Malaysian Journal of International Relations, Volume 9, 2021, 105-119
ISSN 2289-5043; e-ISSN 2600-8181
doi.org/10.22452/mjir.vol9no1.6

SECULARISM AND RISE OF SUNNI ISLAM IN TURKEY: THE OTHERISATION OF THE ALEVIS

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ABSTRACT

State-religion relationship is one of the elements which shape state-society relationship, and this relationship determines the quality of democracy. Alevi citizens in Turkey have been suffering from unequal treatment in terms of state attitude towards their religious freedom and education. Turkey has a sui generis secularisation background which is identified as not having equal distance to all belief systems. Turkish style secularism represents an understanding which has alienated the Alevi citizens and seen them as the "others". The Directorate of Religious Affairs was established to introduce and promote a specific understanding of religion, namely Sunni Islam. In this study, the concept of "otherness" in the constitution of Turkish national identity will be employed as an analytical tool in exploring how state-religion relationship in Turkey has been an important factor producing inequalities between citizens leading to discrimination towards the Alevi identity. In this regard, the role of the Directorate of Religious Affairs will also be discussed while focusing on the rise of Sunni Islam.

Keywords: otherisation, secularism, Alevis in Turkey, Directorate of Religious Affairs, Sunni Islam.

INTRODUCTION

This article is an attempt to analyse the *sui generis* dynamics of state-religion relationship in Turkey with a special emphasis on the Alevi citizens. Turkish style secularism is similar to the French secularism experiment wherein the state controls religion rather than giving it an autonomous space. In this regard, secularism practices in Turkey most of the time, not only undermine democracy, but also reproduce the otherisation of the Alevi identity, while paving the way for the rise of Sunni Islam. It should be noted that, Alevism cannot be taken as the counterpart of Sunni Islam as it is mainly seen as a different interpretation within Islam, not a totally different religious sect.

Some of the crucial questions posed in this article are as follows:

- What are the characteristics of the practices of secularism and secularisation history in Turkey?
- How did Sunni Islam rise in this secularisation history?
- What are the main secularism conceptions on a theoretical basis?
- How can Turkish secularism be evaluated as against different secularism conceptions?

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- How can Alevism be defined in the Turkish context?
- How can "otherness" be related to Alevis, while addressing Turkish style of secularism and modernisation history?
- How does the Directorate of Religious Affairs harm democracy and pave the way for the erosion of the equal citizenship principle?

As the theoretical framework, through using the conceptual tools of "assertive and passive secularism" and "otherness", this article aims to cover Turkish style secularism vis-à-vis its impact upon Alevi citizens. Based on this, first, a historical overview regarding nation-building process and secularisation policies will be scrutinised. Secondly, secularism conceptions as well as Turkish secularism will be addressed. Next, otherisation as a policy of national identity formation will be evaluated. Following this, the competing definitions of Alevism will be addressed along with the Alevi citizens as the "others" in Turkey. Lastly, **t**he institutional and legal setting and the role of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA-*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) in shaping the relations between the state and the Alevi citizens will be examined. In this regard, the role of the Directorate of Religious Affairs will be discussed vis-à-vis democracy and equal citizenship debates.

The main argument of this study is that the understanding of secularism, and secularism practices in Turkey, and state institutions such as the Directorate of Religious Affairs, have been eroding democracy through the harming of the principle of equal citizenship between the Alevi citizens and the Sunni citizens.

SECULARISATION AND SECULARISM PRACTICES IN TURKEY FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

There is a need to make an overview of the relationship between state and religion in a historical perspective, and to discuss how this had influenced the Alevi citizens, in order to analyse the basic dynamics of secularism in the Turkish context. In this vein, the modernisation process Turkey underwent is important.

The Turkish modernisation experience has its roots in the Ottoman Empire. This process began in the 1800s (*Tanzimat* Era). During these years, the first steps towards a secular understanding were taken. After the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the secularisation attempts became the most defining side of the Kemalist reform movements (Zürcher, 2004, p. 186). The modernisation process in Turkish history was carried out in a top-down fashion. The nation-builders had favoured an authoritarian understanding of secularism and modernisation. The official ideology – Kemalism, had been the main determinant in this process. Atatürk[1] and his friends determined the limits of the Turkish national identity in this process. The state elites defined the ideal citizen as a secular Turk adopting Sunni Islam. In this regard, the Alevi citizens have been seen as the "others" of the Republic.

According to sociologist Nilufer Göle (1997), there has been an inherent power conflict between secular elites and Islamist elites in Turkey, fueled by two different

worldviews. Following Göle, it can be said that this power conflict has its roots in the early Republican era, known as the single party years. During the single party era, the policies were implemented with the aim to secularise state bureaucracy, education, and legal system. The secularisation of social life was carried out as well. To this aim, the suppression of the dervish orders, and the small lodges (religious brotherhoods) were witnessed in 1925. These religious brotherhoods had served major social functions throughout Ottoman history. According to Zürcher, state elites extended the scope of secularisation from formal Islam to "popular Islam", and this move triggered the resentment of the masses (Zürcher, 2004). It is to be noted that the single party years which lasted for more than two decades were the years witnessing the rise of Sunni Islam. In this regard, Sunni Islam was used as a tool to establish a national identity based on a secular worldview.

The early reforms carried out by the Republican elites targeted the removal of the role of Islam in political sphere and the administrative structure. The Caliphate, symbolising the unity of all Muslims throughout the world, was abolished. All religious schools were closed, and the educational system was unified under the Ministry of Education. Islam was put under state control through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) which was founded in 1924. The DRA was given its first law in 1935. Up to that point, the DRA owed its legal status to budgetary bills and had no other legal basis determining its organisational structure (Mertcan, 2013). As a result of the ban on religious institutions, such as the dervish orders in the early Republican era, the DRA has been the main institution for religious references for more than nine decades (Gözaydın, 2009). In addition to that, the DRA has also been the one and only state institution upon which Sunni Islam has been established and promoted in line with secular ideals.

It should be noted that, despite the secularisation efforts in the single party years, Sunni Islam continued to remain as one of the major identity references shaping the fabric of Turkish society (Küçükcan, 2003, p. 490). According to Binnaz Toprak (2005, p. 30) the single party years and secularism experiment in this era can be characterised as the following:

> *"The new republic would undertake a series of reforms both to emancipate the women, and to destroy the influence of Islam in education, law, and public administration. At the same time, all religious brotherhoods of unorthodox Islam, the folk Islam—which they found to be the force behind the popular ignorance of rational thought—had to be banned in the effort to create a new nation of men and women who would be guided by positivist ideas of reason."*

On the other hand, the transition into multi-party politics paved the way for the relaxation of the official attitude towards religion. This move put an end to the period of heavy state control over religion. When the Democrat Party (DP) came to power under the leadership of Adnan Menderes, the state's strict policies on secularism began to relax. The DP led to the softening of the strict secularisation programme of the single party years. The Arabic call to prayer was legitimised again. It is known that many of the votes for the DP

came from conservative and rural areas (Weiker, 1963). During the DP's rule, close links were established with religious brotherhoods, and the DP was accused by the secular circles of islamising the country. It is known that the military elites intervened to restore the Kemalist order on May 27, 1960.

The 1970s witnessed tense political polarisation and street clashes, and finally in 1980, a fully-fledged military intervention took place, and the militarisation of politics and society were witnessed. In the aftermath of the 1980 military coup, a new state-led ideology called the Turkish-Islamic synthesis (*Türk-İslam Sentezi*) was promoted. The number of vocational high schools (*İmam Hatip Lisesi)* increased in these years. Turkish-Islamic synthesis was used as an instrument against communist threat in those years.

By the 1990s, the alliance between Islamism and the state dissolved. Islamism which the state had supported under the framework of Turkish-Islamic synthesis during the Cold War years as an antidote to the leftist ideology, had become far more powerful than expected. The Islamist Welfare Party came to power in this atmosphere. It should be noted that the issue of secularism has been the most triggering factor in paving the way for a state crisis in the late 1990s in Turkey. The Welfare Party under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan became one of the coalition partners. Political Islamism as an ideology alarmed the secularist circles and a military intervention called "The February 28 Process" broke out in 1997. After this intervention in 1997, known as the "post-modern coup", the Erbakan-led coalition government had to resign and secularist policies were adopted in a strict way (Burak, 2011).

The state-religion relationship in the aftermath of the February 28 Process used to have an authoritarian nature. One of the main aims of the military was to ban the headscarves in all schools and public buildings. In this process, legal regulations were carried out to empower military elites in the political realm. One of these legal regulations was the Public Act of The Prime Ministry Crisis Management Centre. This Public Act was used as a tool of the military to have a role in political affairs (Burak, 2011, p. 153). Another major impact of post-modern coup on political sphere was the split in Islamist political movement. The National Outlook Movement was split, and later the Justice and Development Party (JDP) came into being under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

During the early 2000s, there were basically two diverging understandings of secularism: illiberal secularism that was dominant throughout the February 28 Process, and secularism that dominated the discourses of the top JDP elites. The JDP officials defined Islam within the framework of a conservative content, and ultimately it has become rooted in the society (Taşkın, 2008). The JDP redefined secularism in line with passive secularism (Kuru, 2009). The JDP elites redefined secularism in the party programme. Accordingly, secularism was defined as a principle to protect religious pluralism without any discrimination or pressure from the state:

> *"Our party considers religion as one of the most important institutions of humanity and secularism as a prerequisite of democracy and an assurance of the freedom of religion and conscience. It also rejects the interpretation*

> *and distortion of secularism as enmity against religion. Basically, secularism is a principle which allows people of all religions and beliefs to comfortably practice their religions to be able to express their religious convictions and live accordingly, but which also allows people without beliefs to organise their lives along these lines. From this point of view, secularism is a principle of freedom and social peace."*
>
> (Axiarlis, 2014, p. 72)

The redefinition of secularism as the guarantee of religious freedom has paved the way for the JDP elites to actualise the major demands of its religious electoral base without ever challenging the constitutional principle of secularism (Akyol, 2019). Moreover, during the JDP governments, the Sunni orthodoxy has been prioritised and the Directorate of Religious Affairs has been granted a larger budget. However, it should also be said that state policies concerning religion under JDP rule have been undertaken in a more liberal way than previous years. The lift of the headscarf ban in public offices in 2013 can be seen as an important step towards a more liberal secularism approach in Turkish political history.

THE CONCEPTIONS OF SECULARISM AND SECULARISM ALLA TURCA

The concept of secularism was first introduced in 1846 by George Jacob Holyoake who defined secularism as a "way of living which can only be tested by experiences of this life and dealing with problems of this world." It can be said that a secular state derives the legitimacy of its existence, as well as its laws and policies, only from secular sources. As a philosophy, secularism interprets life based on values derived solely from the material world, without recourse to religion. Thus, it shifts the focus from religion towards material concerns (cited in Roznai, 2017). Secularism can basically be defined as the separation of politics from religion. There are two kinds of separations. The first refers to the separation with exclusion. The second means the separation to create distance between the two (Raz, 1986, p. 109). A secular state must be anti-religious. This anti-religiosity may be either interventionist or non-interventionist. In its interventionist form, the state actively excludes religion known as "laicism".

It should be stated that laicism and secularism hold different ways about how to organise the relationship between state and religion. These concepts have two mutual elements: (1) a separation between state and religion, and (2) freedom of religion. Secularism is described as being more tolerant toward the public visibility of religion; a secular state is expected to play a passive role and such a state allows religious symbols to exist within the public sphere. By contrast, laicism means that the state plays a more active role excluding religious visibility from the public domain (Kuru, 2009). Laicism is known as a unique feature of French context. It emerged after the 1789 French Revolution with the aim of separating state and religion in a certain way. According to laicism, religion should have no autonomy and there should be a heavy state control over religion. Apart from that, secularism cannot be evaluated as a monolithic practice. A secular government is neutral towards all religions and religious groups. However, there are different models

of secularism. For instance, the French model is known as 'assertive secularism' which addresses the subjection of religion to the state authority. By contrast, the Anglo-Saxon model is known as 'passive secularism' - referring to the meaning of autonomy of religion from the state authority. Ahmet Kuru (2009) notes that in the Anglo-Saxon world, especially in the United States, the dominant ideology is passive secularism which allows public visibility of religion. By contrast, the dominant ideology in countries such as France is assertive secularism which confines religion to the private sphere.

On the other hand, with respect to the Turkish type of secularism, it can be said that Turkey has experienced neither a linear nor a fixed secularisation history. Depending on the governments and political leaders, secularism practices have changed. For instance, in the early Republican years, especially in the single party period, Turkish style secularism was very much like the French type of assertive secularism. The Turkish state has always tried to regulate and control Islam for its own purposes. However, with the multiparty system, new political spaces for Islamic movements started to work closely with political parties (Öztürk and Sözeri, 2018, p. 632). In these years, a certain degree of liberalisation was witnessed in state-religion relationships. However, it is important to shed light on the 1997 post-modern coup process to understand the authoritarian practices state exercised towards religion. In these years, Turkish type of secularism had been criticised for its undemocratic tendencies. When the military staged a "post-modern coup" against the government, secularism was intensely instrumentalised by the military to justify the military intervention.

Under the JDP rule, the secularism policies started to become liberalised. As noted earlier, the lift of the headscarf ban in public buildings can be seen as a key step towards a more liberal state-religion relationship in Turkish political history. Apart from that, with regards to Alevi citizens, the launch of Alevi Opening in 2007 was another significant development for adopting a more liberal secularism understanding. The Alevi Opening can be seen as a turning point in terms of the Turkish governments' approach to problems of Alevi citizens. The Alevi Opening can be evaluated as the first systematic effort to address the Alevis' identity-based demands. However, this initiative could not become sufficient in the elimination of the "otherness" attached to the Alevi identity in Turkish political history.

OTHERISATION AS A POLICY OF NATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION

Nation-building and national identity formation processes are interrelated processes generally promoted by elites as tools for state-formation. Nation-building can be seen as a state-driven project which evokes a common identity to form unity within the state boundaries. Nation-building is defined as "the process whereby the inhabitants of a state's territory come to be loyal citizens of that state." (Bloom, 1990, pp. 54-55).

Homogenisation has been a critical policy adopted by state elites in the nation-building process in many different contexts. Homogenisation can be defined as the socio-political process of providing cultural homogeneity. This step is taken by elites who often

engage in social engineering. In this context, homogenisation can be viewed as an elite-driven policy to impose socio-cultural changes which aim to achieve cultural uniformity (Conversi, 2007, p. 372). Otherisation is an important ingredient for homogenisation efforts. The attribution of "otherness" to some specific identities helps elites establish a homogeneous national identity. According to Anthony Giddens (1985), the process of nation-building has a cultural dimension. Giddens observes that the unity within the state cannot remain administrative because the coordination of activities requires cultural homogeneity, and this requires otherisation of some groups.

The nation-building process can be defined as the process whereby elites attempt to overlap political and national units. To achieve this overlap, the elites construct and impose a common national identity on the masses. Therefore, construction of a national identity can be regarded as one of the major dimensions of nation-building. Identity formation can be seen as the sum of cultural interventions as the centre (elites) establishes a specific identity on the periphery (masses). The elites establish a national identity for the whole population (Utz, 2005).

Chantal Mouffe (1993) argues that identity formation is generally based on exclusion and on establishing a hierarchy between two poles. This neatly illustrates that any social objectivity is constituted through acts of power and needs to show traces of exclusion. The national identity can be defined by highlighting its others. Stuart Hall (1996, p. 5) explains that it is only through the relation to the "other", the relation to what it is not that the positive meaning of any term - and its identity - can be established. The role of the others in building identities is significant. About this role, Seyla Benhabib (1996, p. 3) opines the following:

> *"Since every search for identity includes differentiating oneself from what one is not, identity politics is always and necessarily a politics of the creation of difference. One is a Bosnian Serb to the degree to which one is not a Bosnian Moslem or a Croat; one is a Gush Emmunim settler in the West Bank to the extent that one is not a secular Zionist [. . .]. What is shocking about these developments, is not the inevitable dialectic of identity/difference that they display, but rather the atavistic belief that identities can be maintained and secured only by eliminating difference and otherness."*

Anthony Smith explains national identity as the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of values and traditions that make the distinctive heritage of nations (Smith, 2001, p. 18). Following this, it can be said that, in the process of national identity formation, otherisation of some identities is an inevitable policy for many nation-building experiments in different contexts. In a similar vein, the nation-building experiment in the Turkish context witnessed the otherisation of some particular identities like that of the Kurdish identity, the non-Muslim identity, and the Alevi identity.

DEFINITIONS OF ALEVISM AND ALEVI CITIZENS AS THE "OTHERS" OF THE TURKISH REPUBLIC

Alevism does not have a tradition of authoritative religious scholarship and carriers of formal education. Alevism can broadly be defined as a way of life shared by Alevis living in Turkey. It can be seen as a mixture of Sunni Islam with Sufi elements such as those of the Bektashi religious group. Contemporary Alevism is heterogeneous, and this makes the definition of Alevism problematic. Alevism is neither an object that can be seen nor a phenomenon that can be understood in an easy way (Koçan and Öncü, 2004).

Alevism cannot be seen as a different religion from Islam. Alevism can be treated as a different interpretation within Islam. However, there are different Alevi groups having different identities. It is known that the Anatolian Alevis are different from the Alawites (*Nusayri*) based in Syria and Morocco. The Anatolian Alevism is widespread in Turkey and in the Balkan region. Most of the Anatolian Alevis are originally Turkmenic (Çaha, 2004). The Alevis originated from the Persian Safavis during the 13th century. The name "*Kızılbaş*" (red head) was used for the people who wore a red rag on their heads instead of the term Alevi before the 16th century (Çaha, 2004, p. 327).

Ethnically and linguistically, the majority of Alevis in Turkey are Turkish speaking and they have not been exposed to the challenges of ethnic homogenisation as much as the Kurdish speaking Alevis (Köse, 2013, p. 592). After the foundation of the Turkish Republic, Alevis faced waves of state actions that affected their faith and identity drastically. As noted earlier, the Alevis faced religious and sectarian challenges as a result of homogenisation policies in the early Republican era.

In the formation of the nation-state, the establishment of Turkish national identity required the otherisation of some identities such as the Alevi identity. The 'otherness' becomes more complicated when the state is seen as the political extension of a nation where social communities are reduced to the national entity (Aunina, 2018). If one group dominates in the nation-building process, the enjoyment of citizenship rights becomes associated with the interests of the dominant group which causes otherisation (Mostov, 1994; Kymlicka, 1995).

As noted earlier, in the early years of the Republic, an important policy for religious homogenisation that otherised the Alevi citizens was the law on the dissolution of lodges. This law banned the use of religious titles related to Alevi identity. Moreover, Islam was put under state control through the Directorate of Religious Affairs. With the transition from the Ottoman Empire to a Republican regime, the new ideal was to build a secular-based nation. This ideal has had important consequences for Alevi citizens. Alevis have been seen as one of the groups that official state ideology (Kemalism) should be imposed upon.

With the end of the single-party rule, the Alevis voted for the DP as a negative reaction towards the Republican People's single-party rule policies. Beginning in the 1960s, the Alevis began to associate themselves with the leftist ideology (Bardakçı, 2015,

p. 351). In late 1970s, the Alevi citizens were among the actors in political and ideological clashes, while the 1980s saw the explosion of Alevi publications as Alevis reacted to the pressures of political Islam.

In the 1990s, identity politics was on the rise and with this, the majority of the Alevis started to see Alevism as a source of cultural identity (Karaosmanoğlu, 2013). In the 1990s, noteworthy events concerning Alevi citizens broke out in Turkey. The Madımak Affair in 1993 was one of these events. Madımak is a city located in Sivas which is highly populated with the Alevi people. A cultural festival was organised in the Madımak Hotel. Sunni masses were angered as writer Aziz Nesin announced his intention of publishing Satanic Verses by Salman Rushdie in this festival. A mob after Friday prayer broke the sculpture of Pir Sultan Abdal (an Alevi historical figure) and sieged the Madımak Hotel. 37 people perished in this fire, and the police forces failed to intervene in time to prevent the catastrophe (Köse, 2012, p. 579). The Madımak Affair greatly affected the Alevi youth. It contributed to the organisation of the Alevis and the acquisition of an identity by the Alevi citizens. It accelerated the institutionalisation of associations with the Alevi name (Burak, 2015, p. 191).

On the other hand, the 2000s can be seen as different from the previous decade in relation to state policies towards the Alevi citizens. Under the JDP rule, an initiative of a three-stage Alevi plan that foresaw the provision of financial assistance to cem houses ("gathering houses" - places of worship for the Alevi people), extending them legal recognition, along with setting up an institution for the representation of Alevi citizens, was carried out (Milliyet, November 24, 2007). In this sense, the Alevi Opening initiative was launched in 2007. The Alevi Opening was critical in terms of the state's approach to the problems of Alevi citizens. The Alevi Opening can be evaluated as the first systematic initiative to address Alevis' identity-based demands. This step was a part of the broader policy of "Democratic Opening". One of the Alevi demands in this process was the recognition of gathering houses, and the second one was about the status of the Directorate of Religious Affairs. However, the Alevi Opening could not produce concrete positive outcomes for Alevi citizens. The JDP government held seven workshops from June 3, 2009, to January 30, 2010, to address the Alevi citizens' problems. These important steps, i.e., the Alevi Opening and workshops that were organised to solve the problems of Alevi citizens, were not sufficient to meet the demands of Alevi citizens. Despite these steps, budget and staff structure of the DRA was strengthened under the JDP rule, and the Alevi citizens were not satisfied as these steps were not taken to reshape the Directorate of Religious Affairs which is an organisation promoting Sunni Islam financed by the taxes of all citizens.[2]

THE DIRECTORATE OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

The Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) was established in 1924 to replace the Ottoman Ministry of Religious Affairs and Foundations. The DRA aimed to represent the Sunni Islam, and through this institution the state aimed to put religious activities under control. It can be said that the Directorate of Religious Affairs has been one of the most

controversial institutions in Turkey. The DRA is responsible for appointing *imams* and *muezzins* (religious civil servants), who are its salaried employees, as well as being responsible for the oversight of mosques. The DRA as a government agency led to the exclusion and discrimination of Alevi citizens and this has created crisis repeatedly.

The DRA was organised according to the Sunni interpretation of Islam. The monopoly of DRA over religious life narrowed the legal grounds for religious pluralism in the Turkish Republic. In the single party period, the DRA witnessed excessive state control. After the transition to multi-party system, in the years of the Democrat Party rule, one of the biggest problems of the Directorate was the shortage of trained personnel. The Director of the DRA of the time - Ahmed Hamdi Akseki, accused the Ministry of Education of failing to educate people for the DRA. Akseki stated that it was impossible to find trained people to lead the prayers (Akseki, 1951). With the aim to fight this problem, Preachers Schools (*İmam Hatip Okulları*) and Higher Islamic Institute were opened in 1951 (Ulutaş, 2010).

It is known that the 1960 military coup did not make fundamental changes in the organisation of the DRA. However, some important steps were taken to propose changes in the structure of the DRA. The MEHTAP (Central Government Organisation Research Project) was a comprehensive project regarding central government functions, and it also proposed specific changes to the authority of the DRA (Dinçer and Ersoy, 1974).

On the other hand, a major change was undertaken in 1976 regarding the role of the DRA outside Turkey. The Directorate was given the authority to open representative offices abroad. With this regulation, the Directorate became an organisation that oversaw religious affairs not only in Turkey, but also outside the borders of Turkey (Ulutaş, 2010). It can be said that through this regulation, the Turkish government found more opportunities to promote Sunni Islam in some countries, causing further otherisation of the Alevi community in these countries.

Article 136 of the newly-drafted 1982 Constitution regulated a department of religious affairs within the general administration after the 1980 military coup. This is known as the Directorate of Religious Affairs. The employees of this institution are civil servants, and its funds are appropriated from the budget of the administration. The Directorate is responsible for the regulation of the religious life of all Sunni Muslim citizens. The bureaucracy of DRA has grown to considerable size and scope after the 1980 military coup. With the arrangements made in 2010, the DRA was raised from the general directorate to the level of undersecretary. Its budget has increased significantly in the last 10 years as its staff in central and provincial organisations increased. In an interview, politics and law professor İştar Gözaydın (2020) argued that the DRA can be seen as one of the most important ideological tools of modern Turkey. According to Gözaydın, the DRA can be seen as important as the Turkish Armed Forces. Under the JDP rule, the position of the Directorate as an institution was strengthened and many improvements have been made in its budget and personnel conditions. During the JDP era, the presidents of the Directorate played prominent and active social and political roles (Gibson, 2008). These active roles of the Directorate have been influential in the further alienation of the Alevi

citizens in Turkey as the DRA has not only regulated religious sphere, but it has also played critical roles in political and societal realms based on Sunni Islam.

The debates on the Directorate of Religious Affairs centre around three positions: Alevis propose abolishing the DRA, while others propose changes in the structure and functions of DRA. It is also argued that the existence of such an institution is not compatible with the principle of secularism. However, Ali Bardakoğlu (2004, p. 16) who worked as the director of the DRA noted that the Directorate of Religious Affairs is a public institution and the debates whether this contradicts with secularism are related with the way one views secularism.

CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to focus on the Alevi citizens in Turkey from the perspective of Turkish style of secularism and national identity formation processes. Turkey has a unique secularism understanding that has not been compatible with a democratic form of state-society relationship. Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the Alevi citizens have been treated as the "others" of the Republic. The Alevi citizens in Turkey have been subjected to discrimination in two general ways. The first is related to the secularism policies promoting Sunni understanding of Islam and ignoring the Alevi citizens' belief practices. The second is related to the nation-building process through which Sunni identity has been defined as a major component of Turkish national identity. It can be argued that Turkish style secularism is similar to the French type of secularism wherein the state has control over religion rather than giving it an autonomous space. In this regard, it can be said that most of the time (except for some steps such as the release of democratisation openings), secularism practices in Turkey have not only undermined democratic principles, but they have also reproduced the otherisation of the Alevi identity.

The otherisation of the Alevi identity is generally performed in two ways: through legal mechanisms and through institutional channels. The 1982 Constitution notes that education and instruction in religion and ethics shall be conducted under state supervision. According to the Constitution, the instruction in religious culture education shall be compulsory in primary and secondary schools. This mandatory religious education undermines the principle of equality of opportunities because the children of Alevi citizens are forced to take courses based on the Sunni understanding of Islam. This mandatory religious education can be seen as an illiberal state policy of the otherisation of the Alevi citizens in Turkey and it is completely incompatible with liberal democracy.

In terms of institutional basis, alla Turca secularism has subordinated religion to state authority through the Directorate of Religious Affairs. Based on Article 136 of the 1982 Constitution, the DRA has to exercise its duties in accordance with the principle of secularism, removed from all political views. However, İştar Gözaydın (2014, p. 13) argues that the state makes use of the Directorate as an administrative instrument to indoctrinate and propagate the official ideology and Turkish national identity that are based on Sunni Islam. This indoctrination reproduces the otherisation of Alevi citizens at a considerable

degree. The DRA has undertaken responsibility for making the state's control over religion and playing a role in reproducing national identity. However, the DRA has been a controversial state institution undermining the principle of secularism and paving the way for the otherisation of Alevi citizens.

It is to be noted that, Article 10 of the Turkish Constitution prohibits any kind of discrimination by the state towards the citizens. In this sense, it can be said that the DRA is seen as an institution that violates Article 10 because Article 136 of the Constitution which requires the Directorate "*to exercise its duties prescribed in its particular law in accordance with the principles of secularism*" is problematic. Governments have made concessions to get the support of the Sunni electorate, expanding the role and impact of Sunni Islam through empowering the DRA. In this context, the DRA has been used for serving political purposes which has ultimately undermined the principle of equal citizenship in Turkey and led to further discrimination of the Alevi citizens.

In Turkey, it is impossible to discuss the relationship between secularism and democracy without making reference to Turkey's top-down modernisation process. Turkey's modernisation process witnessed the otherisation of certain identities as a result of attempting to create a homogeneous national identity. Following Chantal Mouffe (1993), it can be said that identity formation is most of the time based on exclusion and on establishing a hierarchy between two poles. In this sense, the Alevi identity has been one of the identities which was subjected to state discrimination and otherisation. The compulsory religious education and the Directorate of Religious Affairs have been two primary instruments used by state elites to create a governable society within the boundaries of Sunni Turkish identification. In order to make state-society relationship more democratised, the Directorate of Religious Affairs should be restructured in line with the demands of Alevi citizens, and compulsory religious education must be removed. In addition, it should be noted that although the Turkish Constitution recognises freedom of religion, while doing this, the constitution promotes Sunni Islam and this weakens the equality principle among the Alevi, Sunni, and non-Muslim citizens.

Notes

[1] Atatürk (Father of Turks) said the following, regarding the role of Islam in social and political life: "… I cannot accept in Turkey's civilized community the existence of people who are primitive and seek spiritual benefits in the guidance of sheiks. The Turkish Republic cannot be a country of sheiks, dervishes, and disciples…" (Timur, 1997).

[2] According to Alevi Cultural Associations, what all Alevi citizens have demanded are for gaining their constitutional rights. The Alevi religious leaders (*dede*) stated that the government did not launch Alevi Opening on their own. According to Alevi leaders, if a state has an organ like Diyanet then it is impossible to say that this state has a secular structure. Source: Milliyet, November 29, 2008, https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/alevi-dedeler-alevi-acilimini-degerlendirdi-1022371 (Access: 15.1.2021)

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