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THE DEBATES ON RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: THE CASE OF TURKEY*

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between the public sphere and religion is a very important issue, particularly from sociological, political, ideological, ethical and judicial viewpoints and in terms of international relations at the local and global levels. The public and political significance of religion has an important place in debates concerning the social aspects and functions of religion. The history of debates related to the situation of religion in the public sphere is politically and academically very long. Religion in the public sphere has always been the subject of lively debate in the context of politics, ideology, sosciology, political science, etc. in Turkey, too. One of the most important reasons for this debate is the fear that religion may gain power in the secular state ("the public sphere"). Under the influence of this fear, the concept of the public sphere in Turkey is discussed in a political, ideological, and emotional framework based on laicism and is used with the same meaning as the sphere of the state or the official sphere. Debates on religion in the public sphere are held in the framework of this perception and of official practices with respect to this perception. This study examines some sociological, ideological and political dimensions of the debates related to religion in the public sphere in Turkey from a sociological perspective.

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

The relationship between the public sphere and religion is a very important issue, particularly from sociological, political, ideological, ethical and judicial viewpoints and in terms of international relations at the local and global levels. The public and political dimensions of religion have an important place in debates concerning the social aspects and functions of religion. The history of debates related to the situation of religion in the public sphere is politically and academically very long. In modern Western societies, including the U.S., and in the

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modernizing societies of Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe, the situation of religion in the public sphere has been the subject of scientific, religious, political, ideological, and emotional discussions. Religion in the public sphere is an issue that is closely related to secularization. Sociologists address the experience and appearance of religion in the public space from various perspectives. Among the most important issues in contemporary society is the relationship between the public sphere and religion in relation to the following questions: What does the public sphere mean? Has secularization removed religion from the public sphere? Is religion present in the public sphere in modern societies? In what dimensions is it present? Has religion become private in conjunction with secularization, is it becoming private, or is it continuing to exist in the public sphere? What is a potential solution for debates on the existence of religion and religious symbols in the public sphere? Religion in the public sphere has always been the subject of lively debate in the context of politics, ideology, sosciology, political science, etc. in Turkey, too. One of the most important reasons for this debate is the fear that religion may gain power in the secular state ("the public sphere"). Under the influence of this fear, the concept of the public sphere in Turkey is discussed in a political, ideological, and emotional framework based on laicism and is used with the same meaning as the sphere of the state or the official sphere. Debates on religion in the public sphere are held in the framework of this perception and of official practices with respect to this perception. Since the establishment of the Republic as the new political system of Turkey, the state has situated itself as the sole authority for defining Islam parallel to the mentality of the nation-state, thereby constituting a new Islamic understanding. The Turkish state has pursued the policy of converting society toward the type of Islam it desired. Thus, it has worked against the people by identifying the existing religiosity in social life with the peasantry. The state has defined religion in the framework of the new Islamic perception it wanted to build instead of old Islamic perceptions and lifestyles. The influence of these emerging requirements led to the foundation of different religious institutions, especially the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, hereafter the PRA). The state, with its secular character, took religion in public life into its own hands. Consequently, the Turkish state attempted to construct a kind of "state religion". In this new Islamic perception, the state has placed prohibitions and restrictions on some manifestations of Islam in public places. The levels and areas of these prohibitions and restrictions have changed from one government to another and from one time period to another. Today, it is clear that the debate on religion in the public sphere in Turkey is directly related to this matter. The current religiosity represented by most of the people has been mixed with the understanding of "religiosity as peasantry". Until the 1950s and 1960s, Turkey's majority remained uneducated peasants due to the influence of policies implemented by the state and the state elites. With the establishment of the Republic, Turkey identified modernization as a stable national mission. This approach of the new regime pushed situations, beliefs, religious appearances, thoughts, and behaviors that are considered inappropriate for modernity out of the public domain. This means that the state determines the public sphere. In Turkey, the public sphere has been the subject of a lively debate with

regard to protecting laicity and fighting against religious reaction, especially in the February 28 process (the process that came into being with the army and bureaucracy-centered post-modern coup conducted on February 28, 1997). In this process, the upper echelons of the army, top-level bureaucrats, some associations and foundations, some politicians, and President Ahmet Necdet Sezer struggled against the manifestations of religion in the public sphere. This study examines some sociological, ideological and political dimensions of the debates related to religion in the public sphere in Turkey from a sociological perspective.

Key Words: Religion, Islam, public sphere, secularization, Turkey.

KAMUSAL ALANDA DİN TARTIŞMALARI: TÜRKİYE ÖRNEĞİ

ÖZET

Kamusal alan – din ilişkisi, yerel ve küresel düzlemde özellikle sosyolojik, siyasal, ideolojik, etik ve hukuki bakımdan ve de uluslararası ilişkiler açısından çok önemli bir konudur. Dinin kamusal ve siyasal yönleri konusu, dinin toplumsal boyut ve işlevleriyle ilgili tartışmalarda önemli bir yere sahiptir. Kamusal alanda dinin durumuna ilişkin tartışmaların, siyasal ve akademik olarak çok uzun bir tarihi olduğu söylenebilir. Türkiye bağlamında da kamusal aland dinin durumuyla ilgili hususlar, hep önemli toplumsal ve siyasal konular arasında yer almıştır. Türkiye, laik bir devlet yapısına ragmen dinin çok etkili olduğu bir ülkedir. Türkiye'de kamusal alanda din, siyaset, ideoloji, dinsel özgürlükler, sosyoloji, siyaset bilimi vd. temelinde daima canlı bir tartışma konusu olmuştur. Bu tartışmanın en önemli nedenlerinden biri, dinin seküler devlette ("kamusal alan"da) güç kazanacağı korkusudur. Bu korkunun etkisiyle Türkiye'de kamusal alan kavramı, laikliğe dayalı olarak siyasal, ideolojik ve duygusal çerçevede tartışılmakta ve de devlet alanı veya resmi alan ile aynı anlamda kullanılmaktadır. Kamusal alanda din tartışmaları, bu algı etrafında ve bu algıya bağlı resmi uygulamalar çerçevesinde yürütülmektedir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de kamusal alanda din ile ilgili tartışmaların bazı sosyolojik, ideolojik ve siyasal boyutlarını sosyolojik bakışaçısıyla ele almaktadır. Belirtmek gerekir ki Türkiye'de, modern cumhuriyetin kuruluşu, yönetim ve idare tarzında bir takım değişimler getirmiş ve bu değişim veya dönüşümler de devletin dinsel siyasetinde bazı değişimlere yol açmıştır. Devletin değişen dinsel siyaseti, gerçeklikte, laik siyasette dini yeniden şekillendirme, tanımlama ve dinsel siyaseti bu yeni tanıma göre yeniden dizayn etme olarak karşılık bulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din, İslam, kamusal alan, sekülerleşme, Türkiye.

Introduction

The relationship between the public sphere and religion is a very important issue, particularly from sociological, political and judicial viewpoints and in terms of international

relations at the regional and global levels. The public and political significance of religion has an important place in debates concerning the social aspects of religion and has a long history of interdisciplinary academic debate (Koenig 2007: 3). In modern Western societies, including the U.S., and in the modernizing societies of Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe, the situation of religion in the public sphere has been the subject of scientific, religious, political, ideological, and emotional discussions.

Religion in the public sphere is an issue that is closely related to secularization (Okumuş 2005). Sociologists address the experience and appearance of religion in the public space from various perspectives. Among the most important issues in contemporary society is the relationship between the public sphere and religion in relation to the following questions: What does the public sphere mean? Has secularization removed religion from the public sphere? Is religion present in the public sphere in modern societies? In what dimensions is it present? Has religion become private in conjunction with secularization, is it becoming private, or is it continuing to exist in the public sphere? What is a potential solution for debates on the existence of religion and religious symbols in the public sphere?

This matter is debated not only in modern and postmodern societies but also in the modernizing societies, also known as transitional societies, such as Turkey. Despite its secular state structure, Turkey is a country where religion is very effective. In Turkey, religion in the public sphere has been a subject of lively debate. One of the most important reasons for this debate is the fear that religion may gain power in the secular state ("the public sphere"). Under the influence of this fear, the concept of the public sphere in Turkey is discussed in a political, ideological, and emotional framework based on laicism and is used with the same meaning as the sphere of the state or the official sphere. Debates on religion in the public sphere are conducted in the framework of this perception and of the official practices with respect to this perception. This study attempts to examine debates and practices related to the situation of religion in the public sphere in Turkey from a sociological perspective.

The Public Sphere and Religion

The public sphere is, at first glance, a place that is open to everyone. In this case, the public is the opposite of private (that is, specific to persons). The public sphere is the civil and social area, and all citizens can be found, talk, and communicate freely in this area. The public sphere is derived from "public", which indicates people and society. As understood from these meanings, the public sphere is a field of social life in which people, who are social actors with different ideas, views, statutes, and faiths, can get together and freely talk, argue and identify social problems and public affairs. Through this discussion, they can influence political action and, when possible, reach a common decision. The public sphere is also an area of social life in which public opinion is formed. Essentially, the public sphere involves all aspects of society with the exception of the private sphere. Without examining its history in the Western world, it can be said the public sphere in modern Western societies represents society and the social arena (Habermas 1991). Areas that are not open to everyone and that are forbidden or closed by a government, power, person or group are not included in the public sphere.

The public sphere is a concept located in participatory approaches to democracy. The area in which citizens gather, exchange opinions, discuss, and form public opinion is conceptualized as the public sphere. The public sphere can be a place where people meet or a framework of communication through which people can communicate with each other. The public sphere is a necessity for good governance, allowing people to participate in the decision-making process of the government. The ideal public sphere requires freedom of expression, debate, and information

flows. The ideal public sphere does not exist in reality, but there are models close to the ideal. The promotion of good governance leads to the formation of comprehensive public spheres.

The concept of the public sphere has a long tradition in the history of ideas and science, especially in philosophy and the social sciences. The German sociologist Jürgen Habermas played an important role in the current understanding of the public sphere, particularly in the analysis of the essential features of the public sphere and its history. According to Habermas (1974: 49), the public domain is primarily an area of social life in which something close to public opinion can occur. All citizens are guaranteed access to the public sphere. Part of the public sphere appears in every situation in which individuals gather to constitute a public body. "The idea of a public sphere is that of a body of 'private persons' assembled to discuss matters of 'public concern' or 'common interest'" (Fraser 1990: 58). Habermas (1998: 360-361) defines the public sphere "as [a] network for communicating information and points of view… Like the life world as a whole, so, too, the public sphere is reproduced through communicative action, in which mastery of a natural language suffices. The public sphere is thus grounded in a life world with an intersubjectively shared space of a speech situation in concrete locales where an audience is physically gathered. The streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions."

The public sphere is a place located between the field of the state and the private area of the individual. In the public space, citizens can freely come together, exchange information, and discuss or debate various matters. The limits of the public sphere have changed and extended, especially with the development of mass communication. In contemporary societies, people can contact each other via television, telephone, or internet and can understand how and about what other people think and organize via these vehicles (see Habermas 1998). Therefore, the public sphere goes beyond place to become an imaginary that includes not only physical but also virtual communication vehicles with which people can exchange opinions and information. The public sphere is not a determined area; it is not directed by state authority. On the contrary, it is a field where people can freely exist, participate in social processes, and discuss and debate various matters and problems from a rational and critical approach.

With regard to religion in the public sphere, one of the most important issues in the debate on the public sphere in Western societies is secularization (see Berger 1967, 1996/97; Wilson 1989; Webster 1977; Cox 1966). In relation to secularization, the issue of whether religion is in decline or is experiencing a process of revival in European and other societies (see Swatos 1989a, 1989b) is important in the context of the public sphere. As Habermas states (2010, 2006), religious tradition and religious communities have gained new political and public importance. Today, there is a religious revival in many geographical regions of the world. We observe variants of religious revival not only in the Middle East but also in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. Religious movements are working and serving on a world scale. In this context, one can note the political revitalization or resurgence of religion in Western societies.

It is clear that what is expressed here with regard to secularization, religion, religious resurgence or revitalization, and religious movements is closely related to the issue of religion in the public sphere. "Habermas's approach starts from the assumption that current day society should be characterized as a postsecular one. In spite of sociological secularization and in spite of what he used to believe himself, Habermas now acknowledges that religion will not disappear as a relevant influence neither in the lives of individuals nor in the cultural and political arena" (Loobuyck & Rummens 2014: 237). Currently, public consciousness in Europe can be defined in light of a post-secular society that must adapt itself to the continuous presence of religious communities in a

progressively secularized environment. The re-reading of the secularization hypothesis is related less to its substance and more to forecasts about the role of religion in the future (Habermas 2014).

In the final analysis, religion performs important roles in various dimensions of the public sphere. These roles vary from society to society, but in every case, the relationship between religion and the public sphere emerges as an important issue in society. In different societies, an increase in the presence and effectiveness of religion and diverse religious perspectives in the public sphere can be observed and witnessed. For example, religion has always played a central role in American society. In recent times, this role provides an opportunity to broaden religious perspectives in the public sphere. It can be said that religion is increasing its influence not only at the global level but also within national public spheres (Habermas 2006; 2014; Okumuş 2005). The effects of religion in the public sphere are related to its effects in the life of society. Thus, in social theory, it is important to examine religion's effects in the public sphere as well as the effects of religion on socio-cultural life.

Religion and The Perception of the Public Sphere in Turkey

Since the establishment of the Republic as the new political system of Turkey, the state has situated itself as the sole authority for defining Islam parallel to the mentality of the nation-state, thereby constituting a new Islamic understanding. The Turkish state has pursued the policy of converting society toward the type of Islam it desired. Thus, it has worked against the people by identifying the existing religiosity in social life with the peasantry. The state has defined religion in the framework of the new Islamic perception it wanted to build instead of old Islamic perceptions and lifestyles. The influence of these emerging requirements led to the foundation of different religious institutions, especially the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, hereafter the PRA). The state, with its secular character, took religion in public life into its own hands. Consequently, the Turkish state attempted to construct a kind of "state religion". In this new Islamic perception, the state has placed prohibitions and restrictions on some manifestations of Islam in public places. The levels and areas of these prohibitions and restrictions have changed from one government to another and from one time period to another. Today, it is clear that the debate on religion in the public sphere in Turkey is directly related to this matter. The current religiosity represented by most of the people has been mixed with the understanding of "religiosity as peasantry". Until the 1950s and 1960s, Turkey's majority remained uneducated peasants due to the influence of policies implemented by the state and the state elites (Okumuş 2012).

With the establishment of the Republic, Turkey identified modernization as a stable national mission. This approach of the new regime pushed situations, beliefs, religious appearances, thoughts, and behaviors that are considered inappropriate for modernity out of the public domain. This means that the state determines the public sphere. In Turkey, the public sphere has been the subject of a lively debate with regard to protecting laicity and fighting against religious reaction, especially in the February 28 process (the process that came into being with the army and bureaucracy-centered post-modern coup conducted on February 28, 1997). In this process, the upper echelons of the army, top-level bureaucrats, some associations and foundations, some politicians, and President Ahmet Necdet Sezer struggled against the manifestations of religion in the public sphere.

In fact, the public sphere in Turkey has been conceived as a "sphere of the state" and thus has been transformed into a power sphere under the control and guidance of the state rather than a "sphere of representation and expression of people" (Küçükcan 2007; Okumuş 2012). This public sphere can be expanded to encompass all areas in which the state may intervene, including civil life. The elites have attempted to prohibit religion, especially the headscarf, places of worship

(masjids and mosques), religious language, beards, and every type of behavior reflecting religiosity in places that are identified as the public sphere.

The elites, who see society as an object for the state, intend to unify the state and society or to unify different aspects of society and to force this unified society to serve the state. Although the public sphere is defined as an open place for everyone, in Turkey, only the political authority holds the right to be active in the public sphere. This is a significant similarity between Turkey in the single-party period and the socialist countries. The main purpose of the state in socialist countries is to expand the state's domination in the public sphere. In this sense, Turkey was similar to these socialist countries during the single-party period. The aim of political authority prior to 1950 was to promote the official ideology of the state. To achieve this, the state used various public bodies, such as the educational institutions, political parties, and social activity centers. In contrast to the modern Western countries, the main purpose of the education system in Turkey is to raise loyal citizens. Starting in the 1950s, society was subjected to a drastic change, and prohibited aspects of political and social life were reintroduced. Although these reintroduced institutions and social organizations were not considered legitimate in the eyes of the state officials, they contributed to the transition of public life in Turkey. Between 1950 and 1980, political and social changes transformed the idea of the public sphere (Çaha 2005).

The actual transformation of the public sphere began after 1980. Beginning in the early 1980s, civil society challenged the ideological public sphere of the state. The increasing influence of neo-liberalism in the 1980s affected the state's perspective on the public sphere. Debates on privatization, the extent of the role of the government, and the constitution influenced the approach toward the public sphere. The aftermath of 1980 was very similar to the nineteenth century of the Ottoman Empire with regard to democracy, the republic, parliament, and the constitution. Under the former Prime Minister and President Turgut Özal, Turkey underwent a significant transformation regarding the above-mentioned issues. During his terms in office, many characteristics of the single-party period were questioned. The state's mentality regarding civil public life and the public sphere were also questioned, and the state's approach began to transform. The state, which controlled most property, land, and manufacturing production in the country, also reflected its economic power in other areas, such as culture, politics, law, education, social order, and religion.

In the post-1980 period of Turkey, a liberal paradigm began to develop that challenged the statist mentality. This situation led to the acquaintance of the political elite, intellectuals, and the public with the liberal view. In this process, some pro-liberal groups, including some political parties, began to attract attention in the public realm. Liberal themes became widespread throughout Turkey with the influence of domestic dynamics and the globalization process. In Turkey's post-1980 period, new perspectives based on rights challenged the existing ideological tendencies (Çaha 2005).

As mentioned previously, public life became subject to a serious transformation after 1980. Some groups claimed rights within the framework of ethnic, religious, sexual, political, cultural, and aesthetic freedoms. These groups were effective in the public sphere. The diversity of the societal groups naturally transformed the public sphere into a realm with great diversity. This period differed from the heavily ideological public life of the 1970s. The rallies of workers, protests of students, and protests against the prohibition of headscarves were mainly peaceful, and this fact made the public sphere more colorful than it was in the previous decades (Çaha 2005: 19-22).

The public sphere in Turkey was transformed into an ideological device, limiting and sometimes even eliminating civil areas and freedoms by which an elite minority, which considered

itself urban and the majority of people peasant, established its power in the name of protecting the regime. In Turkey, the aforementioned elites regard the public sphere as a place where religion is forbidden and forms of religious expression are not valid. From this perspective, the public sphere gains a meaning in which the areas that are open to all of society are considered the areas of the state and these areas are open to the intervention of the state. Therefore, all social areas are regarded as areas where manifestations of religion should be banned.

Secularization theories about the decline or the weakening of religion in social and public areas are the driving force in the minds of people who believe that religion must be forbidden and who have attempted to forbid it. Rather than discussing this view at the sociological level, these people have attempted to implement their goals. Importantly, they see religiosity and religion as the real reason for Turkey's regression, and they believe that the sine qua non condition of modernization is to be without religion. One of the most important elements in the notion that the public sphere in Turkey is considered the area in which the state can intervene is that the state or the elites have realized modernization in Turkey in contrast to the experience of Western modernization. In the Republic of Turkey, social change was a top-down engineering project established through a set of sanctions without the consent of society.

There are various examples of the elimination or exclusion of religion from the public sphere and of the debates over religion and the public sphere in Turkey. These examples include reading the Azan (call to prayer) in Turkish, the insistence on Turkish worship in congregation prayers in mosques, prohibiting entrance to various "public areas" to men with beards, prohibitions against headscarves in schools, universities, and state institutions and organizations, refusal to allow the existence of worship places in state offices, the removal of a headscarved woman elected as a deputy in the general elections from the hall of the Turkish Grand National Assembly,[1] sending single reception invitations to deputies who have headscarved wives, banning headscarved women from entering military clubs and housing, the removal of some military personnel from the profession due to their headscarved wives, and the removal of a headscarved defendant from a courtroom during a trial.

In debates on religion in the public sphere, the headscarf has a prominent place (Çarkoğlu and Toprak: 2006). Essentially, the government has banned women wearing headscarves from working in the public sphere based on a principle of solid official secularism. The ban covers all people working in state buildings, including teachers, lawyers, and parliamentarians. The ban on headscarves in the civil service and political institutions has been extended to cover non-governmental institutions. For instance, female lawyers and journalists who refused to comply with the prohibition have been expelled from public buildings such as universities and courtrooms. With the reflection of religious manifestations in the public sphere such as schools, universities, and courts, especially after 1980 (September 12) and intensively since 1997 (February 28), the ban on the headscarf for female students, mostly in universities, has become a serious problem. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) attempted to solve this problem by passing constitutional amendments, with the support of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), to lift the ban on the headscarf in February 2008. The Republican People's Party (CHP) brought this legislation to the Constitutional Court, and it was outlawed.

Perhaps the most salient issue in the debates on religion in the public sphere in Turkey is reflected in the view of Ahmet Necdet Sezer, the tenth president. In Sezer's opinion, religion in the

[1] The aforementioned deputy is Merve Kavakçi. Kavakçi, a headscarved woman, was elected as a deputy. Kavakçi entered the Parliament but was exposed to severe resistance from Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and deputies of his party, the Social Democratic Party. Hence, Kavakçi could not take her chair in the parliament.

public sphere, which he understood as the state sphere, must be forbidden not only by banning the headscarf in universities but also by banning any manifestations of religiosity the state deems necessary.

The debates on religion in the public sphere in Turkey arrived at such a point that criticism was brought to Ankara's Chief Public Prosecutor's Office about President Abdullah Gül, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and their wives because the women wore headscarves. At the end of the investigation, the Prosecutor's Office gave notice and decided that it was not necessary to prosecute the alleged violation of the Turkish Constitution, the Turkish Penal Code, the Revolution laws, the decisions of the Turkish Constitutional Court, and the European Court of Human Rights.

There is controversy about banning some religious manifestations such as the headscarf in the public sphere in Turkey. On the one hand, there are bans or support for banning religion or some requirements of religiosity in the public sphere based on the principle of secularism. On the other hand, the Presidency of Religious Affairs, mosques, obligatory religious culture courses, Imam-Hatip High Schools, Qur'an courses, and divinity faculties are present on official and legal grounds. How can these two controversial situations be reconciled?

The Exploitation of Religion and the Public Sphere

One important way of understanding the perceptions of the state and the elites, who act on behalf of the state apparatus, with regard to Islam and their approach to religion in the public sphere in Turkey is to examine their discourse on reactionism and policies on the exploitation of religion. In Turkey, an important way for the modern state to cope with religion and religious issues, especially the religious demands of the citizens, is its discourse on reactionism and policies on the exploitation of religion. The state elites' discourse labeling various segments of society (especially its opponents) reactionary since Tanzimat, which is among the building blocks of the establishment of the Republic, is used against religious people in the modern political order. In the same context, one of the most significant issues involves policies related to the exploitation of religion. These policies, which are identified with the CHP, are used as a method in the closure of political parties and the fight against people or groups using religious discourse or performing religious activities and are applied toward people with religious requests (Okumuş 2012).

The Constitution and laws regarding the relationship between religion and politics forbid the exploitation of religion: "No individuals, political parties or groups shall be allowed to exploit or abuse religion or religious feelings, or things held sacred by religion, in any manner whatsoever, for the purpose of personal or political influence, or for partially basing the fundamental, social, economical, political, and legal order of the state on religious tenets" (the Constitution, Article 24; the Turkish Penal Code, Articles 219, 158; the Political Parties Code, Article 87). The new regime of Turkey gives distinct importance to the issue of the exploitation of religion. In the religious politics of the new regime, the exploitation of religion is a vital issue. In Turkey, the discourse on religious exploitation is a kind of reflex developed by the Republic of Turkey to protect itself. Similarly, the state has reflected the aforementioned reflex onto the Constitution, laws, and codes since its establishment and has adopted the idea that the exploitation of religion should be forbidden. The exploitation of religion, the politics and discourse connected to religion and secularism in the Constitution, laws, codes, and written documents, and the policies and discourse of different state institutions, such as the Army, the Constitutional Court, and the Turkish Parliament, seem to be essential policies developed to defend and protect the secular state structure (Okumuş 2011).

On the one hand, there is a policy of religion applied by the state and a policy on the exploitation of religion. On the other hand, there are various political parties, civil society

organizations, and social classes that have relationships with religion and a discourse on the exploitation of religion. Some consider words, attitudes, behaviors, or politics with religious content to reflect the exploitation of religion; others are accused of exploiting religion. The Constitution and laws forbid the exploitation of religion, but the meaning of the exploitation of religion remains ambiguous (Okumuş 2011). These contradictory situations show that the Turkish state elites have created a kind of religious politics related to the exploitation of religion by saying "religion is exploited" with regard to religious freedoms. Thus, in politics, government, and the public sphere in Turkey, there is a kind of "exploitation of the exploitation of religion" rather than simply the exploitation of religion.

In Turkish politics, discourse, politics, and literature indicate the exploitation of the exploitation religion. Some elite classes and political parties create a politics of religion by using concepts and expressions such as reaction, religious abuse, and secularism and by making religion a tool of politics and exploiting it. They use this strategy while pointing at their opponents, especially the parties, groups, and even individuals that are establishing open and close relations with religion. The most remarkable development related to the exploitation of religion in the period of the Republic has been the formation through political power of a dense discourse about the concept of exploitation (Okumuş 2011).

The concept of exploitation has been a significant issue in popular culture for almost all of the political purification operations during this period in which the exploitation of religion, the exploitation of national will, and even the exploitation of freedoms are often expressed. Thus, in this period, the most exploited thing may have been the concept of exploitation itself, the value of which is overloaded. The state creates a monopoly on exploitation as well as on all public possessions. Some political parties and groups support and adopt the concept of exploitation with the goal of claiming this right of the state (Okumuş 2011).

As a result, in Turkey, debates on reactionism and the exploitation of religion are closely related to religion in the public sphere. The impact of the discourse and politics of religious abuse by the state elites is obvious in the attempt to narrow the field of religion in the public sphere, sometimes even making the field of religion subject to strict applications. The requests of the pious to broaden the areas in which they can freely exist within the public domain have faced charges of the exploitation of religion. The presence of religion in the public sphere has been challenged by policies on the exploitation of religion, sometimes through political language, sometimes through the language of law, and sometimes through the language of ideology.

The 2013 Democratization Package and Religion in the Public Sphere

Religion in Turkey became relatively free in the public sphere after 2013. This was ensured by the democratization package of the AK Party, which was announced and enforced in this year. The issues of freedom to wear a headscarf and freedom of dress, which were expressed by strong civil society organizations such as the Memur-Sen (Confederation of Public Servants Trade Unions), were put into effect by the government with the alteration of related regulations (see Official Gazette, October 8, 2013). Members of the Turkish National Police, judges, public prosecutors, and officials of the Turkish Armed Forces are exempt from the new regulation. The main opposition party (CHP, the Republican People's Party) and other opposition parties did not object to this regulation.

This is a significant development in the history of modern Turkey. With this alteration, the state made peace with the beliefs and ideas of Turkish society, which is predominantly Muslim. These steps toward democratization played a role in supporting the Muslim population and

contributed to the moderation of Islamist ideas toward the state and reconciliation between Islamists and the state.

Religious manifestations in universities have increased considerably in recent years. The most remarkable point related to this issue is the increase in the construction of masjids and mosques and an increase in the number of universities with mosques. Although some parts of society, especially Kemalists and secularists, object to this development, the majority of the population approaches it positively. In Turkey, the AK Party Government period represents a new era with respect to the relationship between social change and religion (see Okumuş 2006). In this period, religion in the public sphere has been the subject of significant changes.

The Presidency of Religious Affairs and Other State Institutions Related to Religion

Religion in the public sphere in Turkey is controlled by the state. The Republic of Turkey is a self-identified secular state by constitution, but it undertakes all religious affairs at the institutional level. It is quite difficult to find a similar situation in other secular states. Public religion can be mentioned to the extent that the state determines and permits. When religion in the public sphere is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is the PRA. The Turkish Government established the PRA in 1924 to conduct religious services for Turkish citizens and to regulate their religious needs. The PRA became very effective in Turkish society over time.

The PRA has an informative, educative, and directive influence on religion in Turkish society. It is influential in the formation of people's religiosity due to its authority in the mosques and Qur'an courses and due to its influence in fundamental dimensions such as religious knowledge, belief, and duty. The PRA has produced a mainstream religiosity or piety in Turkish society by publishing catechisms, interpretations, sirahbooks (books explaining the life of the prophet), hadith books, calendars, monthly and academic magazines, imams' messages to people in mosques, khutbas (Friday sermons), religious lectures, lessons in the Qur'an courses, and fatwa, which are functional and effective for religiosity in Turkey. Additionally, the fact that the Foundation of PRA (Diyanet Vakfı) and the officials of the PRA teach and inform the people through meetings, programs, symposiums, and ceremonies has played an important role in the formation of religiousness in Turkish society. As an ideological instrument of the state, the PRA is an institution that enlightens the Turkish people about religion (Okumuş 2005; 2008; 2012).

In addition to the PRA, the Ministry of National Education (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, hereafter the MNE) officially offers the mandatory course of "Religious Culture and Ethical Knowledge" and elective religious courses (Fundamental Religious Knowledge, Qur'an, and the Life of the Prophet Muhammad) in elementary, middle, and high schools. Only the MNE can establish Imam and preacher high schools. Until recently, the Council of Higher Education (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu) on behalf of the state was the sole authority to establish foundations of higher religious education (Colleges of Divinity, Islamic Sciences, and Religious Sciences). For the last few years, private universities (foundation universities) can also establish those colleges.

Turkish secularism contains some paradoxes or contradictions. The PRA is a major part of these paradoxes. The Republic of Turkey is both secular and, paradoxically, has a monopoly on religious services. Non-governmental organizations, foundations, associations, communities, and religious groups can also arrange to conduct some religious services, such as organizing religious educational courses or programs. However, this does not make non-governmental organizations the official authority in religious matters. The only authority in religious services and religion in the public sphere is the state. The authority to offer courses on religion in schools belongs to the state, and mosques officially belong to the PRA on behalf of the state, which officially manages and

controls or checks the mosques. The authority to open, manag, and control Qur'an courses on behalf of the state belongs to the PRA.

Conclusion

In Turkey, the establishment of the modern republic involved changes in governance and administration style, and these transformations involved a change in the religious policy of the state. The changing religious policy of the state has been reflected in reality as re-editing, re-formatting, and re-defining religion in secular politics and re-designing religious policy in line with this new definition.

The modern secular (laic) state of Turkey ultimately acts with a perception of religion and follows a politics of religion based on this perception. Undoubtedly, the state has conducted this politics of religion through the logic of state engineering and social engineering and has attempted to impose its understanding of religion on society. The state has exaggerated the level of this enforcement through certain interventions.

In Turkey, some elite civilian and military bureaucrats and politicians whose views on the public sphere differ from those in the West argue that religion must be separated from the public sphere. By prohibiting the entrance of religion to the public sphere, a type of religiosity, sanctity, and immunity is attributed to the public sphere.

The previously mentioned elites perceive the public sphere as a place or an institution belonging to the state. Therefore, the public sphere has been conceived as a place where the rules executed by official institutions must be valid forever. However, in developed democracies, the public sphere is a free and civil sphere open to everyone. Although the public sphere has emerged and developed as a sphere for representation and discussion from its beginning, the public sphere has been defined in Turkey as a sphere of the state. As a result, it has been transformed to a power sphere under the control and guidance of the state rather than a sphere of representation and expression of the people.

The understanding of classical secularist and positivistic religion in Turkish modernization and the purpose of protecting secularism are part of the background of Turkish elites' perceptions of the public sphere. Those who support the separation of religion from the public sphere argue that failing to ban religion from the public sphere is contrary to the principle of secularism.

In Turkey, there has been a significant change in the situation of religion in the public sphere. In the official perception of religion and the religious politics based on this perception, a relative change began after the September 12 Military Coup and after the February 28 Postmodern Coup period. Today, there are indications of new perceptions and practices that differ from the past in the state's understanding of religion. The steps toward democratization taken by the AK Party Government in the public sphere, despite the opposition of secularist and Kemalist elites, have revealed that there are no reasonable or legitimate grounds for the fear of losing laicity. On the contrary, the efforts of the AK Party Government to extend religious freedoms in the public sphere may have led to the legitimization of the secular government in the eyes of some religious circles.

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