

Article

Religious Pluralism and Religion-State Relations in Turkey

H. Şule Albayrak 

Department of Sociology of Religion, Faculty of Theology, Marmara University, Mahir İz Cad. No. 2, Üsküdar, Istanbul 34662, Turkey; sule.albayrak@marmara.edu.tr or albayraksule@gmail.com

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Abstract: In this article, I examine religion-state relations and religious pluralism in Turkey in terms of recent changes in the religious landscape. I propose that there is a growing trend in the religious sphere that has resulted in a proliferation of religions, sects and spiritual approaches in Turkey. I argue that although the religious market model might not be applicable to the Turkish religious sphere during the republican era until the 2000s due to the restrictions applied by the state's authoritarian secularist policies, it is compatible with today's changing society. Different religious groups as well as spiritual movements have used the democratization process of the 2000s in Turkey as an opportunity to proselytize various faiths and understandings of Islam, with both traditional and modernist forms. In this period, new religious movements have also appeared. Thus, the Turkish religious landscape has recently become much more complicated than it was two decades earlier. I plan for this descriptive work firstly to provide an insight into the history of religious pluralism and state policies in Turkey. Secondly, I will discuss the religious policies of the republican period and, thirdly, I will evaluate recent developments such as the increasing number of approaches in the religious sphere within the scope of the religious market model.

Keywords: Turkey; religious pluralism; secularism; Islam; religious market; laicism

1. Introduction

In most of the examples of secularist Muslim countries, secularism has been imposed on the public from above with authoritarian policies (Küçükcan 2005, p. 127), which makes an analysis of the political factors contributing to the situation necessary. Turkey, which constitutes the topic of this article, offers an important experience of non-Western secularism in which policies of authoritarian secularization were carried out for many years and religious symbols and elements were banned from the public sphere. This approach was supported by discourse such as “modernization”, “rising above the level of modern civilization” and “joining Western civilization”—the fundamental claims of Turkish secularist elites. Such an approach, in which the state is protected against the influence of religion and in which religious affairs are strictly controlled, differs from Western secularisms, and in particular, from the American type of secularism.

Sakalhoğlu (1996, p. 248) argues that despite its changing strategy toward Islam, one of the most enduring features of the Turkish state has been the way it has sought control over Islam. This analysis is accurate and it helps to understand the Turkish state's role in determining religious culture before 2000s. Nevertheless, the democratic transformations that have occurred in Turkey over the last fifteen years have brought about significant changes in the religious sphere. Eliminating obstacles that prevented religion and religious symbols from being displayed in public spaces, reinforcing the freedom of speech, providing religious freedoms such as education and worship for the Muslim majority, and reinstating the seized rights of religious minorities, are among the most outstanding developments within the subject in this period. The growth in the middle-classes, urbanization, the greater influence of women

in the public space, and a greater variety in communication, with growth from conventional media to social media, are important factors that affected the transformation of religious-social affairs in Turkey. Then there is the huge impact of globalization on all of these processes (from consumption to culture, from politics to social and religious movements).

The developments regarding Turkey's religion-society relations in the last decades need to be analyzed in multiple aspects. Firstly, a process similar to the reappearance of religions in the public sphere after 1980, the significance of which was pointed out by Casanova (1994), was also experienced in Turkey. In the period following the liberalization policies of the 1980s, the religious masses increasingly demanded democracy and the freedom to express their religious identity in the public sphere despite the obstacles that had been placed in front of them. Turkey, as Rosati (2015, p. 3) states, is a superb case study for analyzing the making of a post-secular and multicultural society, and it is a case study particularly relevant for Europe too.

Habermas' (2006) concept of the post-secular society, in which religious traditions and groups continue their validity even in secularized societies, is reflected in discussions about religion-state and religion-society in Turkey. These ongoing discussions concerning the increased public demands for religion weakened the discursive power of the modernist constructions of the Turkish elite, who perceive the only modernity as Western modernity, which they claim to be completely secular. Thus, the country entered a period in which alternative perspectives gained power; in parallel with a growth of the religious middle-classes in Turkey and an increasing interaction between the Muslim masses and modern lifestyles, studies that adopted different narratives of modernity and presented Turkey's unique experience in religion-modernity discussions gained strength (Göle 2001).

Meanwhile, a trend similar to the increasing inclination aimed at the cooperation model in religion-state relations observed in Western countries in recent decades was also witnessed in Turkey (Albayrak 2015). The religious sphere, which had been under state control for many years, now became relatively liberalized and thus, both the traditional religious forms that were kept silent were revived and the basis was provided for new religious forms to emerge. As revealed in the *religious market* approach, this also led to a kind of a competitive religious sphere. In this way, the Presidency for Religious Affairs, which had been under state control, ceased to be the sole influential institution in the field of religion. This created a visible dynamism in the Turkish religious sphere with the addition of new religious interpretations, forms and movements.

From a controlled religious sphere toward a competitive religious area, this article focuses on the state policies and the issue of religious pluralism as they relate to recent developments in the religious landscape in Turkey. The relation between state policies and religious pluralism is crucial, because religious pluralism does not only mean having different views but it also means that the state does not impose on all citizens one single view or way of doing things (Bardon et al. 2015, p. 2). Thus, pluralism is the result of conditions of freedom, and it limits the authority of the state.

In this descriptive work, I will analyze religious pluralism in Turkey and recent developments in religious landscape with the help of the religious market model. For this aim, I will evaluate state policies as a factor that determines religious pluralism. I will examine the questions of "what are the roots and the dynamics of religious pluralism in Turkey?"; "how did/do state policies affect religious pluralism in Turkey?" and "how can we explain the recent diversification of the religious landscape in Turkey?"

I argue that although the religious market model might not be suitable to the Turkish religious sphere during the republican era until the 2000s due to the state's restrictions and control over Islam, it is applicable to today's changing society. To provide evidence for this claim, I will first attempt to provide insight into the history of the religious pluralism and state-religion relations in Turkey; in order to do this, the pluralistic structure of the Ottoman Empire will be given as a reference and I will touch upon the method used by the Ottoman State to manage religious diversity. Secondly, I will discuss the religious policies of the Republican period and the secularist approach of the Kemalist regime, which prevented religious pluralism. Thirdly, I will address the leading religions, religious movements

and groups in the religious sphere, and in the following section I will shed light on the reflections of the demilitarization of the socio-political field and other socio-economic and political factors in the religious arena in the 2000s. I will lastly evaluate the increasing approaches and formations in the religious sphere within the scope of the religious market model.

2. Religious Pluralism in the Ottoman Period

Any study on the origin of religious pluralism in Turkey would not be complete without mentioning the *Millet*¹ system that was adopted by the Ottoman State. The historian Pappé believes that the reason for the Ottomans being able to rule for such a long period was due to their policies that gave no importance to ethnic roots and their tolerance of religious differences (Pappé 2014, p. 17). This system, which was designed in accordance with the principles of Islamic law² and took its classic form in the Ottoman period, is, according to Barkey, not only the subject of history, but also has the potential to provide insight into the management of differences and to current problems concerning interfaith peace and coexistence (Barkey 2013).

There was a significant non-Muslim population living in the Ottoman Empire. There were 3151 Greek families, 1647 Jews, 3095 Armenians and 8951 Muslim families living in the empire's center, Istanbul, in 1477 (Barkey 2013). In the 19th century, one third of the population was non-Muslim (Ortaylı 2005). The *Millet* system, which was developed both in keeping with the principle of Islamic tolerance and due to pragmatic reasons, such as governing the non-Muslims, gave the religious groups that were recognized by the state the right to maintain their religious and judicial structures and to continue their own religious education (Cleveland and Bunton 2008, p. 49). The administration of these communities was undertaken by their own spiritual leaders, known as *kocabaşı* (Vergin 2000); these individuals were responsible for collecting taxes and were given civil and religious authority in the fields of education, jurisprudence and religion. In this way, the Ottoman method was successful in ruling with minimum resistance from different religious groups that were autonomous in many areas (Cleveland and Bunton 2008, p. 49). Also, the legal and administrative autonomy granted to non-Muslim religious groups in the Empire's geography emerged and was steadily applied through the domestic legal order, not through interstate agreements (Aydın 2014).

The *Millet* system was not based on an ethno-linguistic belonging, but rather on a religious-doctrine belonging (Ortaylı 2005); according to this, in addition to the Orthodox, Armenians and Jews, in time, the Catholic and Protestants were also classified as individual communities (Aydın 2014, p. 64). Muslims were also classified as an independent religious community (*Millet*), and the Shaykh al-Islam was considered the religious leader and guide of all Muslims (Vergin 2000). In the Ottoman Empire, a state totally integrated with the Islamic faith, Muslims came first in the social hierarchy; the protection and the fulfillment of needs of other religious groups in return for recognizing state authority and paying taxes was regarded as part of the Muslims' religious law.

While the structure introduced by the *Millet* system continued until the 19th century, it was subjected to change during the Ottoman modernization process; with the *Tanzimat* Edict in 1839, the *Millet* system was replaced by a secular ideology, in the form of Ottomanism (Hanioglu 2008, p. 76). By abolishing the principle of organizing the social structure that was based on religious affiliation introduced by the *Millet* system, every individual living in the Ottoman Empire, regardless of religion, began to be classified as an Ottoman citizen with the citizenship law of 1869. One of the main outcomes of Ottomanism was that members of all religions were equal under law.

¹ The term *Millet* is used in modern Turkish to mean nation. However, the meaning implied by the *Millet* system here is a social order enforced by taking religious identity as fundamental, in a period when the concept of nation-state had not yet developed. In that time, the term designated the religious communities in the Ottoman territory.

² Freedom for minorities in the forms defined in Al-Baqarah 2:256 and Yunus 10:99 of the Qur'an and the rights granted to the non-Muslims defined in the practices of the Prophet Muhammad (Constitution of Medina) was not only conceived as freedom of faith and worship; at the same time the freedom granted to other religions included being subjected to their own laws in terms of marriage, divorce, inheritance, legacy and other judicial issues (Aydın 2014, p. 60).

In addition to non-Muslims, the orthodox and heterodox interpretations of Islam and many Islamic interpretations of intermediate forms were also evaluated as a part of the cultural texture of the society in the Ottoman period (Barkey 2005). Particularly in the 15th century, travelers who visited the Turkish territories at different times related the tolerance they saw being displayed, whether to Christianity or to religious movements other than Sunni Islam. However, in the 16th century there were restrictions on this tolerance due to a crisis in the socio-political field³. The central administration, which to date had not adopted any oppressive policies against heterodox beliefs, now started to implement a stricter governing policy (Ocak 2002, p. 42).

The Sunni understanding of Islam that had been inherited from earlier Turkish states experienced its most influential period during the Ottoman Empire; Sunni Islam was reinterpreted by the scholars and madrasahs (religious schools giving higher education) established in the Ottoman state. Nevertheless, there were variations in the way Islam was perceived and practiced in this period. These variations have been addressed by Ocak in four categories: “popular Islam”, “textual Islam”, “tekke Islam” (in reference to the Islam taught at sufi lodges), and “state Islam.” (Ocak 2002). Accordingly, *popular Islam*, in the popular form practiced by the people, pointed to a saint cult-based religious understanding that was shaped around both orthodox and heterodox interpretations in which the influences of Sufism were seen. *Textual (madrasah) Islam*, which defended Sunni Islam and was also in close contact with the people, took as its basis the orthodox interpretation of the religion and led to the production of *state Islam*. While *tekke Islam* developed a mystic interpretation of Islam, it did so on the one hand with heterodox *tariqats* (religious orders), and on the other with Sunni *tariqats*. Lastly, *state Islam* indicates an Islamic perception that was developed in the context of state administrative policies and institutions.

The religious orders (*tariqats*) generally constituted institutions that functioned as the secondary structure between the state and individual in the Ottoman period, where there was no civil society according to Western terms (Mardin 2001, p. 76). The Naqshbandi, Mawlawi and Bektashi orders were the most prominent religious orders in the Ottoman period.⁴ While the Bektashi order was more popular among the janissaries (Karamustafa 1994, p. 84), the Mawlawi order became widespread among the bureaucrats. The Naqshbandi order was more popular among scholars (Gencer 2008, p. 389). On the other hand, Alevism, which is a heterodox interpretation of Islam that developed through the centuries as Muslims internalized pre-existing traditions with which they came into contact as they gradually migrated from Central Asia to Anatolia (Ocak 2002), represented the periphery in opposition to the Sunni center in the Ottoman period (Vergin 2000, p. 80).

3. The Impact of Authoritarian Secularism on the Religious Sphere in the Republic of Turkey

With the rise of the West, restoration attempts in the Ottoman State, a state closely involved with Islam, gathered momentum in the 19th century; a variety of perspectives were presented by the Ottoman intelligentsia as they debated the reasons for their own decline. Although Westerners suggested that Islam was the reason for the decline, the Islamists emphasized that Islam was not the problem; rather they argued that Islam could be compatible with modernity. However, despite the fact that they fought for independence together, the Republican elite left the Islamists out of the equation

³ A. Yaşar Ocak, who is renowned in Turkey for his work on the history and culture of Islam, states that the strict attitude developed by the Ottoman Empire as of the 16th century against heterodox interpretations of Islam was more a political than theological conflict. According to him, the change of perception in the Ottoman Empire towards religious plurality resulted from a broad aim to defend the state and its territories from the propaganda of the Safavid state, which had adopted the Shi'ite understanding (Ocak 2002).

⁴ Ahmet T. Karamustafa portrays the dervish groups in the Ottoman empire in the 16th century: “Apart from the ubiquitous Qalandars and Haydaris, more specifically Ottoman bands such as the Abdals of Rum, Bektasis, Jamis, and Shams-i Tabrizis roamed the empire” (Karamustafa 1994, p. 65). Bektashi dervish group was transformed into a full-fledged Sufi order while the Qalandars, Haydaris, Abdals of Rum, Jamis, and Shams-i Tabrizis lost vigor and ceased to exist as independent social collectivities. The reason for the success of the Bektashi movement was its firm connection with the Ottoman military system. (Karamustafa 1994, p. 84).

in the end, pursuing a Westernist perspective; this development had significant repercussions that influenced religious life.

The state kept tight control on religion while striving to establish a secular society with consecutive reforms; at the same time there were attempts to create a homogeneous nation-state by keeping both ethnic and religious identities under pressure (Yavuz 2009, p. 25). Laicism was embraced as a positivist state ideology rather than the separation of religion and state relations, establishing strict control over religion and clearing the public sphere from all kinds of religious influences and expressions. One of the most important reforms introduced for this purpose was the abolishment of the religious institutions whose impact had weakened since the *Tanzimat*. On the same day of 3 March 1924, the caliphate was abolished and the Ministry of Religious Law and Endowments (*Şer'iyye ve Evkaf Vekaleti*) was replaced by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Reisliği*) and the law on the Unification of Education (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat*) that centralized all educational institutions, was introduced (Kara 2008, p. 104). Although this last legislation was not introduced to close the madrasahs which provided religious education, they were transferred to the Ministry of Education, and just a few days after the law was enacted, the decision to close the madrasahs was taken (Öcal 2011, p. 85). Additionally, the law in question stipulated the establishment of the Imam Hatip (Islamic divinity) Schools and a faculty of theology at the university level which would meet the demands of the society for religious services. However, by 1930, the schools that had been established had been shuttered, and the only theology faculty was also closed down in 1933; there was no education institute to provide religious education for more than a decade in the country. The re-institutionalization of religious education was delayed until after 1945, a time when the effects of the Cold War were prevalent and Communism was considered to be a threat.

In the history of Turkish politics, the era from the formation of the Republic in 1923 until the transition to multi-party democracy was an authoritarian period (Kahraman 2010). In this era, in which the religious-ethnic pluralism of the Ottomans was rejected, as part of the simplification of the language, the Arabic alphabet, which had been used for centuries, was changed and the Latin alphabet was adopted in 1928. Furthermore, attempts to create a new idea of nation which would be severed from the Ottoman era and from Islam led the Republican administration to rewrite the history of Turkey; thus, avoiding the Ottoman history of the Turkish people, a historical understanding that gave preference to pre-Islamic Anatolian civilizations, such as the Hittites, began to be taught in schools (White 2008, p. 359).

The political elites of the new Republic, who first abolished the sultanate and then the caliphate, resorted to a complete structural change; the socio-political reforms adopted in the Republic were based on a Westernist-nationalist approach instead of the Islamic references of the past. Thus, in the same way that pluralism had been abolished in the field of education, the post-*Tanzimat* efforts of the 19th century to reconcile secular and Islamic laws were also abandoned, (Şentürk 2008) and the Swiss Civil Code and Italian Penal Code were adopted in 1926.

In this period *tekkas* (sufi lodges) were closed down, reciting the *adhan* (Islamic call to prayer) in Turkish became obligatory, and religion was excluded from schools and public life in general; men were compelled to wear hats, religious officials were banned from wearing religious clothing in public areas, and civil servants and students were banned from wearing anything that symbolized religion. Although wearing a headscarf, a common practice, was not totally forbidden, a drastic deterrent policy was enforced by preventing women who covered their hair from appearing in banks, hospitals, schools or anywhere in the public sphere (White 2008, p. 360). That is, European clothing had become defined as the norm for urban women; the headscarf became a symbol of the lower classes and women from rural areas.

In the same period, the *Takrir-i Sükun* law (Law on Public Order), enacted in response to the Kurdish uprising, gave the government extensive authority in order to protect the state (Zürcher 1992, p. 250). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the president who was able to obtain control in social and political fields due to this law, and the Republican People's Party (CHP), which represented

the single party regime, dominated the media and banned other political parties on the grounds that they exploited religion.

Although the first constitution of the Turkish Republic, issued in 1924, stated that the state religion was Islam, this clause was later removed in 1928. Laicism, which was adopted in 1937 as the constitutional principle worked not to separate religion from state affairs but to make religion dependent on the state. Over time, it became a privileged political instrument of the state (Kadioğlu 2010). While an Islamic understanding that had no public demands, that was under the strict supervision of the state, and was made to conform to Western values was found appropriate by the state, bringing religious practices and symbols to the public sphere were prohibited as they were considered against laicism. The outcome was that religion that went beyond the inner conscience was forbidden. Indeed, despite radical secularization in the fields of law, politics and culture, the Republican regime never presented an unbiased standing between the different Islamic and non-Islamic beliefs. Instead, it supported a national conception of religion that would be controllable and considered adaptable to the modern nation-state (Azak 2010, p. 12). The Directorate of Religious Affairs was the new conveyer of this type of Islam in the Republic, but instead of ensuring the coordination of religious affairs, it secured the control of the religion culture that it did not trust (Kara 2008, p. 97). The Directorate, which did not even participate in determining or preparing religious text books, had no authority over religious publications and no influence on the state's implementations in the field of religion; it became a body that conformed with state demands to maintain control on religion rather than one that helped meet the religious demands of Muslims.

When the multi-party system materialized after 1946, the state's strict policies regarding religious issues began to relax somewhat, due both to domestic and international factors; in 1949, the first new faculty of theology was opened and some tombs of saints were reopened for public visits. The *adhan*, which had been recited in Turkish since 1932, returned to its original form in 1950, and restrictions preventing pilgrimage were lifted. As for religious education, in 1951 Imam Hatip Schools were opened at a secondary level in order to provide religious education; in 1956–1957 lessons on religion were included in the curriculum of junior high schools (Mardin 2012, p. 72). Democrat Party (DP) which came to power in 1950 by election, was accused of Islamizing the country due to its easing of policies in the religious sphere. However, urbanization, which was a major development in Turkey's social history after the 1950s, was not taken into consideration in this analysis by the secularist elite. This new situation on the increased visibility of religion was actually not a result of political Islam or an Islamic revival, it was more the self-expression of the masses who did not approve of the Kemalist state's ideology (White 2008, p. 362). On the other hand, the DP's position toward Islam did not involve any loss of state control over religion. The DP pursued court cases against Islamic publications and some Islamic figures and took a tough stand against anti-Atatürk activities of Ticani tariqat (Sakallıoğlu 1996, p. 237). It passed an "Atatürk Bill" to fight against anti-Kemalists.

Turkish democracy was under military tutelage, making it open to intervention on many occasions based on reasons such as "Islamization" and "reactionism". It was interrupted with a series of military coups, with the first one occurring in 1960. During the next decade, the Justice Party dominated political life and adopted a double discourse regarding Islam. "The first discourse incorporated strict secularism on the official level and excluded Islam from the public sphere by declaring it irrelevant for political and economic development. The second however, meant taking a more permissive stand concerning issues of personal piety and morality" (Sakallıoğlu 1996, p. 240).

The 1970s were dominated by political turmoil; this era was followed by the 1980 military coup. In the wake of this coup, Turkey entered a new era in both economic and socio-political terms with the liberalization policies of Turgut Özal, prime minister of that period. Özal's project for Turkey consisted of three aspects of liberty: "freedom of speech", "freedom of enterprise", and "freedom of religion and belief" were given great importance (Heper 2013, p. 143). Özal, who himself was a religious person, opposed conventional authoritarian laicism which restricted belief and prevented the expression of faith in public areas. As an alternative, a more passive understanding of laicism

was adopted. According to the understanding of conventional laicism in Turkey, the head of state could not be seen in a mosque or attend *iftar* meals during Ramadan or display any signs that he fulfilled religious duties; however, with Özal the open expression of religious belief found a more suitable foundation. This approach did not consider religious values and development of society contradictory; on the contrary, while the development of Islamic values was encouraged on the one hand, the development of a market economy was also encouraged (Heper 2013, p. 147).

The 28 February coup in 1997, known as the “post-modern coup”, was carried out with the support of the media, a certain group of academics and secularist politicians (Yavuz 2009). It was put forth as a reaction to the rise of Islamic middle classes who had come into some measure of power. The generals who carried out this coup accused the religiously sensitive government of the time of supporting reactionary and Islamic movements that were perceived a threat to the secularist character of the regime. In the period following the coup, religious education was banned for those younger than 12 years. The headscarf was perceived as a threat to laicism in the public sphere and hence banned in many places from educational institutes to hospitals and without distinction between public or private. In such a restricted environment, where the majority of the time the limits of the ban were undefined, there was no distinction between employees or the public, the students or the parents of students, the people working or the patients visiting hospitals, or even on some occasions customers in restaurants; all could be asked to remove their headscarves or leave.⁵ In addition, a large number of religious citizens were expelled from state and private institutions due to their religious preferences, primarily from the Turkish military, on the grounds that they could lack the discipline required for good service.

4. Religious Life in the Republic of Turkey

After the establishment of the Directorate of Religious Affairs in 1925 all the religious groups that represented the Sufi approach were banned, and the *tekkes* and *zaviyes* (Sufi lodges) were closed. However, these structures had deeply penetrated Ottoman society, and as a result it was impossible to eliminate them overnight. These structures continued to exist one way or another and remained out of sight until the state’s approach of authoritarian laicism became more relaxed in the 1960s (Yükleyen 2008, p. 382). After the transition to the multi-party system, these religious groups resumed activity in social and religious life and aroused interest among politicians, given their importance during election times due to the vote potential they held (White 2008, p. 377).

In this period, the Naqshbandi, Suleymancı and Nurcu movements were prominent among the Islamic groups; all of these had existed for centuries and formed the Islamic Sunni-mystic religious orders.⁶ The Naqshbandi *tariqat*, whose roots date back to the 14th century, spread to Anatolia in the 19th century and managed to have an impact throughout Turkey despite the preventions taken against it in the 20th century (Mardin 2012, p. 84). Even though in 1925 it was declared illegal like the other religious orders, it continued to survive in mosques and followers’ homes. Although members

⁵ There are many examples regarding this topic in the media. For example, when Medine Bircan, who was receiving cancer treatment, visited Çapa Tıp Faculty Hospital in Istanbul in 2002, she was refused entrance to the hospital because the photograph on her identity card showed her wearing a headscarf (Benli 2009). When the Turkish citizen Bircan died shortly after this, no investigation was held regarding this maltreatment. On the other hand, the following incident is quite interesting in terms of showing the scope of the ban: Emine Erdoğan, wife of the President of the Republic of Turkey, was refused entry to a military hospital where she was visiting a famous theatre performer in 2007 (at that time, Erdoğan was the prime minister of Turkey) because she was wearing a headscarf: <http://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/477827-emin-erdogan-aglatan-gata-olayi> (21 June 2016). For the extent of the headscarf ban see Benli (2009), “The Statistical Examination of the Condition of Women in Turkey and the Impact of the Headscarf Ban on Turkey’s Gender Equality Ranking”: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/39070?download=true> (21 June 2016).

⁶ Apart from these orders, the Mawlawi, Bektashi and Kadiri religious orders also exist in present day Turkey. When all the *tariqats* were declared illegal in 1925, Mawlawism was also banned; however, in the 1950s the government of that period recognized how important the whirling dervishes were for tourism, so permission was granted for the *sema* ritual to be performed in Konya every year on 17 December to mark the death anniversary of the order’s founder Mevlana Jalal ad-din Rumi. Mawlawi rituals still continue to intrigue both local and foreign tourists (Yükleyen 2008, p. 383).

of the religious order were subjected to arrest or execution, they tended to become integrated within state institutions rather than reject the structure introduced by the Republic (Algar 2007, p. 419). The Naqshbandi order began to gain power in society and in politics after the 1960s; it influenced some of the prominent names in Turkish politics, one of which was Turgut Özal (Yükleyen 2008, p. 382).

The Süleymancı movement, under the leadership of Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan (1888–1956), constitutes one of the largest religious communities in present day Turkey; this movement gives greater importance to Qur'an courses rather than *dhikr* or other rituals of remembrance that are popular with other *tariqats*. Tunahan gained the public's interest for the sermons at Istanbul mosques and lessons he gave in the 1940s, and hence, the formation of a religious movement with emphasis on Qur'an education was ensured (Sitembölükbaşı 2012, p. 377). Members of the movement who believed it was necessary not only to meet the religious demands of the people in Turkey, but also those Turkish people working abroad, established an Islamic cultural center for the first time in the city of Cologne in Germany in 1973. The Süleymancı movement, which is still active setting up Qur'an courses and student hostels, was occasionally viewed with suspicion by the state. It is estimated that the movement now has over 4 million followers (Yükleyen 2008, p. 384).

The teachings of Said Nursi, who supported religion against the movements of positivism and materialism in the 19th century and who was educated in the Naqshbandi madrasahs, have been a guide for the Nur movement, one of the largest and most populated religious orders in modern Turkey (Karpat 2005, p. 589). Members have been active in many fields such as publishing, media, education and politics. This movement, which began as a revival movement and turned into a social movement, was segregated into multiple subgroups after the death of Said Nursi in 1960. The most recognized and controversial among these was the group led by Fethullah Gülen. Even though it is considered to be part of the Nur Movement, Gülen has seen Said Nursi as the “mind-maker of the century,” but has never approved Nur Movement expression (Açıkgenç 2008, p. 572). The group, which opened more than 500 schools in various countries throughout the world, focused on education (Yükleyen 2008, p. 385). It was also active in the fields of business and media. In the 1990s Gülen also became renowned for his activities in interfaith dialogues. The Gülen Movement managed to be the religious group least affected from the military coups due to the leadership-level support they provided to the pro-coup circles in Turkey. They were one of the greatest beneficiaries of the democratic developments in the 2000s, in particular when public spaces were opened to religious groups. Nevertheless, after it emerged that the group had become established in state institutes, particularly the education, police, military and judiciary, and had attempted to use this power to intervene in Turkish politics, the movement has become recognized more for its attempts to control the state through undemocratic means rather than religious activities. Gülen supported military coups in Turkey in 1980⁷ and in 1997⁸. Furthermore, the failed attempt of the coup d'état on 15 July 2016 was organized and implemented by Gülen's supporters in the military.⁹

Alevi, the largest non-Sunni religious group in Turkey, are followers of the Shiite-like interpretation of Islam and have syncretic beliefs influenced by Bektashi Sufism and Shamanism (Yükleyen 2008, p. 386). They accept the prophet's son-in-law, Ali, as the real first caliph and stand out with the ritual called *semah*, which they perform to musical accompaniment at their gathering places called *cemevi*. The *semah* was made illegal in 1925 as were the practices of other religious groups. However, the Alevi gave substantial support to the Kemalist reforms that were directed at severing

⁷ For Gülen's support of the 12 September 1980 military coup see <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2015/05/10/fetullah-gulenin-12-eylulculere-destek-yazisi> (23 June 2016).

⁸ For Gülen's support of the 28 February 1997 coup see <http://www.cnnturk.com/2012/guncel/04/13/gulen.28.subat.icin.ne.demisti/657109.0/> (23 June 2016).

⁹ For the Gülen movement evolving from a religious group into a political power and its results see Duran (2013) (29 December 2013) “The Gülen Movement and the Loss of Sunni Codes” Star Açık Görüş: <http://setav.org/en/the-gulen-movement-and-the-loss-of-sunni-codes/opinion/14303> (23 June 2016); Enes Bayraklı and Ufuk Ulutaş (Ed.), *Fetö'nün Anatomisi*, Ankara: SETA, 2017.

Islamic relations in public areas and helped to settle the secular identity (Yavuz 2005, p. 97). Alevis joined leftist movements in the 1960s–1970s, and in the 1980s they became allies of the secularist state against the perceived threat of Sunni Islam. Alevis who became politicized with the effect of urbanization joined many political and social formations and went through a period in which their new culture-centered identities clashed with the traditional religious authority (White 2008, p. 376). Today, while Alevism is considered to be the Turkish interpretation of Shiitism, some also claim that Alevism is a Sufi interpretation of Islam. Also, in addition to those who claim that the Alevi identity is a non-Islamic faith, deep differences of opinions continue among the Alevis themselves in this regard.¹⁰

The multi-religious structure of the Ottomans has been subjected to significant change in the years following the establishment of the Republic, and there has been a considerable decrease in the non-Muslim population. Under the Lausanne Treaty, which led to the Republic of Turkey being recognized as an independent state, the new definition of minorities meant that the rights of Armenians, Jews and Greeks in the new Republic were protected. However, the term minority as a religious-based definition was in contradiction to the Kemalist formulation of laicism and was actually a continuation of the Ottoman *millet* system (Azak 2010, p. 13). Indeed, the forced migration policies adopted in the first Republican period made clear that the definition of Turkishness in practice was based on religion rather than ethnicity.¹¹

At the present time, the most prevalent view of the discriminatory policies implemented by the Turkish Republic towards minorities in the early years of the Republic is that the state was attempting to establish a homogenous nation-state. In addition to the 1934 *Thrace incidents* that ended with the migration of Jews from Thrace to Istanbul, the 1943 *law on wealth tax*, which again affected Jews the most, led minorities to feel insecure (Kirişçi 2008, p. 182). The higher rate demanded from non-Muslims for the wealth tax that was issued to tax the high profitability that formed in the war period and the penalties applied on those who were unable to pay meant the destruction of the non-Muslim mercantile class. These kinds of discriminatory policies led to many Jews migrating to Israel in 1948–1949. The estimated Jewish population in Turkey in 2000s was around 25,000 (Kirişçi 2008, p. 183). A significant number of Armenians in Turkey, whose deportation is still a matter of debate, migrated and the Armenian population in Turkey in 2000s is estimated to be between 55,000–60,000.

Furthermore, in the revolts that occurred on the 6th and 7th of September 1955, the workplaces and homes of many Greeks and other non-Muslim citizens were destroyed upon news that the Atatürk museum in Thessaloniki was bombed. Following these incidents, which the government failed to bring under control, a significant number of Greek-origin citizens left Istanbul and the Greek population that was at about 100,000 in 1960 dropped to 7000 in 1978 (Kirişçi 2008, p. 183). Emigration continued, due to reasons such as violations of the settlement rights of Greek citizens, problematic Turk-Greek relations in the following years and the appeal offered by European Union citizenship. The current Greek Orthodox population in Turkey is about 4000–5000.¹²

¹⁰ Discussion on the Alevi identity have surpassed the country's borders and have become a subject that determines Western countries' approach toward Turkey during the European Union process. However, Alevis have not always been pleased with this interest taken by EU countries. For example, Alevis being referred to as a 'non-Sunni Muslim minority' in the European Union progress report dated 6 October 2004 gave rise to discussions on whether Alevis are also minorities like the Armenians, Orthodox and Jews in Turkey. In response to the reactions received, in the 2005 progress report the 'minority' term was changed to 'non-Sunni Muslim community' (Uyanık 2013). Additionally, Germany's interest in the Alevis has also disturbed Turkey's Alevis. As is known, Germany recognizes and supports Alevism as separate from Sunni Islam. This approach by Germany is also a topic that ignited debates on whether Alevism in Turkey constitutes a different religion. Some Alevi intellectuals state that there are financial interests behind these arguments. For example, Hasan Meşeli, Chairman of the Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli Cultural Center Foundation, claimed that the German government promised to pay 5 billion euros to certain Alevi associations and foundations if the Alevis stated that they were a minority group (Uyanık 2013, p. 130).

¹¹ According to the provisions of exchange settled within the agreement that came up on the agenda and was signed in the Lausanne meetings in 1923, a population exchange was made between Turkey and Greece, with the exclusion of the Greeks in Istanbul and Muslims in Western Thrace. The religion factor was taken as the basis of the agreement: Turkish citizens of the Greek Orthodox religion and Greek citizens who were Muslims were included in the exchange clause (Firat 2009, p. 333).

¹² [Minority Rights Group International \(2007\)](#), Bir Eşitlik Arayışı: Türkiye'de Azınlıklar.

5. Democratic Developments and Religious Pluralism in Turkey

AK (Justice and Development) Party, which came to power in the 2002 general elections and which continues to lead the country at the present time, has religious cadres and has a critical outlook on the state's problematic relationship with religion. However, although neither AK Party nor its leader, R. Tayyip Erdoğan, categorically oppose laicism, they chose to revise its meaning (Uysal 2013). In this period, support for democratic laicism rather than authoritarian laicism came to the fore, in which rights and freedom of faith were protected. Initial efforts were focused on eliminating military tutelage, the main problem in Turkish politics, as this created many social issues. The motivation in this period to join the European Union was an important factor in implementing the required reforms. In addition, during this period in which the effects of globalization became apparent in Turkey, religious, ethnic and cultural groups demanded the recognition of identities and the reinstatement of rights (Coşkun 2013, p. 97). Not only the Muslim majority, but also minorities and new religious movements were influenced by the policies during this new era in the religious arena.

In the 2000s, when stable economic growth had gained momentum, in response to democratic demands, the government introduced a series of reforms aimed at reinstating the rights of both the Muslim majority and the minorities. Most significant among these was the demand by the Muslim majority to have religious education and the freedom to use religious symbols in public places.¹³ The importance and functions of the Presidency of Religious Affairs increased, and, in cooperation with various state departments, attempts were made to transform this institution from one that had the role of "controlling religion" to one that "met the religious demands of society."¹⁴

In the 2000s, Alevi, who have an estimated population of between 4–7 million (Üzüm 2000, p. 22), found the chance to loudly voice their demands and with the initiation process started in 2007, workshops have been organized aimed at understanding the problems of Alevi (T. Köse 2010, p. 147). As a result, after decades of discriminating policies and Alevi-Sunni conflict that broke out at certain periods, it became possible to discuss the problems faced by Alevi and their demands for the first time in public. Prime Minister Erdoğan's apology to the Alevi on behalf of the state in 2011 for the Dersim massacre, which led to the killings of almost 14,000 Alevi and the exile of 11,600 people in 1937–1938, was a major sign of the state's changed approach toward the problems of Alevi and recognizing their identity (Kandemir 2014).

The Alevi's demands, the status of the *cemevi* and *dede* (Alevi leaders), and criticisms regarding religious education were all formulated upon the abolishment of the Presidency of Religious Affairs; it was in this light that the government's potential response to these demands was evaluated. In this context, a section on Alevism was allocated in the text books for the compulsory religious education offered in secondary schools and names of major Alevi religious leaders such as *Hacı Bektaş Veli* have been given to public universities as university names. While discussions on the status of *cemevis* and assigning salary to Alevi *dedes* are still ongoing, both the Alevi community and the general public continue to discuss the Alevi's demands.

In Turkey, where, according to official figures, there is a population of 90,500 non-Muslims, there are no reliable numbers that can give a map of religious belonging (Toktas and Aras 2009, p. 701). In addition to the minority groups mentioned above, there are an estimated 10,000 Bahais, 15,000 Assyrians, 5000 Yazidis, 3300 Jehovah's witnesses, 3000 Protestants and a limited number

¹³ The headscarf ban that continued for many years was gradually lifted from universities in the 2000s. The headscarf was made free for employees in public institutions and organizations for the first time with the democratization package that was approved in 2013. Also, the first deputies wearing a headscarf gained the right to enter the parliament for the first time since the Merve Kavakçı incident in the 1990s, in which Ms. Kavakçı, an elected representative, was expelled from Parliament due to her headscarf.

¹⁴ With a protocol signed by the Presidency of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Health in 2015 (*Protocol of Cooperation in Providing Moral Support to Patients*) a support-program similar to which had been applied in Western countries for many years, was initiated. <http://www.diyaret.gov.tr/tr/icerik/hastanelerde-manevi-destek-donemi-basliyor%E2%80%A6/25477> (20 January 2015).

of Nestorians, Chaldeans, Maronites and others living in Turkey. The rights of the non-Muslim population, which were taken away in the early period of the Republic, have been reinstated by legislative regulations introduced in the 2000s. The most significant were the regulations in 2011 reinstating the rights of ownership to minorities whose property had been seized after 1936. In addition, legislation aimed at preventing discrimination was enforced; discrimination related to race, color, language, religion or belief was prohibited. During this period, many places of worship were restored or reopened. The most famous of these were the Sumela Monastery in Trabzon, the Mor Gabriel Monastery and Dayro d-Mor Hananyo Syriac Monastery in Mardin, Church of the Holy Cross in Van, Holy Apostles Church in Kars, the Grand Synagogue in Edirne . . . etc.

6. Pluralization in the Religious Arena and the Religious Market in Turkey

To analyze the present pluralism in the religious arena in Turkey, the socio-political and economic changes should be taken into consideration. In an environment in which there has been a growing middle-class, in which the effects of globalization and postmodern culture have become more apparent, and in which the means of mass communication and modern social media have influenced the population, there has been a removal of obstacles to freedom of faith and reduction in state control. As a result, a religious arena which is increasingly diversified has begun to emerge.

Although different variants of Islam in Turkey have a common history and shared culture dating to the Ottoman period, they are still distinguished from each other in many respects. In the current state, one can speak of a process of pluralization that uses the modern means provided by globalization such as the Internet and social media. While recent events demonstrate that religious groups, such as the Naqshbandi, Suleymancı, Nurcu, and Mawlawi, with their roots going all the way back to Ottoman history, are continuing, it also indicates a religious sphere that is developing in a vast array ranging from modernist or liberal religious approaches to modern sufi interpretations, from salafi understandings to radical religious understandings. This variety and the rising trend of religious approaches can be described with the religious market theory.

The *religious economies model* was achieved by applying *rational choice theory* to the sociology of religion. It refuses the supposition that factors such as rationalization, urbanization, industrialization and religious pluralism—which are considered the standard measures of modernity—necessarily lead to permanent secularization of a society (Finke and Stark 2003, p. 98). Writers who have problematized religious pluralism's effect on secularization have claimed that the pluralist and competitive atmosphere in the U.S. has engendered lively religious cultures, and that on the contrary, in places where the state dominates institutionalized religion and where a single religious organization exists, a religious monopoly is formed that gives rise to a static group of clergymen (Norris and Inglehart 2004, p. 12). The religious market model, which attempts to explain religious decisions as rational rather than irrational cognitive process, suggests that religious demand will increase when religious supply is varied and attractive. In places where there is a religious monopoly, in which a single religion or sect dominates and religious activities are supervised by the state, religious life will not be very active.

At the center of the economic theory of religion, the term religion is considered like an optional commodity (Iannaccone 1991, p. 158). Here, religion is something selected by the consumer, unlike race or sex, and is a phenomenon in which the individual is involved to the extent they desire. In addition, it is possible to observe changes in consumers' religious preferences over time. In such cases, religious organizations are like competing companies that present products to the consumer (Hamilton 2011, p. 199). Every religious group competes to earn the largest share of the existing market and to gain the greatest number of members. In response, consumers make different choices. While some prefer a more extroversive, exalting ritual, more relaxed forms of worship based on contemplation are more suitable for others. However, in general each group offers the same main purposes of security, peace, safety, welfare, worldly prosperity, etc.

Increased pluralism in religious life is leading to a kind of religious market in Turkey as well. However, it differs from Western religious markets in some ways. While in Western countries, besides Christian groups, non-Christian and also non-religious spiritual groups compete; Turkey witnesses fervent competitions more among Muslim religious groups than between different religions, although non-Islamic religions feel more independence to act compared to the previous era. Thus, an Islamic religious market emerges in Turkey. While Sevinç defines the era after 2004 as “the era of plural competition” in the religious arena (Sevinç 2009, p. 377), Uçar and Selman prefer to say that Turkey has a “semi-pluralist religious market” (Uçar and Selman 2012, p. 54). In Turkey, where religious activities are not confined to mosques and it is easy for religious groups or movements to reach the community, many religious movements are competing to make up for the time they were banned and to increase the number of their followers through the schools, dormitories, commercial businesses, television channels, newspapers and websites they have opened.

Introvigne refers to an Islamic market within the religion domain as an “intra-band Muslim market”, the roots of which date back to the Ottoman period (Introvigne 2005, p. 14). According to Introvigne, although there has been a decrease in market alternatives with the de-Islamization process, the secularization policies have only targeted public areas and were largely unsuccessful due to the fact that informal social relations were ignored. Revealing the difference between the religious Islamic market in Turkey and that of other countries, Introvigne indicates that moderate conservative groups (niches) in Turkey offer comparatively rich and persuasive proposals. The Turkish religious market confirms that in an environment in which moderate conservative offers are plenty and state control is limited, fundamentalism will remain limited and ultrafundamentalist trends will remain marginal (Introvigne 2005, p. 22).

The existence and status of the Presidency of Religious Affairs may appear to present an obstacle to the religious market approach; nevertheless, in my opinion, the existence of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, which has a different institutional structure and social significance than that of the Church in Western context, has not been sufficient to prevent the formation of the religious market. The religious officials, who are under the Presidency of Religious Affairs stand out with their mostly mosque- and Qur’an course-based activities, do not compete with other religious groups and some are affiliated with religious orders, sects or movements. On the other hand, the majority of these officials only work according to the duties set out for them and some are not very willing in their work. At times the professional competence of some of these officials has been questioned. This lack of enthusiasm from mosque workers does not fulfill everyone’s quest to meet their religious needs (Uçar and Selman 2012, p. 52).

Today, especially in Turkey’s big cities, it is no longer surprising to see criticism toward traditional religious approaches or the existence of alternative religious views. Religious individuals of the new generation who have gone through the modern education system have started to greatly criticize traditional religiousness with the rational methods of thinking that they acquired from the education system. Thus, while the traditional perceptions of Islam are being weakened on the one hand, there is an increase in the religious individual’s efforts to return to the essence of religion (A. Köse 2015, p. 15). This is apparent particularly in debates about the Islamic view of women. The traditional Muslim perception of women has been criticized not only by secularists, but also by religious women who have undergone modern higher education. Yet, these women find the reason of the discourses and practices in society that render the woman second class not in Islam, as the secularists often do, but in Islam’s patriarchal interpretation. They see the solution to be returning to the essence of Islam and the rediscovery of the female models in the era of the Prophet Muhammad.

The other non-Islamic religious movements and spiritual approaches that have been active in Turkey in the recent years should also be mentioned. These new religious movements can be categorized into two groups (Yitik 2014, p. 256). The movements such as Sahaja Yoga, Reiki and Transcendental Meditation convey clear influences of Eastern belief, while there are Western-based movements such as World Brotherhood Union Mevlana Supreme Foundation, Jehovah’s Witnesses

and Mormonism. The members of the new religious and spiritual movements consist mainly of people from high or middle-income groups; however, young people who are members of lower income groups may also join. The members are in general university graduates, and rather than conveying their teachings to everyone, these groups act with caution and convey these teachings to individuals who they believe will accept.

7. Conclusions

Despite pleasing a small minority, the secularist policies that were applied in a top-down authoritarian way to form a secular society in Turkey were not accepted by the Muslim majority. The state authority that was long criticized by religious groups due to its negative attitude toward religions was also accused by the Alevis of favoring Sunnism, by Sunnis of eliminating Islam from the public sphere and by religious minorities of failing to be impartial towards all religions. In addition, for many years the Alevis were supported by the state against the majority as a guarantor for the Kemalist regime and religious groups were taken as allies against left-wing movements. This attitude of the state, with its unstable policies, created mistrust among the religious groups. However, in the 2000s the ethnic, cultural and religious issues, which had become gangrenous over the years, started to be discussed in public.

When Taha Parla and Andrew Davison suggested that “Kemalist laicism” in Turkey prevented rather than encouraged secularization in many aspects, they appear to be correct (Parla and Davison 2008, p. 63). The basic reason as to why Turkey was unable to be secularized lies in the inability to divorce religion from the state. Not only did the Kemalists control religious culture, they also supported it in some ways. However, the fact that the Republican elite took into consideration the religious identities when structuring a modern nation does not mean that the Turkish state supported religion. Indeed, the policies enforced over the years served to increase rather than decrease the discontent of both the Muslim majority and the minorities; this went so far as to endanger social peace.

The main reasons for why Turkey could not secularize, despite being ruled with authoritarian laicism, should be sought in the continued obstacles that long prevented the settlement of democracy. Casanova argues that in the majority of Western European societies, secularization occurred after democracy was set into place (Casanova 2008, p. 69). When the situation in Turkey is examined, there is a transition from a period in which, even though laicism was enforced in its most severe form, secularization of the society was at a level far below the expectations of policy makers, to a period in which popular discussions about the secularization of society are taking place, even among the religious middle-classes (Albayrak 2015). However, while this period signified a process in which the signs of secularism increased, it also indicated an environment where the forms of religiousness had become more varied. Recently, social segments that are assumed to be intrinsically secular are observed to have increased interest in religion, and social segments that are considered to be intrinsically religious are seen to develop different forms of religiousness or secular approaches. Thus, while different views of liberal or modernist forms of religiosity that were open to compromise with secularism secured a place in society, forms that could be transformed into radicalism were also existent. Introvigne describes the Islamic market in Turkey in five categories, the ultra-strict, strict, moderate-conservative, liberal and ultra-liberal (Introvigne 2005, p. 22). The striking point in this classification is that the religious arena of the moderate-conservatives addresses a larger section of society more successfully than the others.

An important matter that needs attention here is the state of the relations of the increasing number of actors and groups in the religious sphere and how these relations will possibly evolve. Certainly, this will continue to be one of the main debates in the religious arena in the years to come. Moreover, the role of the Presidency of Religious Affairs in the coordination of religious groups will be another issue.

Turkey adopted laicism as a constitutional principle, yet it is also a country in which a majority of the population defines itself as religious in one way or another (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 2014; Çarkoğlu and Toprak 2000). The visible changes and increasing pluralism in Turkey’s religious sphere

may be explained by the religious market approach. In particular, studies supported by field research may help to understand the established religious groups and those groups that are continuing to form in Turkey, a country with a dynamic religious life, and to compare these findings with other countries.

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