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Elite and popular religiosity among Dutch-Turkish muslims in the Netherlands

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Summary in English

Over the past three decades, Islam has become increasingly visible in the European public sphere. Despite Islam's rapid growth in Europe and the Netherlands, many people in the West know little about this religion. The reality of European Islam is very diverse. The differences are related to national, cultural, religious and linguistic elements. In the present study, we explored the inner differences of Dutch-Turkish religiosity in relation to social, economic, and cultural aspects. By means of this exploration we examined the possible directions Islam is taking in Europe. We sought a middle ground between two types of essentialist argumentation: one is to theorize incompatibility between Islam and European culture, and the other is to theorize compatibility between them. As many scholars who study Muslim society have noted, Islam, like any other religion, does not develop in a monolithic form, whether it is hostile to European values or assimilated, as the term 'Euro-Islam' suggests. It develops in a multiplicity of forms, such as political Islam, official Islam, popular Islam, spiritual Islam and radical fundamentalism, combining both radical and moderate religious voices.

The objective of this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge about the characteristics of the religiosity of Dutch-Turkish Muslims in the Netherlands, in relation to their socio-economic status. Our research is exploratory and descriptive. It seeks to examine and understand Muslim beliefs and practices from the perspective of elite and popular religiosity, exploring the characteristics of both kinds of religiosity. The main research questions are (1) ‘What forms and motivations characterize elite and popular religiosity, what are the patterns in the relationship between elite and popular religiosity, and how does this relate to the socio-economic status of Dutch-Turkish Muslims living in the Netherlands?’ (2) ‘What are the socio-psychological differences in behaviour and attitudes among Dutch-Turkish Muslims who experience elite and popular religiosity, respectively?’

Ethical traditions in Islam, in particular all Sufi traditions, generally classify the whole of humanity into three ranks. The ranks are: the common folk or general mankind (*‘awāmm*); the elect or elite (*khawāṣṣ*); and the super-elite (*khawāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*). Nearly comparable conceptions of ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ are used by sociologists to explain the structure of Muslim society. In the academic study of Islam in Turkey, the spiritual and intrinsic dimensions of religiosity were mostly ignored or studied separately by sociologists, without taking the interrelatedness of elite and popular religiosity into account, while the relation between religiosity and social and economic factors was largely neglected by the scholars of religious studies. This was also the case for the study of Dutch-Turkish Muslims. There was very little information available in the literature about socio-economic issues relating to the religiosity of Dutch-Turkish Muslims. In order to fill this gap, in the present study, we concentrated both on the inner-Islamic differences of religiosity and their relation with the socio-economic situation in the Netherlands.

Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical background of the main concepts in light of a social scientific study of religion. The notions of ‘great’ and ‘little’ traditions, ‘high’ and ‘popular’ culture are introduced and developed upon in a broader context. First, we discuss how the category of the ‘popular’ is approached by structuralists and culturalists. These concepts are also elaborated upon in light of Turkish sociology. More specifically, we sought to investigate the links between culture and religiosity drawing on the works of Ziya Gökalp and Fuad Köprülü. The literature review shows that the ‘great’ and ‘little’ traditions in Islam, which are derived from the more expansive division between ‘great’ and ‘little’ traditions in culture, have great significance for understanding the religious structure of Turkish society.

This study sheds light on the notion of elite and popular religion and its acquired meaning and content in the social scientific study of religion. We explain Weber's status stratification and rational choice theories in order to clarify elite and popular religion from a sociological perspective. In this study it is then proposed to add a different definition of 'elite' based on a synthesis approach. It holds that: 'Popular religion' is constituted by specific types of religious praxis and belief exercised by generally socially and economically non-privileged strata. The definition of elite religion takes shape as follows: 'Elite religion' is constituted by specific types of religious praxis and belief exercised by strata that are generally socially and economically privileged. Thus, following these definitions we assumed that certain objective positions within the social field generally 'go hand in hand with' certain forms of religiosity.

This study utilizes the five-dimensional scheme of the nature of religious commitment as developed by Glock and Stark (1962). However, it is important to stress that Glock and Stark's scale does not wholly apply to the distinctive religious elements of the Islamic worldview. The present study focused on the intra-dimensional aspects of the five dimensions and proposed to use Allport's conceptual schemes. Furthermore, this study revealed that Al-Ghazālī's analysis of individual religiosity shows some striking similarities with the analysis of the psychologist Allport, and provides a fertile ground for uncovering a variety of motivations, cognitive styles and contents of Islamic beliefs and practices, and also forms an important example to explain intra-dimensional aspects of Islam.

Chapter 3 will shed light on a somewhat narrower context and will focus on elite and popular religiosity in Islam. We will make a comparison between the two-dimensional scale devised by Allport and Ross (1967) and the multidimensional religiosity scales conceived by Stark and Glock (1968). Following this, our study develops a new elite and popular religiosity scale. The conceptual orientation suggests two poles within each of the five components of Glock and Stark's model. These are: 5 components of elite religiosity, and 5 components of popular religiosity. These two extremes reflect the classification of the sub-dimensions, which include belief (*īmān*), practice (*'amal*), knowledge (*'ilm/ma'rifah*), experience (*maunat/ilhām*) and consequences (*natajah*). Under these sub-dimensions, we identified several motivational and cognitive characteristics and contents, which according to us distinguish elite religiosity from popular religiosity.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology for the study. The design of this present study has been shaped by a 'mixed-methods' approach, in which quantitative and qualitative methods are merged into one research project. Within a four-year period (2010 - 2013), the project began

with qualitative research to explore the various forms and motivations of elite and popular religiosity and the social location of these religiosities, focusing on Dutch-Turkish Muslims living in the Netherlands. One of the essential instruments we used was participant observation. The research design also included an extensive literature review, so that the results of the qualitative research and literature review could serve as a basis for aspects of the quantitative approach.

The second method consisted of a questionnaire survey that formed the main part of the project. We used four different scales; (1) a general religiosity scale, (2) an elite religiosity scale, (3) a popular religiosity scale and (4) measurements for the consequential dimension. The general religiosity scale (1) was designed to obtain information under the five dimensions based on Glock and Stark (1962). This part of the questionnaire focused on high and low religiosity. The results of this part of the survey were used to identify respondents who experienced a low level of religiosity and to remove them from the sample. An elite religiosity scale (2) and a popular religiosity scale (3) were designed to highlight the intra-dimensional aspects of Glock's five dimensions. The consequential dimension (4) was interpreted here as the relation(s) between, or even the possible influence(s) of being an elite or popular religious person for peoples' day-to-day lives.

Chapter 5 provides data analysis and results, and the answers to the sub-questions and, accordingly, to the main research question. The hypotheses as developed in chapters 2 and 3 are tested. This first main research question was: 'What forms and motivations characterize elite and popular religiosity, what are the patterns in the relationship between elite and popular religiosity, and how does this relate to the socio-economic status of Dutch-Turkish Muslims living in the Netherlands?' The first sub-question was: 'How can the relationship between religion and culture be characterized, and how do we understand popular and elite religiosity in our research setting?' The literature review showed that the 'great' and 'little' traditions in Islam, which are derived from the more expansive division between 'great' and 'little' traditions in culture, have great significance for understanding the religious structure of Turkish society.

The second sub-question was: 'What are the characteristics of elite and popular religiosity in the context of Turkish – and possibly also Dutch – society?' These characteristics are: dynamism versus stability, critical versus uncritical, without material expectations versus with material expectations, differentiated versus undifferentiated, experiential inessentiality and privacy versus experiential desirability and shareability, tolerant versus intolerant, and unprejudiced versus prejudiced.

The third sub-question was: ‘What are the characteristics of elite and popular religiosity among Dutch-Turkish Muslims living in the Netherlands?’ Factor analyses and correlation analyses performed on the elite religiosity scale and the popular religiosity scale, showed that participants who experience elite religiosity tend to stress doubt and dynamism within the ideological aspect of religiosity. Within the ritualistic aspect, they tend to emphasize the intrinsic value of rituals (i.e., focus on quality). Within the intellectual aspect, they underline the importance of doubt regarding the validity of their current religious knowledge, and the dynamism of religious learning. Within the experiential aspect of religiosity, they consider miraculous religious experiences (special gifts from God in exchange for their religious effort) to be relatively unimportant: for them it is essential to keep these private. Participants who experience popular religiosity tend to stress the sureness and stability of their current beliefs within the ideological aspect of religiosity. Within the ritualistic aspect, they emphasize the extrinsic value of rituals (i.e., focus on quantity) and they express material expectations. Within the intellectual aspect, they tend to be sure of their current religious knowledge and place intellectual stability at the centre. Within the experiential aspect of religiosity, they consider miraculous religious experiences to be an appropriate and necessary part of religious commitment, and they are eager to report such experiences to others.

The fourth sub-question was: ‘What are the patterns in the relationship between elite and popular religiosity?’ We indeed found a negative correlation between elite religiosity and popular religiosity ($r = -.72$).

The fifth sub-question was: ‘How are elite and popular religiosity recognizable in the Dutch-Turkish research population, and how is this phenomenon socially located?’ Of the 893 (76.7%) respondents with a strong religious affiliation, 203 (22.7%) turned out to consistently experience elite religiosity, while 545 (61%) consistently experienced popular religiosity. First-generation respondents do experience popular religiosity more intensely than second-generation respondents. Respondents with a higher level of education experienced a higher level of elite religiosity than respondents with a lower educational level. Similarly, respondents with a lower level of education experienced a higher level of popular religiosity than respondents with a higher educational level.

In light of our literature review, we expected a relationship between socio-psychological attitudes and religiosity, and for this reason we formulated a second main research question: ‘What are the socio-psychological differences in behaviour and attitudes among Dutch-Turkish Muslims who experience elite and popular religiosity respectively?’ We found that respondents

who experienced elite religiosity were more open and friendly towards other religions. Moreover, men who experienced elite religiosity had stronger views on the equality and rights of women compared to men who experienced popular religiosity. It also turned out that participants who experienced elite religiosity expressed less (racial/ethnic) prejudice, and showed less conservative in-group attitudes than participants who experienced popular religiosity.

Based on the findings of this study, out of the total group of participants who experienced high religiosity, six out of ten participants experienced popular religiosity, while only two out of ten experienced elite religiosity. The literature and our sample suggest a number of demographic and socio-economic factors to explain why Dutch-Turkish Muslims generally experience popular religiosity. Some of these factors are gender and age; educational status; household income; and social and cultural capital; the experience of immigration; structural and contextual factors such as the current economic and political crisis; government policies; and experiences with discrimination. In the discussion section, we tried to pay more attention to the role of these factors listed above, in order to deepen our understanding of the social, cultural and economic grounds of elite and popular religiosity.

The findings of this study generally support the view that Glock's five dimensions can be regarded as heuristic and exploratory devices encompassing a variety of phenomena, which should be operationalized, conceptualized and measured before other types of analysis are attempted. This study also recognizes the occurrence of respondents who simultaneously experience elite and popular religiosity, and suggests that the dialogical self theory (DST) provides an interesting theoretical framework for an explanation and further research of this phenomenon. We mainly analyzed those individuals who disagreed with, or were in conflict with the other religious voice. But this does not mean that the other religious voice is completely absent and rejected in such individuals. On the contrary, certain circumstances led respondents to express themselves with certain religious voices and these expressions may change as circumstances change. If we look, for example, at the participants who simultaneously expressed elite and popular religiosity, we can say that these different religious voices can, to a certain extent, be reconciled, even if they show very different and contradictory forms and motivations.

In line with many cultural theorists, we would like to draw attention to the ontological insecurity brought about by the complexities, uncertainty, and diversity of the postmodern condition. We see religious fundamentalism as an emotional and defensive coping mechanism

to deal with the insecurity caused by the plurality and fragmentation of the postmodern world. According to the findings of our study, popular religiosity could remain an important and dominant source of defensive localization within Turkish religiosity, at least in the short term, and this both in Turkey and in the Netherlands, due to the recent socio-political developments outlined in the discussion section of this study.

One of the aims of this study was to investigate whether there are socio-psychological behaviours related to elite and popular religiosity. Recent studies have confirmed that religion has an aspect that encourages prejudice, and an aspect that unmakes prejudice. The findings of the present study support these findings. These findings suggest that the real question is not whether one is a believer or not, but rather whether the kind of things a person believes in make him or her ethnocentric.

One of the aims of this study was to measure the spiritual aspect of religion by developing an elite religiosity scale. As we have discussed in this dissertation, Islam has been largely reduced to popular religiosity – to jurisprudence, rituals, and, above all, prohibitions characterized by exoteric, unreflective, and uncritical forms and motivations. European Muslim families experience Islam under a comprehensive set of rules, prohibitions, and rulings that explain Islam in the context of a specific relation of protection against an environment that is perceived as too permissive and even hostile. Our findings largely confirm this attitude. Within our group of participants who experienced high religiosity, only 24% experienced elite religiosity while 61% experienced popular religiosity. If we take the other participants into account – those who experienced low religiosity – this ratio drops to 19%. In other words, only two out of ten participants experienced elite religiosity to some extent. In the short term, we do not foresee any growth in the spiritual side of religion because of the insecurity that will likely be felt in the near future.