

## New Forms of Religiosity Within Secularization Process in Modern Turkey

<sup>1</sup>M. Ali Kirman and <sup>2</sup>Bülent Baloğlu

<sup>1</sup>Department of Philosophy and Sciences of Religion,

Faculty of Theology, Kahramanmaraş University, Kahramanmaraş, Turkey

<sup>2</sup>Counselor for Social and Religious Affairs, Turkish Embassy, Stockholm, Sweden

**Abstract:** Many religious movements have emerged and developed in a short time, which they represented “new religious forms”, in the industrialized western societies, especially in the USA in the second half of twenty century. These developments which have led to the discussion of classical secularization theory and given rise to de-secularization discussions, have been appeared in modern and nation-state Turkish society since 1980s. These developments which are viewed both world and Turkish society, have led to the emergence of new paradigms about secularization. It is understood that the relationship between religion and modernity or secularity is evolve as ‘compromise’ in place of ‘controversy’. In this paper, it will be discussed the reasons of “new religious forms” which are appeared in public sphere in Turkish case from the sociological perspective. At the same time, this paper resulted in new paradigms in spite of classical secularization theory. While Turkish people have adopted the modern and secular values, on the other hand they define themselves pious.

**Key words:** Religious movement • Religiosity • Secular state • Secularization • Modern values • Turkey

### INTRODUCTION

All advanced industrial societies in the world have been affected by rapid changes since the second part of twentieth century. These socio-economic and socio-cultural changes have inevitably affected the Muslim countries too. In this change period, since modern people suffered an identity crisis and searched for meaning in life and not satisfied with the current religious understanding, they went in search of new things, when they discovered they swiftly switched to them. As a result, new forms of popular religiosity and new spiritualities and many new religious movements have emerged. In another words, in modern societies which they have “risk society” [1] characteristics, it is a great need to “islands of security”. According to the recent surveys, the following things seem to be spreading in modern societies very rapidly: some forms of worship peculiar to individual, such as mysticism, esoterism and occultism; new quasi-religious movements and metaphysical teachings; alternative medicine, parapsychology, sorcery, tarot and astrology; belief in the imperceptible communication; contact with the dead; unphysical experiences; vast number of superstitions

regarding any numbers being lucky or unlucky; mystical and occult experiences; and trances etc [2]. Apparently, although a kind of world view that liberate men from mystical, mythical and transnatural beings has been created in modern world, human beings seem to have been surrounded by some new and strange sanctities whose borders have not been defined by any established religion [3]. All of these developments have seriously challenged the very existence and legitimacy of the classical theories of secularization which could be summarized quite simply as follows: the importance of religion in society will decline as the society has achieved a remarkable progress in the process of modernization.

Now, concepts such as “religious revivalism”, “de-secularisation”, “re-enchantment” and “God’s vengeance” have gained prominence almost in whole world. However, most sociologists, especially Bryan Wilson, one of the most brilliant and influential sociologists of religion of the past century, talked about the “rise of spiritualism” and a “return of the sacred”, rather than talking about “return of the religion”. Since new religions and new spiritualities, which were brought as the examples or evidences of religious revivalism, have emerged in secular societies and since they had a secular

colouring and were defined in secular terms, they are certainly the products of this process of secularization, let alone reverse it.

This global situation has some inevitable reflections on Turkish society. Zira social and religious history of modern Turkey depicts a status parallel to aforesaid proceedings observed in globalization process. In this paper, emphasis will be given on large scale changes and transformation practiced in religious domain, especially on the new religious forms emerging in the period of post-1980s which this period is received as a turning point in history of modern Turkey. In this paper, we will analyze the factors leading to the new religious forms in modern Turkey in sociological perspectives.

**New Religious Forms in Modern Turkey:** In recent years, especially in the period of post-1980s, we have witnessed some phenomenon which a rapid transformation took place regarding the relationship between the secularization and religion in Turkish society. Meanwhile, we happened to meet some concrete evidence indicating that there exists a kind of transition in the relationship between religion and secularization. Some specific examples may help illustrate how some religious people started displaying themselves within public domain with new forms of religiosity that also allow for entertainment: luxury holidays, weddings, ceremonies and receptions in five-star hotels, attendance at the fashion shows (Islamic fashion), going out for live concerts, music (Green pop), exhibits and sport events etc. [4]. We may also cite the following examples as a new forms of religiosity: the rapid increase in inter-faith marriages, especially an increased tolerance to young Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men; a growing tendency among artists, fashion models, sportsmen and high society people to make umrah and annual pilgrimage to the Ka'ba; firstly performing the morning prayers in the imperial mosques –i.e., *selatin* mosques built by the Ottoman sultans-, especially in Eyüp Sultan mosque and then having a big breakfast or brunch at the five-star hotels; despite apparent lack of will to perform the daily rituals and worship on a regular basis, sending messages to the relatives and friends through web or phones, celebrating their sacred religious nights and festivals [3].

These attitudes and behaviors which they are mostly presented by the conservative parts of society, are the patterns showing that the 'religious' is reflected to public sphere by connecting with the 'secular'. As for the patterns in the second category are attitudes and behaviors which they are observed in public sphere and

they are presented by those turn towards the 'religious', while they define themselves as modern and secular. Then new religiosities emerged in Turkish modernization/secularization process are signs of being closer religious/traditional and modern/secular. In other words, the tendency of '*closeness*' between religious/traditional values and modern/secular ones in place of '*contrary*' is observed in the socio-cultural changing process experienced in modern Turkey. As far as the relationship between religion and secularism is concerned, all of these activities, in one sense, might be seen as an indication for the shift from the conflict process to the compromise process.

In post-1980s, the modern educated recently urbanized second-generation young people whose parents came from countryside have developed a tendency toward the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. With their critical approach to the traditional Islam, they take on anti-modernist stand without being apologetic to western modernity in the name of an Islamic alternative model [5]. It is possible to call them as '*neo-fundamentalists*' by the word of Olivier Roy [6]. They are under the influence of religion (Islam), but they don't demand the political power. The state in their eyes is not an instrument for the transformation of society. But they are interested in making individuals to return to the faith. According to Roy, they may very well accept laicity as a rule of the game in the public square, but their lives are very religious in private [6].

It is worth to mention about the transition from "political Islam" to "light Islam" or "soft Islam" started with expressing the slogans made out of verse as rise of political comments of Islam in Turkey in 1980s [7], with expressing the religion is commercialized and light form Islam through a life where verse turned to an advertisement from being a slogan [8]. Actually this status recalls the transition perspective experienced during modernization period and yields that similar evolution is observed in Turkish society, for the evolution of religion being "object" in pre-modern, "subject" in modern and "merchandise" in post-modern societies [8]. As corollary, women veil "in name of religion" in the beginning, then for "political" symbol for advent of Islamic Law in 1980s and then after for a cosmetic accessories "in name of look beautiful", in a "commercial" nature [9].

As result of all these developments, a number of the religious groups and communities have been get visibility in Turkish public sphere. However they have some characteristics of sufi tradition, they emphasis on their

social and cultural functions other than their religious-mystic ones to maintain of their existence in secular public sphere. Therefore they are named “*yeni dinî cemaatler*” (new religious communities) in Turkish context [10]. So it is possible to appraise these groups as trade companies or firms producing and marketing religious commodity and services. Because they have met expectations and demands in modern and secular society. Therefore religious groups in modern Turkey exhibit a specter as they are very active in fields of activities committed in “*social and economic aid and solidarity*” like private hospital, polyclinic, health center, help and shelter provision for unemployed people; “*education and formation institution*” like scientific research, private schools, colleges, dormitories, guesthouses, schoolroom courses; being “*culture and research center*” for activities like publishing newspapers, periodic and books and arranging scientific meetings [11], as well as in “*mass communication*” like broadcasting in private radios and televisions and publishing daily newspapers and periodical magazines.

Like companies, religious communities working on presenting various commodities and services mostly in the field of economy, are in subject rather than classical organizations emphasizing religious-mystical dimension when it is talked about a religious group or a sect. As far as they are understood, new religious formations appear today exhibits quite a functional structure by providing various possibilities and choices to their members in social, political, economical and cultural fields.

It is known that religious communities in Turkey became quite active in their relation with money-business and capital as a result of liberal policies applied in 1980s. This process which was initiated in name of “disseminating religion” produced a result like the one is conquered who went for conquer. For instance, Islamic channels, which started to work on guiding people into the true faith, are dissolved in “show business” [8].

**Factors Leading to New Religious Forms:** Some conflicts and transitions brought by the new visibilities of Islam in public sphere forces us to make a sociological analysis of new forms of religiosity in terms of the relationship between religion and secularization in modern Turkey which obtained important gains during the process of modernization. In other words, for such analysis it is very important to try to understand how daily life of a Turk is realized in modern world.

As we know, new forms of religiosity which also permits entertainment serves a social function in society in the same way as novels, poems, caricatures and other literature works do. All these, alongwith their other characteristics, are a realm of reaction and they, from the sociological point of view, might be considered as a deep reflection of social transformation [12].

When we search for the reasons why we have an increase in new forms of religiosity in modern Turkey, we come across a number of factors. Here are some factors:

- The Turkish tradition of modern and secular state is not a new phenomenon; on the contrary it has deep historical roots.
- Implementation of liberal social and economic policies, especially economic privatization, after 1980s.
- Expansion and privatization of mass media (televisions, radios, newspapers and magazines).
- Expansion of education as a power of secularization within process of Turkish modernization.
- Change of attitudes in leisure, entertainment and holiday activities.

**The Turkish Tradition of Secular State:** It is also important to place an emphasis upon the reason why new forms of religiosity have not been visible in any other Islamic country but Turkey alone. We might give some explanation as to why it is. One explanation is that the Turkish tradition of modern and secular state is not a new phenomenon; on the contrary it has deep historical roots. Throughout history, the Turks have always had an independent state, lived freely and owned their own territories. Even after they accepted Islam, they had been a state in the centre, not a state in the periphery. They were never governed by theocratic state or principles. Today their state, Turkey, as a modern and secular nation-state, function as a cross-bridge between Islam and modernism.

As we know, after the defeat of Ottoman Empire in the first Great War, it was collapsed. From the ruins of that Empire, the new state of Turkey emerged with through the efforts of nationalist Turkish leaders headed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938).

After the proclamation of Republic in 1923, Turkey has been in transformation process into a modernized, industrialized and secularized nation-state. With the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 Atatürk,

who is founder and first president of modern Turkey, immediately embarked on the series of reforms [13] with the ultimate goal being the creation of a modern democratic, secular nation-states with advanced economy and a secular minded progressive people in the image of the western countries. The important thing that should be underlined here is that this set of reforms had already been started in the last years of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the westernization of Turkey mainly started with the Tanzimat (reorganisation) and Turkey has been following this path since then [9]. Although it looks like something new, infact, when we look closer to the arrangements which could be considered as the final steps of modernization movement started with Tanzimat, we notice that these arrangements were made for the aim of establishing “a secular socio-political structure” and “integrate Islam into a modern social fabric” instead of following the traditional order [14]. According to Bernard Lewis, “The basis of Kemalist religious policy was laicism, not irreligion; its purpose was not to destroy Islam, but to disestablish it.... In thus reducing Islam to the role of religion in a modern, Western, nation-state, the Kemalists also made some attempts to give their religion a more modern and more national form.” [15].

Two centuries of westernization and decades of radical policies in favor of secularism make Turkey the first—and up to now probably the only—Muslim country where a total separation of the political and the sacred has been implemented with success. It could be underlined the usual implications of the Turkish Model [16,17] as a ‘model of a secular, democratic, Muslim country, aiming to achieve Western standards, in partnership with the West, by applying liberal free-market policies. Especially after the attack of September 11, Turkey has been popularized in global agenda. In fact, today Turkey is an ideal secular Muslim democracy contrast to authoritarian and theocratic dictatorships in Muslim world, but has been some weakness [16]. In another statement, Turkey, with its secularization and modernization processes and changing religious landscape, is a modern and secular state in the way of European Union. So it is clear that Turkey, although her some deficiencies, obtained some acquisitions in the processes of secularization and modernization for a long time, approximately two centuries.

**Economic Development and Liberal Policies in Post-1980s:** The rise of new religiosities is seen as a product of various reasons in the process of urbanization and economical development in Turkey. As we know, in recent years, especially in the period of post-1980’s,

Turkey has achieved remarkable success in economic development. Related to economic success and grow, there had been a significant increase in the level of welfare.

After the army coup of September 12, 1980, the ANAP (Motherland Party) which headed by Turgut Özal (1983-1989) and represented a laissez-faire right-wing perspective came to power in 1983 [13, 18]. In 1980s, Özal, economics minister and later ‘civilian’ prime minister and eighth president, immediately embarked on the series of reforms and the free market mechanism was adopted as a principle in the economy. In his economic model, privatization was not merely a possible solution, but a scientific rule for escaping Turkey’s economic problems [18]. Turkey has been in transformation process into a liberal, modern and industrial nation-state.

Briefly it can be said that after 1980, state intervention in the economy has been reduced and the economy was opened to the outside. Therefore it is possible to say that the transformation is still continuing in Turkey.

Turkey has adapted new economic model based on market-oriented economy in 1980s. In this period, as a result of new economic and political liberalization and globalization processes, new forms of religiosity which the Turkish sociologist Nilüfer Göle, known for her studies on the relationship between modernity and Islam, calls these forms or new religiosities as “new public visibilities of Islam”[4], have also grown. At the same time, some tariqats and religious groups started to gain public visibility, social recognition, legitimacy and prestige. In other terms, in 1980’s we are witnessing pervasive influence of Islam in all spheres of the social and political arena in Turkey.

Until the late 1980s, there was only state television, but now there are several private channels that reflect the transformation and the plurality [18]. Special attention was paid to the different religious groups which are proscribed under Turkish law and have to operate in secrecy by Islamist mass media, included periodical, newspaper, radio and tv. With the help of diverse magazines and newspapers these groups began to express themselves and disseminate their ideas. For example, traditional gender roles stressed by religion are presented in these Islamist periodicals. In this period, the formation and expansion of Islamist groups were accelerated [9].

Another development in this period is to rise of economic Islam. Because the new economic restructuring and other various factors attracted many small businessmen, merchants and artisans to the big cities from the traditional-conservative provincial towns which

have been known with rural characteristics. This group who established their workplace with the help of jointly managed family concern has become small employers in working class of squatter neighbourhoods in metropolitan centers. This sector as a part of petit-bourgeois which is conservative and anti-socialistic in nature has grown very rapidly in the 1980s and partly contributed to the formation of foundations of Islamic businessmen with Islamic sensitives, they define themselves as "Anatolian Tigers", in 1990 [9]. The best known and the leading position of them is MUSIAD. There is no doubt that MUSIAD is the most important business organization claiming to carry an Islamic identity. With MUSIAD, Turkey has seen the emergence of economic Islam with its actors, strategies and discourses. [19].

Economical Islam has been rapidly developed led by petit-bourgeois which composed of middle class small traders. On the other hand, it has been widely benefited from the liberal socio-economical policies, especially by the economical privatization strategies. This economic sector has not good relationship with state, but it is very powerful position because by exporting its goods and services worldwide. This sector has widened its activities such as holds by establishing private hospitals and medical centers, private radios and tv channels, newspapers and periodicals, private schools and universities, academical journals, dormitories etc., especially after the 1980's. In addition to these activities providing resources (money, time, personals) mobilization, they try to support civil non-governmental organizations by way of charities, research institutes, clubs of thoughts and various platforms by way of research. May be the great effects of this social sector which contributed to societal level, the changes and transformations at the consumptions patterns of religious part of society which are expressed in every time of Islamic sensibilities. For example, education in abroad, knowing foreign language, holiday and wedding ceremonies in luxury hotels and dancing in various parties saloon of wedding, participating to the fashion exhibitions.

**Expanding Education and its Secularizing Power:** One of the reasons of increasing in new forms of religiosity is the substantial increase of number of educated people due to high rates of school attendance in Turkey. In Turkey, education, one of the most important indicators of modernization, becomes widespread and therefore the level of schooling rises day by day. As a result, today, in Turkey there is a university, or even universities, almost in every city [20].

Education is a secularizing power. It strengthens the secular and individual tendencies. It affects men's worldviews and religious understandings and helps them become subjects/individuals [21]. Individuals, along with their education and experience, transform, or at least try to transform the dynamics which constitute the sociality and sanctity around themselves. Although there have been many studies concerning this and one of them is particularly interesting. A research study made upon a graduation party organized by the students of Theology Faculty at Kahramanmaraş University (KSU) discovered some interesting findings can be taken as evidence for secularization. The most striking is that, in the opening ceremony, a student resigned from the organizing committee when his offer for the recitation of the Qur'an was refused by the other members of the committee. This incident could be interpreted as an evident example of a kind of experience of secularization lived by those theology students [20]. When another student gained entry to the Sociology department at the University of Bogazici, in the very first year he told that he would do an Islamic sociology, however he changed his mind after the graduation and told that he would do the sociology of Islam [22].

Ernest Gellner (1925-1995), a renowned sociologist and an outstanding theorist of modernity, claimed that scriptualism has a much better chance to maintain its existence in modern context as the level of education increases. He further claimed that as modern nation-states were being formed and as the ratio of urbanization increased, traditional Sufism, which is the foundation of popular Islam, will disappear; in other words, the reason of its disappearance will be the strong influence of modernization [23]. Despite the fact that his prediction could be considered as being more assertive, it also expresses a fact. Since 1950s, especially in the post-1980 period, more individual and more liberal religious understanding is apparently being developed in Turkey. However, there is one thing Gellner missed that despite their traditionalist posture, Sufi orders and the movements with ascetic tendency have also undergone significant changes and developed during modernization.

At times these people tend to mystic formations believing that these formations may contribute to their senses and feelings, against to rationality of modern and secular world in spite of their high educational levels. In fact, in global world the mystic and religious order groups have tended to rise against to the rationality of modernism.

On the other hand in relation with the increase in the level of education, almost every one, whether he/she is a member of a certain sect or not, tried to reach directly to the sacred scriptures and their historical interpretations. As a result of these changes and developments, while people were aiming to have lived their religions intensively through use of modern technological instruments and being urged or incited by those instruments they were in the position of heading towards new forms of entertainment and consumption. Therefore, new forms of religiosity or new “hybrid patterns” [24], which combined religious and secular values but not-yet-synthesized them, started to come out.

It is known that individuals’ level of education has much influence on accepting more liberal interpretations of religion. Education, as the agent of sociability, contributes to the intellectual and cognitive development of human being. Hence it is known that those individuals, who are not completely integrated into the educational system, are most likely to accept conservative moral attitudes, on the other hand, those, who are well educated, are most likely to adopt liberal moral attitudes [25]. To be more precise, there is a close connection between the level of education and religious attitudes. For instance, in a scholarly research made in the Christian world put forward that the level of education is higher among a predominantly Protestant population that attaches more importance to the freedom of expression than Catholic majorities [26]. Some related surveys on religious life are also being carried out in the Turkey [27,28], according to which daily religious rituals and practices are performed intensively in the villages and towns where the literacy level, in general, is low. On the other hand, the tendency to embrace secular-rational values is growing day by day among the university students and in the cities with high literacy and schooling level [29]. Especially according to a survey focused on the students in the Faculty of Theology and also made comparisons between three universities, the theology students opted for secular choices rather than religious ones [30]. Similar results were obtained in a survey carried on the theology students’ attitudes regarding choosing a friend or a spouse [31].

**Leisure, Entertainment and Holiday Activities:** Another factor which effects on emerging of new forms of religiosity that also allows for entertainment is leisure.

During the process of change took place from traditional society towards industrial society, one of the important problems people faced was “passing spare times”. From the sociological perspective, “spare time” or

“free time” ever gains more importance as a significant social institution [32]. Alongwith modernization, passing spare times and culture of entertainment started to gain significance and a wide variety of ways to spend and enjoy. There had been important changes in the ways people consume and entertain.

Entertainment has always been a part of everyone's life; and it has important psychological, sociological and economical functions in the lives of people. It should also be added that one of the functions of entertainment is to create social adaptation, cohesion and solidarity and this is valid and common to both modern and primitive societies. Thus, Emile Durkheim, in his work on the religious life of primitive people [33], suggested that collective religious rituals and festivals are necessary to bring together the members of a religious group and furthermore, they are also good opportunities to solidify the social bond and connection between them.

From a sociological point of view, entertainment contributes not only to social integration, but also to economic and cultural development. Thus, Max Weber, one of the leading scholars of modern sociology, claimed that during the socio-economical and cultural development of Europe, there had been a significant decrease in churches’ preaching fear of hell, or describing vivid pictures of the tortures of hell and damnation and in parallel to this, people preferred to attend to the sermons on God’s mercy and grace. According to Martin Lipset, an American political sociologist, when the horrible economic catastrophe emerged in 1930, the sermons given in the American Protestant churches that attracted the European people’s attention the most, or they liked the most were the ones that talked about tyrants and cruel oppressors would go to hell [34].

It has been assumed that, within the Islamic tradition, there had been a conflict, or at least an irreconcilableness between religion and the culture of entertainment. It has also been thought that entertainment was forbidden by the religion. Even today, it is possible to meet those who defend the idea that the religion of Islam is against music and even try to show the religion as hostile to it. In fact, we meet with a realistic view when we look at the first period of Islam. There are ample evidence show that the Prophet of Islam gave permission to play musical instruments in wedding ceremonies and religious festivals and also allowed professional female singers to perform their special dances and sing songs during joyous ceremonies like marriage, circumcision and other similar festive occasions; he did not see any inconvenience in permitting children to play in mosques [35].

On the other hand, since there is no Qur'anic verse indicating a prohibition for music and entertainment and the related regulations are made through Prophetic traditions, the subject matter is related with "culture" rather than with the "divine". So it is quite possible to conclude that such form of religiosity which approves entertainment is a cultural and secular reality.

In this context, it could be said that entertainment culture takes place within the habits and customs of civilized life. Thus, the 14<sup>th</sup> century historian and scholar Ibn Khaldun is of the opinion that music, a distinct and worthy form of art, receives a wide acception by the culturally and socially developed population of a city or area [36]. According to Olivier Roy, a leading French analyst of Islam, the reason for entertainment culture's being rudimentary in Muslim societies which he labeled as "bleak" is the perception of the worship in Muslims' minds as the only behaviour pattern. To Roy "there is no Islamic leisure activities" [37]. It should be mentioned, however, that his description of the Muslims societies as "bleak" is a straightforward generalization. He might have done this generalization because of the deperate living conditions in the underdeveloped Muslim countries.

Especially, one of the reasons that the radical and fundamental movements have been unsuccessful is their negative attitude towards entertainment. It is known that ideological and tight-knit organizations, whether religious or political, deny the right to live in freedom. A leftist writer, known for his critical and analytical capacity, formulates it succinctly as follows: "If an ideology has no life, there is no life for that ideology" [38].

### CONCLUSION

Emerging of new forms of religiosity in Turkish society shows us that the Turkish people question the relationship between religion and modernism. In this context, there seems to be a rapprochement in their understanding of religion and the world. So, Turkish people adopt modern and secular values in one hand. In other hand they see themselves religious. The rise in religious awakening does not necessarily constitute an impediment to tendency of secularization; on the contrary, it, having encompassed secularization, proceeds towards a new synthesis. Since this new synthesis is yet to become a reality, for the time being there is a kind of hybridization, i.e. side-by-side positions, but not blended

with each other completely. While there had been important progress in that respect, it is quite possible to say that there are many many failures and shortcomings should be overcome.

The new form of relationship observed between religion and modernization in the Turkish society evokes the "transformation of intimacy" [39]. In this global environment as known to us, the borders of hiding and revealing have changed. While once they do exist on their own in private and public realms, now they can exist side by side in public realm. The clear signs of this phenomenon can be observed in newspapers and television programs. Now there is also replacement along with subversion/displacement [39]. While displacement mechanisms remove social relations from their original place and time, they also offer new chances for their replacement [40]. In the Turkish society, various attempts to combine Islamic values with modern ones can also be considered as a search for a synthesis. Göle's use of "demolished wall-constructed wall" simile is quite explanatory at this point [4]. According to this, the prohibition of entertainment in the traditional Islamic understanding might be understood as "demolished walls or borders", while the today's approval of moderate entertainment as "constructed wall".

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