MODERNITY, SECULARIZATION AND RELIGION IN TURKEY

OYEDAMADE TOPE OPAKUNBI
Department of Political Science and Public Administration
Babcock University, Illisha-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria
opakunbio@babcock.edu.ng

&

MICHAEL IHUOMA OGU (PhD)
Department of Political Science and Public Administration
Babcock University, Illisha-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria
ogum@babcock.edu.ng

Abstract
How has religion influenced the politics and development of the Turkish society? What is the nature of religion and secularism within the Turkish state? These are some of the questions this study set out to address. This study adopted the qualitative expository design, sourcing data from largely relevant secondary sources of data to investigate the variables of modernity, secularization and religion in Turkey. The study found that although a secular state, religion has played a significant role in the politics and development of Turkey, considering its 90% Muslim population. It was also found that unique nature of secularism in the state of Turkey has remained a challenge to the admission of Turkey into the European Union. The paper recommended that Turkey must continue to ensure a balance between religion and secularism to ensure that the Muslim religion does not drown the secular nature of Turkish politics. Also, Turkey must, rather than desire a place in the European regional framework, continue to strengthen the Organization of Islamic Corporation and the regional framework of the Middle East.

Key Words: Secularization, Security, Religion, Modernity, Politics.

Introduction

Religion centers around the believe in a supernatural power behind the world and all in it, it creates an avenue through which this supernatural power is worshiped, and religion thrives in establishing relationship between man; the worshipper and supernatural power; the worshipped. Maoz and Henderson, (2020:1) stated that: "Religion, in its simplest form, is a belief in the existence of some divine authority/ies. This belief translates to a set of values and moral codes and a set of rituals and practices that are presumably prescribed by such deities to humans." That is to say, religion shapes the way of life of the person involved; it molds their values and believes system. Xinping, (2015: 51) argued that "spiritually, religion is seen to be a personal or mystical experience. In this sense religion should be a private matter and it is understood to be hu-man spirituality". Hence, it can be argued that what an individual chooses to believe and worship is supposed to be a private affair.

Religion, however, becomes collective or communal when a group of people share a common believes in same divine or supernatural being, such that they are identified based on their mutual religious traditions that are different from others. Similarly, Maoz and Henderson, (2020: 1) observed that; "If religions were only private affairs, then individuals would hardly care about the belief systems of others. Religious persons would not try to convert other people...If rituals were private affairs, we would have no churches, temples, mosques, pagodas, or holy burial sites". Fundamentally, if religion was strictly private or solely about the person involved, it could be misleading, because then, there will not be need for different places of worship where people with similar faith gather to worship regularly. Also, the collective nature of religion could

sometimes lead to frictions of believes between or among different religious groups. Beckford (2003) argued that right to hold religious beliefs or non-religious beliefs guaranteed by the the constitutions of many sovereign countries and in international declarations and codes of human rights have lessened the likelihood of religious disputes. In other words, laws protecting right to either or not subscribe to religion beliefs in many states and international declarations have reduced conflicts due to religion. Withal, the tendency of religion to lead to conflict shows its proneness to politics, it is not unusual for leaders all over the world to use religion as political tool for their gains. Maoz and Henderson, (2020:3) explained this thus;

> This tale of religious conflict suggests a strong connection between religion and world politics. Leaders of communities, whether they were prophets, kings, warlords, presidents, or prime ministers, often used religion to promote their interests. Wars in the name of one God against infidels—believers in other Gods—seem to be a common theme in world history. But religion also has been a source of cooperation within and between communities. Most religions define codes of moral conduct. These help establish common norms among disparate communities. Communities that shared similar religious values may have found it easier to communicate and cooperate than communities that practiced different religions.

Similarly, religion could bring states closer and encourage cordial relation between and among them; an example of this is the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), with 57 state members and the second largest international organization after the United Nations (UN), with its major objective including the protection of the interest of the Muslim countries, while maintaining peace and harmony in the world among others (Anwar, 2016). The Republic of Turkey is a member of the OIC, considering the fact that over ninety percent (90%) of its population are Muslims. Highlighting the religious identity of Turkey, Larrabee, (2010) argued that Turkey's Islamic political identity was traditionally built in opposition to the West, which was regarded as an entity to be rejected or countered, especially because the west opposed Turkey's membership in NATO and the EU and saw Turkey as closer ally to the Muslim world, even though Turkey had adopted state secularism in order to be identified as modern like other western states of Europe. However, the Turkish conservatives disagree with secularization because they claim it is eroding Turkey of its Islamic roots (Yavuz and Öztürk, 2019).

It is against this background that this paper aims to understand how Modernity and Secularization are posing threats to Religion in Turkey. This paper is divided into six (6) sections; the first is this introduction, followed by a brief trace of the evolution of religion in Turkey. The secularization model of analysis is adopted to understand Turkey's choice of a secular state; this is followed by explanation of the impacts of modernity and secularization on Islam in turkey. After which, analysis is made on current realities in turkey over the place of religion as a result of secularization and this paper ends with a conclusion that highlighted some of the finding and suggestions on the mutual co-existence of the three variables of modernity, secularization and religion in Turkey.

Evolution of Religion in Turkey

Turkey is a country geographically occupying two continents, while a part of it is located in Asia, the other is in Europe, thus, it is fondly referred to as the bridge between the East and West (Coleman III, et al 2017). Historically, Turkey was a country dominated by Christian, in fact, Christianity was declared as the country's official religion in 380 AD (Sansal, 2019). This was during the reign of Theodosius I who legalized the destruction of pagan temples, this action in a way shows an intersection of government and religion; at the time the state could punish a pagan. Antioch, the place where followers of Christ were first called Christians is a city in Turkey now called Antakya, this shows that Christians have arguably lived in Turkey from about the time Christianity first existed (Kılınç, 2019; Sansal, 2019).

Fleeing persecution in Jerusalem after the death of Jesus, Christians travelled and settled in cities across western, central and southeastern Turkey. Among the travellers were Apostles like; Saint Paul, Saint Peter and Saint John, Saint Peter organized one of the first churches in Turkey (Kılınç, 2019). Constantinople

(Istanbul) and Antioch (Antakya) were two out of the five centers of Christianity at the time, the other three were; Rome, Alexandria and Jerusalem.

Istanbul is home to the largest church in the world, the cathedral is also known as; Church of Holy Wisdom or Church of Devine Wisdom, it was constructed under the leadership of Justinian I, a Byzantine emperor (Zelazko, 2020). The church from its construction in the sixth century (532–537), until the Turks conquered Istanbul in 1453 was a religious center for Eastern Christians and Byzantine Empire (Zelazko, 2020; Kılınç, 2019). This construction was significant because it shows the full involvement of government in religion; Emperor Byzantine ordered and saw to the construction (Kılınç, 2019).

The largest church was converted to a mosque by Mehmed II after the conquest of Constantinople (Istanbul) by the Turks in 1453. The rivalry between the Catholic and the Orthodox Byzantine church arguably contributed to the victory of Islam over Christianity. Consequently, the design of the cathedral was adjusted to fit the Muslim mode of worship. Following the rivalry between the Catholic and the Orthodox Byzantine church, many Christians in Turkey at the time were confused as to what faith to subscribe to, coupled with the fact that non-Muslims were taxed fifty percent (50%) of their earnings ("Dhimmi"), while Muslims were only paying a little, eventually, many people converted to Islam to enjoy low taxation. Hence, conversion to Islam largely signified a show of allegiance to the "winning team" which rules the country, plus, the practice was clearer to them without major rivaling groups. Also, Islam preached the existence of only one God, unlike Christianity which preached trinity (Sansal, 2019).

The Church of Holy Wisdom became a museum in 1935 after Turkey secularized its government; this was during the reign of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (Rahman, et al. 2015). However, it remains a location well respected by Christians and Muslims across the world till date (Zelazko, 2020). Currently, about ninety-eight percent (98%) of the 80 Million populations in Turkey are Muslim but the state is secular. According to Bruinessen, (2018: 2) "one cannot be a proper turk without being muslim despite the Constitution's declaration that "every citizen of Turkey is a Turk". The constitution allows for freedom of religion, only that the totality of other religious groups is way lesser than the number of Muslims with Christians being about 120,000, and Jews: 26,000 (Coleman III, et al, 2017: Sansal, 2019).

Modernization and Secularization in Turkey
Modernity and secularization are two concepts which tend to deviate from religion, they tilt to agreeing with current events or more advanced, passable ways of behavior in the state, and the acceptability of such behavior is not considered by a state under any religion. The departure from the old norms to the new is as a result of interactions and interrelations with other societies, put differently; interaction between developing states with a developed one could trigger social change that could yield advancements in the developing state. Altinkas (2014: 1) stated that "social change is key in the modernization process. For developing countries to become modern, the rate, direction, and quality of social change is the deciding factor…" In other words, social change is pertinent in modernization; it is a shift from old ways to the new and 'now' deemed better ways of behavior, and this is usually as a result of what the developing state had observed as applicable in the developed, thus, for want of development, they tend to adopt the ways of the developed states.

Emphasizing secularization, During, (2012, para. 1) observed that secularization has different processes, three prominent ones are explained as follows:

> First, the gradual delegitimation of natural and revealed religion's truth-claims in the face of rational critique. We can call this intellectual secularization. Second, the process by which some states have constitutionally disengaged from their citizens' religious beliefs and institutions. We can call this state secularization. Third, the increase across society of knowledge, activities, values, tastes, and activities which lack religious content, as well as the extent to which, increasingly, people

> involve themselves with these non-religious forms. We can call this social
> secularization.

From the above assertion it is implied that there is a departure from religion, and whether it is intellectual or social secularization, the process of secularization is only fully integrated into a state when it is legalized; that is, when the state constitutionally adopts secularism, with which other processes could either fall in place or have constitutional backing.

Karakas (2007) observed that secularism has been accepted as an integral part of the modern constitutional state. This is suggesting that for a state to be termed as modern it has to adopt secularization, this is the current reality of the Republic of Turkey. Turkey is among the many secular states in the world; however, the secularization of Turkey is peculiar; this is because it has over ninety percent (90%) of Muslim population; (Gruen, 2007) sharia could be assumed to be more appropriate for it. However, Yavuz and Öztürk, (2019:2) observed that:

> The modern Republic of Turkey evolved not only from the ashes of the
> late Ottoman state but also was created by the late Ottoman military elite,
> known as the Young Turks. The Turkish Republic's understanding of
> secularism as an ideology for catching up with the West was inherited
> from the Tanzimat mentality. The purpose was to empower the state by
> imitating Western institutions, cultural practices and mentality.
> Conservative groups in society resisted this top-down modernization
> project through Islam…The aggressive secularizing (laikleşme-
> laikleştirme) policies of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk helped to turn Islam into
> an identity of resistance …

Yavuz and Öztürk argued that secularization in Turkey was as a result of the state's bid to identify with the European Countries, it was an act of imitation of the West in culture and institutions so as to be accepted as modern. However, the conservatives disapproved this model of modernization with the use of Islam, Dorroll, (2014; 1035) puts it thus: "…conservative religious groups utilize Islamic…tradi-tions to undermine the authority of secular social institutions in Turkey..." That is, the conservatives not only detest secularization of Turkey, Islam is the tool used to weaken the secular state. Bruinessen (2018) also argued that religion (Islam) in Turkey can be likened to religion in France, explaining that laïcité (the separation of religion and the state, and the neutrality of the state in the affairs of religion) in France is similar to laiklik (state control and legal regulation of religion) in Turkey.

Impacts of Modernity and Secularization on Islam in Turkey
Mustafa Kemal, also known as Ataturk or "Father of the Turks," established the new Republic of Turkey in 1923, and according to Jones, (2010: 11) it is based on "nationalism, secularism, reformism, statism, populism, and republicanism". Since 1923, the modes of administration and lifestyle in Europe gradually became largely acceptable in Turkey, and these have had negative impact on Islam in Turkey (Ismail and Tekke, 2016). Ismail and Tekke, (2016: 66) corroborated this view by asserting that "Western culture and lifestyle were to become the way of life in Turkey. Although the new system of Western-style secular, particularly on the basis of culture, negatively affected the Islamic life in Turkey…" Much as secularization has had adverse effect on Islamic religion, Muslims in Turkey did not just give up on their religion, they strove to keep the practices and principles of Islam, having realized that secularism in Turkey was designed to "disestablish" Islam unlike that of America that stood for the "separation of church and state" (Ismail and Tekke, 2016: 66)). As such, as opined by Ismail and Tekke, (2016: 66), secularization has "…negatively influenced all aspects of culture, state, personality, social behavior and society that had their roots in Islamic traditions." That is to say that, secularism significantly altered the practice of Islam in Turkey (Rahman, et al. 2015).

Jones, (2010: 12) pointed to some specific aspects of Turkish Islamic tradition that were altered by Ataturk's establishment of Secular state in Turkey. First was he decline of polygamy and equal rights for women in the area of divorce and marriage, along with the right to vote and own property. Secondly, seclusion of women from political and social life was perceived as a waste of significant amount of Turkey's most precious resource, and this was depicted in the roles women played in dinnertime debates as well as by their

unveiling of their faces. Increasingly, contemporary Turkish women are fast assuming roles that are equal with those restricted to men for so long. Thirdly, similar to Christian and European states, Sunday became the day of rest, rather than the traditional Islamic Friday, making Turkey the only Muslim state to do this. Fourthly, the use of the Gregorian calendar rather than the typical Islamic calendar; hijri, and changed script from Arabic to Latin (Landau) were also very significant, especially as all languages other than Turkish were abandoned to help promote nationalism through single language usage, and Thurkish was written in Arabic. Finally, the transfer of the capital city from Istanbul, which was principally Islamic, to Ankara, a city without a strong Islamic background was also a dramatic alteration aimed at undermining Turkish control by Islam and arguably establishes a secular Turkish state. Describing the secular Turkish state, Coleman III, et al, (2017: 6& 7) observed that; "The state intervened in domains ranging from music to clothing… Western music and art saw increasing support from the state. In particular, "balls" and "beauty contests" found their way into Turkish life in an attempt to challenge Islamic perceptions about the place of women in society" However, after Ataturk's death in 1938, resistance to secularization became conspicuous, especially in the small towns and villages (Altinkas, 2014). Even before his death, Altinkas,(2014: 3&4) observed that "The more distant the area was from the capital or from the major cities, the less chance there was that its inhabitants were even aware of the change." Supporting this claim, Jones, (2010: 12) said that; "Although these changes were difficult to enforce in small towns and rural areas, their presence was evident." That is, the secularization of Turkey was not a smooth sail from the onset.

Current Trends in Secularization and Religion in Turkey
Realities since the death of Ataturk (Kemal) in 1938 have projected that more Turks are moving against radical secularization as he advocated, Akyol, (2019:3) wrote that; "… the majority of Turks opposed Kemalist secularism. This was repeatedly shown by election results, from the time of the first free and fair elections in 1950. The majority of Turks voted over and over again against staunchly secularist candidates." Conservative electorates have over the years used their votes to show their discontent with Ataturk's secularism by supporting candidates whose leadership will not threaten Islam with alien traditions from the West (Akyol, 2019).
Before President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan came to power in 2002 under the platform of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) the political party tried not to associate itself with Islam, this, in spite of the party's previous association with Islam. Rabasa and Larrabee, (2008; 51), opined that; "Despite its Islamist roots, the AKP realized the advantages of speaking the language of modernity and of integration with Europe". To gain majority support the AKP focused on improving the economy of Turkey which had experienced major degradations in the hands of past governments. Khouli, (2011; 4) observed that the AKP's was unique because of its prioritizing economic and social issues above all else as well as it's astute understanding of Turkey's complex political situation, along with its domestic and foreign agenda.
The party did not set itself up for a battle with Islam; instead it found a way to integrate Islam with modernity. Khouli, (2011; 6) further stated that "the AKP treads a fine line between the old and the new", seeing that the founders of the party sort a consensual system which blends tradition with modernity, and human values with rationalism, and thus the party gained the support of the electorates based on its principle of balancing conventional with the non-conventional.
Religion (Islam) under the current administration seems to be gaining more prominence and President Erdoğan's supposed support for modernization just before he gained power appears to have been 'smoke and mirrors'; a means to an end, in this case, the promotion of Islamic tenants. Ertit (2018) corroborated this view by asserting that public opinion in Turkey reveals that the Turkish society have arguably adopted a more religious and conservative structure, particularly after the AKP's accession to power in 2002, and this is evident in the Republic Protests of 2007 held in major cities of Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and Çanakkale, claiming that Turkish society had become greatly Islamized under the AKP government.
The above assertion suggests that the current administration in Turkey is tilting towards a revival of Islam in governance. In support of this point, Yavuz and Öztürk, (2019:5) also observed that, although perceived as a 'savior', the AKP was seen by many others groups, including Kemalist and laik groups, as a group of hypocrites, who always pursued a secret Islamist agenda. However, most of these perceptions changed in this rapidly transforming period of modern Turkish history. Yavuz and Öztürk (2019) have also boldly

argued that President Erdoğan is in favour of an Islamic state; also, his party came to power on the platform of the conservative who felt marginalized under the secularism of past administrations. As such, his support for an Islamic state is him basically delivering is mandate to his supporters.

Since Recep Tayyip Erdoğan gained power in 2002, a major criticism of his government has been the "Islamization" or "Iranization" of Turkey, nevertheless, facts and figures is increasingly suggesting the gradual embrace of modernization and the erosion of Islamic practices in the lives of more Turks, especially the younger generation. A survey by Ertit, (2018) reported the following statistics;

   a. Ramadan fast: the percentage of those who participated in Ramadan fast in 2006 were 60.4%, this dropped 6.4% by 2012 to 53.1%. While those who would not fast at all throughout Ramadan increased from 24.9% in 2013 to 29.5% in 2015
   b. Daily prayers: The percentage of people who observed this Islamic tenet of praying five (5) times in a day in 2013 was 28.2%, two years later, the percentage had dropped to 26.2%. And those that never prayed increased from 22.7% in 2013 to 27.5% in 2015.
   c. The establishment of Atheism Foundation with slogan: "No atheist or non-believer will be alone from now on", this is the first of its kind in the Muslim dominated country.

These figures largely illustrate the downward slide of religion in the face of secularized Turkey, a point buttressed by Sinan Yılmaz's study of 2797 families. The study, cited in Ertit (2018), concluded that; 84% of the older generation perceive the new generation as indifferent to religious issues, 87% think the young generation are negatively affected by Western values, and 80% consider the style of upbringing of the young generation to pose a problem for traditions.

Considering the decline in participations in religion by the youths in Turkey, the AKP government has adopted fun activities like table tennis, badminton, etc. in Islamic schools to attract them to learn and practice Islam (Ertit, 2018). This simply points to the fact that religion in Turkey will find a way to fight for survival in the face of threats from secularization and modernity. This extent of this struggle nevertheless is dependent on the orientations of the leadership of the country at a given time. The current government led by the AKP tilts more towards political Islam, this explains why the government sponsors religious activities and societies more while heavily taxing "alcoholic beverages and banning their advertising and promotion; and imposing "national and spiritual values" on mass media through the grip of the "Radio and Television Supreme Council." (Akyol, 2019:7).

In the words of Rabasa and Larrabee (2008; 54) "Secularists argue that because of the potency of political Islam, only "hard" secularism could prevent it from overwhelming Turkey's political institutions." That is, radical secularism might prevent Turkey from becoming an Islam theocratic state. However, the possibility of secularization to be overwhelmed by religion is questionable, this is because complete opposition to secularism is illegal, and increasingly, majority of Turks are not in support of neither radical secularism nor extreme 'Islamization' of Turkey (Akyol, 2019).

Conclusion

This paper from the five (5) sections above has attempted an explanation of modernity and secularization posing threats to religion in Turkey; a country that historically had Christianity as the official state's religion, but, evolved over time to secularism in the midst of over 90% Muslim population. To understand Turkey's secularization, the secularization model of analysis was adopted, and it was observed that secularization is important in every effort towards modernization. Thus, Turkey's ambition to modernize and attain membership of the European Union (EU) prompted it to embrace a secular state.

This act of secularization is said to have adversely affected religion (Islam) in the country by the conservatives and this led to more support for leaders that were Islamic advocates after the death of Ataturk in 1938: a radical secularist. However, it was ascertained that many people prefer a balance of religion and modernity, that is, a government that does not practice only one of the two in extremity. This is because many people want to be able to choose whether to be religious or not without been compelled by the government, this fact can be observed from the percentage of people who used to adhere to Islamic tenants which has significantly reduced over the years.

Also, the younger generation is said to be increasingly losing interest in religion and the incumbent government is intensifying efforts to make Islam attractive, so the practice does not get totally relegated. As such, religion which in this case Islam is part of Turkey's national identity, despite secularization, will continue to be in the sub consciousness of the government. In as much as modernity and secularization are increasingly gaining more acceptability, they may only continue to be threats to religion in Turkey, without really having the capacity to totally overshadow it. This is in consideration of the benefits of western development due to secularization and Islamic states as allies, as a member of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) the second largest international organization after the United Nations (UN). It is therefore certain that as the existence of religion is threatened by secularization and modernity, it will not be overpowered as it will always fight back by available means. This is evident in the many efforts of the AKP government to bring recreational and sports activities to Islamic schools, and the imposition of heavy taxes on alcohol and other non-Islamic activities. Religion, secularization and modernity would have to co-exist with frequent threats to one another with none actually overwhelming the other.

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