returning to Turkey when she was in the fourth grade. She is now married to a Norwegian and has been living in Oslo for five years. As a family, they have decided to live in Norway rather than Turkey, yet, although she thinks that her child will have

better opportunities growing up in Norway, she does not feel happy about this decision. She is the only foreigner working at her current company and, when talking to other people at her workplace, she often gets the question, "Where are you from?" Every time she says, "Turkey," she feels like something suddenly changes and not in a positive direction. (She describes it as "You can almost hear the sound of something breaking inside the other person.") She even gets the response "Oh, are you Muslim?" It offends her when she gets questions about her religion, and in response asks why they are asking such questions. As a non-religious person, she says that she does not spend much time reflecting on religion, but such comments, in a sense, force her to do so. She also finds the religion question disturbing because it serves the purpose of categorizing and is usually followed by questions about whether she eats pork and drinks wine.

M21 thinks that there is a general dividing line between Christian society and Muslim society in Norway. For her, although the general perception of Norway is that religion does not play an important role in social life, she thinks that it is a predominantly Christian society and it stereotypes those who come from Muslim-majority countries. In her view, "Norwegians are not willing to approach Muslims or include them in society."

M24 remembers one incident when she was wearing shorts and a Norwegian person asked her if she learned to dress like that after coming to Norway. She explains it with reference to the profile of other Turks who were coming to Norway at the time but she also thinks that it is connected to how Norwegians *want to see Turks.* She feels that the media represents Turkish people from the same angle. She does not like to hear that she does not look Turkish, even from her close Norwegian friends. In her view, the fact that Turkey is a Muslim-majority country influences how Turkish migrants are treated in Norway.

M20 is a woman who worked in Turkey as a doctor for many years and came to Norway after her retirement to live near her daughter and take care of her grandchildren. She stated that while she was living in Turkey, she did not usually emphasize her professional identity as a doctor when she met new people, but in Norway she feels the need to highlight her professional identity in order to prevent being categorized in other ways. As a person who is always curious to learn new things and to have

new experiences, she participates in several different language and reading groups in Oslo. In her interactions with Norwegians in these groups, she feels uncomfortable when she encounters their assumptions about Turkish people. "I show them our pictures: my father and mother at the seaside with their swimsuits. Then she asks me if I wore a veil! It means that she is extremely ignorant! So this is how she perceives me." She complained about being treated like she has learned the proper ways of doing things only since coming to Norway and recounted incidents when her Norwegian friends have tried to "teach" her simple things, although she is an 80-year-old woman who worked as a doctor for many years. She thinks that they see themselves in the position of teaching her because of their assumptions about her nationality and religion.

M10 has been working at the same company for fourteen years but described a period when she was applying for jobs. After making out applications and sending her CV to several different places without getting any response, she decided to do something different. She dressed up and went to one of the employment bureaus so that they could see her physically. After the face-to-face interaction, she landed a job rather quickly. She thinks that when she sent in her CV, she was not granted an interview because of her Muslim-sounding last name but when the people at the employment bureau saw her physically, they approached her more positively. She suggested that life is easier for her as she is not a covered woman and does not wear a veil, but she thinks that for a veiled woman, social life can be quite challenging. She also feels that in Norway, Turkish people are regarded as underdeveloped and unable to adapt and integrate, and she needs to prove that all Turkish people are not the same.

What do these accounts tell us? If we reflect on the major issues that have been expressed in them, this is how we can summarize the main argument being made here:

1. Women who are from Turkey (a Muslim-majority country) are mostly defined with reference to Islam in Norway, regardless of their own religious identifications.
2. These women are exposed to many questions about their religious beliefs and practices, although these are considered private issues and questions in many Western countries. Thus, their privacy is violated.
3. As these women think that Norwegians do not ask questi-

ons about religion of each other, the fact that they are being asked such questions signals to them that they are not being respected in social relationships with Norwegians. Different social rules seem to apply, or they are not considered as social equals in relationships.

4. A monolithic and superficial understanding of Islam (defined with reference to the avoidance of pork and alcohol, wearing a veil, etc.) is used as a reference point when approaching these Turkish women. However, as discussed in the previous sections, the majority of these women do not follow or believe in the importance of such practices, and they have much more sophisticated understandings about religious belief.
5. This superficial understanding of Islam is mixed with other stereotypes, like that of Muslim women being beaten by their husbands or as uneducated and in need of being taught the proper ways of doing things (even when they are highly educated professionals). Stereotypes about Muslim women as subordinate and oppressed, as discussed in the previous sections, seem to shape how Turkish women are perceived by Norwegian society.

Conclusion

In this paper, based on interviews with 41 Turkish migrant women living in Norway, I first demonstrated the variety in their religious identifications and adherence to religious practices. Among these women, there are those who define themselves as atheist, agnostic, deist, (what can be called) apatheist, as believers in God/Allah/a creator/a force but not in a specific religion, Muslim but partially practicing, and Muslim and practicing to a large extent. As I have shown in the previous sections, for many of these women religion is not a subject on which they often reflect in their everyday lives (unless they are asked about it), nor is it a category they reference when defining who they are. For the majority of the others who identify as Muslim, following religious practices is quite limited. They selectively engage with some practices and not others, and many of them attribute greater importance to belief, values, ethics, and morality. However, in spite of this heterogeneity in terms of religious identification, living in Norway, these women seem to be con-

stantly identified with reference to a monolithic and superficial understanding of Islam and being Muslim. The paper demonstrates how these women's daily encounters in Norwegian society are mostly shaped by the fact that Turkish women are primarily assumed to be religious Muslims. Many of these women feel uncomfortable because of being exposed to so many questions about religion. They perceive it as a private question that should not be probed by others. In one sense, living in Norway they feel that they are being questioned about their reasons for not being more religious Muslims. When they seem to differ from the stereotypes, they are told that they are not like other Turks. Although all these women seem to differ from the stereotypes, rather than leading to changes in those stereotypes they are considered exceptions. Prejudices and stereotypes are saved, while these women are regarded as single cases that do not conform to the general situation of Turkishness, which is defined with reference to a monolithic understanding of Islam.

I argue that in Norway, Turkish migrant women are religified: that is, an assumed religious identity (Muslim) is ascribed to them based on their nationality/ethnicity, and that ascribed religious identity is considered more important and defining than all the other dimensions of their identities. As I discussed before, my definition of religification differs from that used by Ghaffar-Kucher (2012) in her study of Pakistani-American youth. While the youth in her study embraced being Muslim as a form of resistance when that religious identity was ascribed to them as their main identity, my respondents reject that identification. What I have observed in their case is *disidentification* with the ascribed religious identity. How can we explain their choice of disidentification rather than choosing to embrace religious identity as a form of resistance? I argue that this has a lot to do with the country of origin, Turkey. Although the large majority of the population in Turkey is Muslim, secularism has been one of the major principles on which the Turkish Republic has been founded. For those women who embrace the Republican project of secularization and who have benefited extensively from the secular system, religion has either not been a central aspect of their identities or it has become very much an individualized issue that they have freely created for themselves. They either do not identify with Islam at all or identify with a version of Islam that does not put a lot of emphasis on practices like not eating pork, not drinking alcohol, or wearing a

headscarf/veil. In opposition to what Hannah Arendt argues, even when they are "attacked"/stereotyped as Muslims, they do not "defend themselves"/resist as Muslims. This is because being a secular woman is central to their notion of identity, and they will not simply replace it with another notion just because they are stereotyped when they become migrants. On the other hand, there is very little evidence in their accounts to suggest that they became secularized due to living in Norway. It is rather that they are doing their best to protect their self-identifications as secular women in a society which defines them with reference to religion. Therefore, and thus differing from the individuals in Ghaffar-Kucher's (2012) study, while society religifies them, they resist by rejecting it, not embracing it.

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