

From Secularism to *Laïcité* and Analyzing Turkish Authoritarian *Laiklik*

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ABSTRACT Turkish secularism called *laiklik* which derived from the French *laïc* term, was transferred from Frances' *laïcité* in the late Ottoman period via the Young Turks to achieve western modernization. The implementation of the *laik* institutions in Turkey, contrary to the secularism in the United States, and *laïcité* in France, did not originate from its own historical, social, and political circumstances. To create a new form of the western secular model onto the framework of the new Republic of Turkey, *laiklik* has articulated as a political Kemalist doctrine to protect itself and, especially translates itself to the totalitarian context. This article argues that Turkey's own secular model *laiklik* was not aimed at the separation of religion and state but first to control it and finally to try to minimize it from the public sphere.

Secularism or *Laïcité*

The idea of the secular or *laïc* state is not present or apparent in Muslim societies. It was an idea that emerged in Europe to obstruct the control of religion, that is to say, the hegemony of the Church over the social and political spheres. Since then, secularism has played a major role in the development of western societies. Eventually, all the social developments in the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries, such as concepts of freedom of thought, nationalism, rationalism, humanism, materialism and industrial development arose in modern European societies after the implementation of secular principles.¹ As a term, "secular" or "secularism/secularization," has a variety of meanings and comes from the Latin *saeculum*, meaning "this age" and "this world." In the Middle Ages, the term referred to a "priest who worked out in the world of local parishes" and later during the Reformation, the term secular indicated a "distancing from the sacred, the eternal, and the other-worldly."² *Laïcité*, a French term, comes from the ancient Greek, *laos*, common people, which then passed to French through the Latin *laïcus*, "the one who didn't enter in religious order."³ Finally, the term *laiklik* in Turkish comes from

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the French *laïc*, which is perceived as the separation of religious and political affairs by the state's constitution.

The diverse conceptual meanings of secularism and *laïcité* and state-religion in relation to western societies were formed according to their historical, national and religious histories, which caused different forms of secularism in Catholic and Protestant societies.⁴ Generally speaking, secularism does not mean to be opposed to religion but it does not approve of certain types of relationships between the state and religion.⁵ Furthermore, secularism and *laïcité* were not defined following neutral ideas of religion versus nation, but they were characterized by the societies that produced them with local values. This fact has caused Europe, particularly after both World Wars, to be characterized by specific “values” rather than basing their identity on religion or nationalism, which was perceived as a factual cause of the trouble.⁶ Though each country has created its own secular form, the outcome is two major perspectives of the secular state in the West. The Anglo-Saxon model –represented by the U.S., as well as the United Kingdom, Canada, and northern Europe– and the French *laïcité*, which Shakman Hurd points out, is a powerful organizing principle in modern politics: “it has been influential in France, the former Soviet Union, Turkey, China, and elsewhere.”⁷

In France, the concept of *Laïcité* is the result of a socio-political process and closely related to its Christian and Roman Catholic past throughout history.⁸ The earlier leading French intellectuals such as Montesquieu (1689-1755), Voltaire (1694-1778), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Denis Diderot (1713-1784) were among the most influential figures who led *laïc* society in France and eventually, their thoughts influenced the social and political climate of other western societies. Even though the thoughts of *laïcité* in France go back earlier than the 19th century, it was at that time that the idea of *laïcité* emerged in the context of “the independence from any religion or religious principles.”⁹ The French Revolution, 1789-1799, was an influential era of socio-political and religious upheaval in France. This is because, in the history of France, the Roman Catholic Church had enjoyed explicit influence over the sociopolitical arena. Therefore, the Republicans aimed to draw a distinction between religion and the political sphere. The Revolution led to the restructuring of the Republic, and limited the power of the Church, forcing it to adapt



to civil law (*la loi sur la constitution Civile de clergé* – July 12, 1790) and the Church eventually became one of the components of the French Republic as a separate institution.¹⁰ The process of implementing civil society through *laïcité* ended the autocracy of the Church and led to the application of civil principles in France, however, almost a decade later, Napoléon Bonaparte signed an agreement with Pope Pius VII on July 15, 1801 in Paris called the *Concordat*, known as the *régime concordataire français*. The *Concordat* regime aimed to organize and restructure the relationship between the state and religion and particularly to restore relations with the Catholic Church. The *Concordat* recognized Catholicism as a major religion of the French people.¹¹ Furthermore, the battle with the Church continued and led the state to create a new law in 1881 called the Jules Ferry law,¹² in which public education was restructured by completing its secularization and eliminating the religious (Roman Catholic) influence that had dominated the French educational sphere for centuries.¹³

After this interlude, the actual concept of *laïcité* developed through different stages, taking more than a century to complete the separation of religion and state, which was then mentioned as a fundamental Republic law in 1905, officially disengaging the state from religious affairs, and vice versa. The influence of *laïcité*, therefore increased not only in the political sphere but also became notably widespread in education and other socio-economic fields. For instance, as Franck Fregosi points out, the laws in January 1907 legitimated that all religious buildings are part of the public domain and led to the adaptation of the rules of their urbanization, which authorized the State to dis-

The National Security Council held a meeting on February 28, 1997 and made infamous statements (known as the post-modern coup) declaring secularism as the guarantor of democracy and rule of law in Turkey.

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Anglo-Saxon secularism proposed building a bridge between the religious and secular world, and this relationship is in many ways similar to countries that adopted liberal democracy in the contemporary world

Germany in 1918. Due to this reason, the act of *laïcité* in 1905 regarding the separation of the Church and state is not completely effective in what is today the Alsace-Lorraine region.¹⁵ In the strict sense, conceptual clarification of the *laïcité* in France, although debated and in question, is introduced by Raphael Liogier as “a clear acknowledgment of the lack of competence in the religious domain by the public authorities, exactly as a civil court declares itself not competent under penal law. Interference in religion by the public authorities is however, not the exception but, on the contrary, the normal state of what is, and has ever been, labeled *laïcité* in France.”¹⁶

Unlike Catholicism, Anglo-Saxon secularism derived from its Protestant culture within its historical process, and subsequent Protestant Reformation and Protestant thinkers such as Martin Luther, Roger Williams, and John Locke.¹⁷ Anglo-Saxon secularism proposed building a bridge between the religious and secular world, and this relationship is in many ways similar to countries that adopted liberal democracy in the contemporary world, the U.S. adding its particular contribution to this model.¹⁸ Throughout history, secularism evolved vis-a-vis within the Protestant world as an internal dynamic process to provide religious freedom through civil discussion –as Jose Casanova points out– it aimed to bring religion and religious monks out from the monasteries and into the secular world. It took several reforms and attained prominence in the Anglo-Saxon Calvinist cultural domain. “Such a dynamic tends to transcend the dualism by blurring the boundaries between the religious and the secular, by making the religious secular and the secular religious through mutual reciprocal infusion.”¹⁹

It is also important to see that religious diversity in the U.S. demonstrates that there has never been only one approved church and religious system in the country. The diverse religion of immigrants in the U.S. throughout history, which was brought and continued by religious immigrants, has been welcomed with empathy, and its immigrants remain religiously active compared to most European countries.²⁰ Illustrating the differences of secularism in context as opposed to the U.S. in France, because of the particularly bloody history of the

pose of any buildings of worship at will.¹⁴ However, it took almost two decades (1924) for Catholic groups to fully accept the terms of *laïcité* in France. Here it is important to note that although the *Concordat* regime was abolished in 1905 and the state no longer recognized the Church, it had been effective as a “*droit local*” (local law) of the Alsace and Moselle regions, which became part of France after victory against

country with Catholicism, religious groups and their visibilities have always been perceived as a dividing force. Contrary to France, as Charles Taylor points out, the perception of social cohesion in the U.S. enabled the reception of new immigrants gathered around established groups, side by side, which in fact bound the population together “in a consensual ‘civil religion.’”²¹ Although in the beginning, these organizations were Protestant Catholic or Jewish, arriving immigrants brought together other religions, including Islam, and joined in this consensual mechanism in later times. Americans built their society on the integration of different faiths, as demonstrated in this consensual relationship with the common “civil religion.”²² People could go to the religious establishment of their choice, which included the growing Muslim population’s freedom to attend mosques. “When imams began to appear at prayer breakfasts, along with priests, pastors, and rabbis, the signal was that Islam was being invited into the consensus.” Taylor explained, “That means that one can be integrated as an American through one’s faith or religious identity. This contrasts with the Jacobin-republican formula of ‘*laïcité*’, where integration takes place by ignoring, sidelining or privatizing the religious identity, if any.”²³ As José Casanova explains, “From the Enlightenment and Independence till the present, processes of radical social change and modernization are often accompanied by “great awakening” and by religious growth.”²⁴ The expression of religion in the public sphere has been encouraged by political systems and as exemplified by the first President of the United States, George Washington (1732-1799), who played a major role for church/state relations believing that the attitude of the government towards religion was to be “neutral but not secular.”²⁵

The two different perspectives are mostly derived from historical facts. Multiculturalists and pluralistic approaches in the U.S. allow coexisting cultures and religious diversity, while the French integration policy does not enable such a thing, religious groups, as well as migrants, should adopt *laïcité*. Thus, in the contemporary world, French *laïcité* in contrast to Anglo-Saxon secularism is often perceived as an assimilationist approach to domesticate diverse religions and cultures.²⁶ This perception of *laïcité* has been frequently interpreted as undemocratic, anti-religious and even a “hegemonic idea of national culture to the exclusion of other identities.”²⁷ However, Fregosi and Deniz point out “freedom of religion in France is often understood within a minimalist perspective of individual rights and almost never in regard to collective rights referring to the existence of religious communities.”²⁸ Oliver Roy shows that the French *laïcité* is part of the integration process required by French law and supports the idea that to build a nation, it is necessary for all citizens or immigrants to keep their religious and cultural symbols in the private sphere.²⁹ Jacques Berlinerblau writes that “Laïcité is a system that brings the state into far closer proximity to religious groups than its American counterpart. With its Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses, the American government tries to keep its religions at arm’s length. The French, in contrast, offer their believers overbearing head-

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lock.”³⁰ He formalizes that “The 1905 law makes separation an *explicit* policy of the French government. In the United States, by contrast, separation is an *inference* drawn by secularists.”³¹ Thus, Americans stress religious liberty, while the French, to contrast, emphasize “freedom of conscience.”³²

Concerning Islam and Muslim migrants’ one can claim that because of the historical process through a consensual relationship with religious groups in the U.S., the visibility of diverse religious symbols and religiosity in the public space is not perceived as contrary to the secular principle, but as a sign of religious right. However, one also must take into account that in the U.S., there is a widespread idea of religion as a unifying factor, whereas in France religion is viewed as a threat to public order.³³ As R. Stephen Warner, who defines religious systems in the U.S. as an open religious market, explains, the religious differentiation in the U.S. is relatively less problematic compared to France; however, he points out that “in the U.S., Muslims are relatively accepted as a religious minority, a situation that stands in contrast to the persistent problem of racial discrimination. France, by contrast, manifests greater racial openness but Muslims suffer religiously based discrimination.”³⁴

It is generally believed that secularism as a personal religious expression, including in public, is encouraged and widely practiced in the U.S. more than in France. Nevertheless, this pattern was not the automatic result of disestablishment and as Warner demonstrates, “It had deeper, more complicated, and more concerted roots in the actions of public figures.”³⁵ It is widely accepted that the idea of secularism in the U.S. has been to provide a great autonomy for religious communities and their activities in the public sphere.³⁶ In his comparative studies on secularism, Ahmet Kuru describes secularism in France and in Turkey as “assertive secularism” which means that these secular states play an “assertive” role that “excludes religion in the public sphere.” This is in contrast to the U.S. and by extension the rest of the Anglo-Saxon world, where there is a “passive secularism,” in which the State plays a passive role regarding visibilities of religion in the public space.³⁷ In order to understand the argument that France provides little or no space for the visibility of religion in the public sphere, it is also necessary to take into account the fact that there is much debate over the definition and boundaries of the “public sphere.” Jürgen Habermas who pioneered a study of the “public sphere” defines it as “a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens.”³⁸ However, the state authority considered the public’s good to be linked with the political and legislative exercise, keeping in mind that the concept of such a “public sphere”

and “public opinion” were not formed until the 18th century.³⁹ Nancy Fraser also points out that, according to Habermas “the idea of a public sphere is that of a body of ‘private persons’ assembled to discuss matters of ‘public concern’ or ‘common interest.’”⁴⁰ Craig Calhoun analyzes that “Habermas’s argument is an elaboration of the fundamental premise that the public sphere of a democratic society must be open to all.” The contemporary political arena must consider religious groups and actors, including Muslims in Europe, “into the workings of public reason” to maintain the future of the democratic society.⁴¹ Nilüfer Göle also explains that “The public sphere is not simply a pre-established arena; it is constituted and negotiated through performance.”⁴²

A Short History of Turkish Secularism: The Formative Years of the Young Turks

The implementation of the western system, considered as part of modernity, has been complicated in Muslim societies.⁴³ The contemporary Muslim world has encountered western ideas such as democracy, capitalism, secularism, and *laïcité*, since the 18th century. The phenomena became stronger during the decolonization period and at the beginning of the establishment of the nation-states. Turkey, which was never colonized by the western powers, was in a way an exception as modernization was debated earlier and widely argued among the Ottoman intelligentsia in the 19th century. In 1839 *Tanzimat* also known as *Gülhane Hattı Humayün*, was the first-time religious freedom regardless of any religious group was mentioned, and in 1859 (*Islahat Fermanı*) The Imperial Reform Edict accepted religious freedom as a rule. The rule states that everybody is free to practice their religious faith or sect and no one can be brought to torture or punishment because of their religious practice.⁴⁴ In 1876, like its modern western version, the first Ottoman constitution (*Kanun-i Esasi*) was announced and the following year the Sultan accepted the Constitutional Monarchy (*Meşrutiyet*). This effort was made to save the multicultural and religious Ottoman existence in the face of the rise of liberal western ideas. In the early 19th century, the secular/secularism idea was presented and widely discussed within the concept of modernization, and eventually, the implementation of secularism, later called *laiklik*, borrowed from the West, came with the establishment of the Turkish Republic under Mustafa Kemal in 1923.⁴⁵ *Laiklik* played a major role in the central construction of the new republic and aimed to banish the religious institutions of the Ottoman past.

To understand this process and the subsequent effect on the formation of religious ideology that answers to it, one should go back to the late 19th century of the Ottoman period. At that time, three main ideologies emerged within the Turkish elite: Nationalism, Westernization, and Ottomanist/Islamic ideology. Westernization became a very popular ideology among the group of mil-

Atatürk speaks at the Republican People's Party's Convention in 1935 under the banner of the "six arrow principles": nationalism, republicanism, secularism, reformism, populism and etatism.

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itary and secular elite called the Young Turks (*Genç* or *Jön Türkler*) and it even became the political program of the Committee of Union and Progress Party-CUP (*İttihad ve Terakki Partisi*).⁴⁶ The Young Turks believed that achieving the objectives of western civilization in Muslim territories was possible only through the implementation of secular institutions and culture. According to Thierry Zarcone,

the Young Turks were seduced by Freemasonry that was responsible, in a large part, for the introduction of the liberal ideas.⁴⁷ During their exile, the Young Turks were inspired by the works of French intellectuals and affected by *laïcité* in the late 19th and early 20th century. They observed the abolition of Catholic faculties in 1885 and, particularly, promulgation of the law formalizing the separation of church and state in 1905. The Young Turks were assisted by Freemasons through attending Parisian Masonic circles and French Masonic lodges in İstanbul and meeting with secular supporters.⁴⁸ Furthermore, it was at this time that the early Turkish deists surfaced and published the journal *İctihad*, which became the voice of the late 18th century French deists in the Ottoman territory.⁴⁹ As Edwards Said describes in his book *Orientalism*; modern Orientalists try to accommodate the East to the structure that they inherited from their Christian past, to secularize and modernize it. The one thing that the Orient, particularly Muslim World, could not do was represent itself. "In short, having transported the Orient into modernity, the Orientalist could celebrate his method, and his position, as that of a secular creator, a man who made new worlds as God had once made the old."⁵⁰

In order to modernize the Ottoman Empire and secure its multi-ethnic territory from uprising nationalist ideas after the French revolution, reformation, called *Tanzimat*, began under Sultan Abdülmecit. The reforms aimed to transform political, social and military structures of the Ottoman Empire to bring European standards for enhancing civil liberties. The reforms that were expected to create the necessary change to boost the empire into a sustainable form, failed.⁵¹ One of the main reasons was the process of nation-building going on in Europe. The Ottomans could not resist the spread of nationalism in its territories, mainly in the Balkans, which led to the formation of several independent states. Second, it is true that in the 19th and early 20th centuries,



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many political, military, and secular Turkish intellectuals were highly influenced by the Enlightenment and the industrial progress of the West, nevertheless, this admiration did not turn into practical activities for the economic transformation and industrialization process of the Ottomans.⁵²

Following World War I, soon after the War of Independence (*Kurtuluş Savaşı*), the new Turkish government signed the Treaty of Lausanne on July 24, 1923, which ended the Ottoman period. The power that the Turks had had in the Middle East and North Africa then shifted to the British, French and Italian governments. The treaty not only diminished the extension of the former territory controlled by Turks, but it also became a cornerstone of the new era. After the treaty, the *Cumhuriyet* (Republic) was quickly established on October 29, 1923, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal (later known by his given surname Atatürk, “The Father of Turks”) who build a *laik* state under his *Kemalist* ideology.

The Implementation of *Kemalism*

The Westernization process had begun in the late Ottoman period, but the implementation of the western style secular institutions and excluding religion from the public sphere began during the new era. Atatürk with his supreme political authority immediately began to apply his perception of the western secular model onto the framework of the new Republic of Turkey. Therefore, to create a new form of the modern western system, Atatürk embarked on a series of political and social reforms to undertake the socio-religious transformation of Turks towards the secular western civilization. Hamit Bozarslan explains that *Kemalism* was a search for an ideology during the first years of the Turkish Republican State. For instance, in 1919-1922 they used terms that linked them to leftist discourses. After the victory against Greece and the end of the sultanate, they demonstrated a revolutionary ideology.⁵³ However, the most important objective of the early Republic’s elite class was their intention to de-Islamize Turkey during the period 1923-1946.⁵⁴

Atatürk believed that the greatest threat and obstacle to developing his new *laik* republic was the existence of strong religious affiliations within Turkish

Change in the alphabet was strategic, as it brought traditional Muslim scholars and many other intellectuals into ignorance, and not only obstructed people's access to any religious texts, but intentionally aimed to prevent new generations from accessing the past, and to create a link with the adoption of the new secular values

society. To constitute his Westernized and modern Turkish republic, Atatürk reconstructed the new political, social, religious and constitutional institutions based on the secular *laik* regime. For him, the implementation of secularism would not only free Turkish society from the chains of religious dogma, but also lead them towards new development and a progressive era. To do this, Atatürk developed the combination of his ideology and thought, framed by six principles: nationalism, republicanism, secularism, reformism, populism, and etatism. By employing these principles, he eventually set up a social

engineering program to replace the traditional and religious formats of Turkish society. This process was later called principles of *Kemalism*, and its influence was so profound that it became the socio-political doctrine of the new regime of Turkey.⁵⁵

Amongst these principles, Atatürk's *laik* reforms –*laiklik devrimi*– were strategically important. To diminish the risk of any sort of religious insurrection within traditional Turkish society, Atatürk scrutinized the progress of moving towards a *laik* society. In the beginning of the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, in the Constitution of 1924, Atatürk did not remove or circumvent Islam as the religion of the Republic. His numerous reforms gradually took place by introducing and displaying the western style of life as an example of civilization and modernization (*çağdaşlaşma*). For example, *Şapka Kanunu* (the Hat Act), derived from the French “*Chapeau*,” introduced western styles of clothing by force of law and prohibited women from wearing the *çarşaf* (*niqab*) in 1925. Here it is necessary to mention Göle's remarks: that when *Kemalist* modernization attempted to build a new “civilization,” moving from the Ottoman-Islamic to the Turkish-Western, women became an important role in this “civilization conversion.” She points out that in this conversion *Kemalist* modernism aimed to make women publically visible, by mixing of the sexes in public spaces and removing the veil through legislating civil rights for women.⁵⁶ In the same year, all the Islamic *madrassahs* and *dervish* lodges were closed or prohibited, and in support of modernization and Westernization, Arabic script was outlawed, and the new Latin-based Turkish alphabet was adopted in November 1928. This change in the alphabet was strategic, as it brought traditional Muslim scholars and many other intellectuals into

ignorance, and not only obstructed people's access to any religious texts, but intentionally aimed to prevent new generations from accessing the past, and to create a link with the adoption of the new secular values.⁵⁷ To have legal grounds for these reforms, on April 10, 1928, the Turkish Grand National Assembly called for a constitutional amendment to abolish Islam as the religion of the state and removed the requirement that the deputies and president give an oath, known as "*Vallahi*."

Within a few years, Atatürk established the *Türk Tarih Kurumu*, (Turkish Historical Society) in 1931, and the *Türk Dil Kurumu* (Turkish Language Society) in 1932. Both institutions were founded as advocates for research on Turkish pre-Islamic history, to promote Turkish ancient traditions and cultures. Through linguistic studies, he intended to eliminate the religious influence on Turkish literature by clearing away Arabic and Persian terms and replacing them with pre-Islamic Turkic words and idioms, or with European words.⁵⁸ He also attempted to alter the Islamic call to prayer (*adhan*) and prayer invitation (*qad gamat al-salat*) from Arabic to Turkish in 1932. Nevertheless, this attempt stunned the masses that heard the Arabic *adhan* in Turkish; for example, instead of hearing "*Allah-u Akbar*" (God is great), they heard "*Tanrı uludur*."⁵⁹ Finally, on February 5, 1937, the Turkish Grand National Assembly declared that the Turkish State was a *laik* Republic by having it inscribed in the second article of the Constitution. While the influences of French modernism and the idea of a secular society brought forth the implementation of *laiklik* in Turkey, ironically it was legislated as a constitutional term in 1937 by Atatürk, almost a decade earlier than France, which did not legislate that *laïcité* be written in the Constitution of France until 1946.⁶⁰ With the intention that Turkish nationalism would overcome the idea of the Islamic "*ummah*," Atatürk attempted to abolish any religious weight on Turkish society and replace it with science through positivist approaches. As a historian and expert on Islamic and Oriental studies, H.A.R. Gibb states that "Only in Turkey, thanks to the prestige acquired by a successful revolution and defense of the nation's territory, did the leadership retain the power to carry through its program, and achieve the conditions in which a real relation of mutuality with the West could be founded."⁶¹ Nevertheless, Westernization and secular reforms, particularly the abolition of the caliphate in 1924, was seen as sacrilege by the Muslim world.⁶² On the other hand, Atatürk's secularization attempts were also perceived as truly revolutionary by Arab secularists and nationalist thinkers. Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Karim al-Khattabi, who fought against the French (1921-26), expressed that he "admired the political course followed by Turkey...The Islamic countries cannot achieve independence unless they free themselves from religious fanaticism and follow the path of the European peoples."⁶³ However, as M. Şükrü Hanioglu points out, Atatürk's nationalist approaches to the mixing of Turkish and progressive/secular/Westernized views indeed kept Atatürk away from the ultimate opportunity of being a global Muslim leader.⁶⁴

The Nature of Turkish *Laiklik*

To illustrate the attitudes of the Turkish secularist elite, Abdülhak Adnan Adıvar notes that it was indeed a most unfortunate mistake that Ziya Gökalp translated *laik* as *la-dini* (irreligious), which led the Muslim scholars, including Şeyhülislam, to take on a hostile attitude.⁶⁵ He affirms that the entire mechanism of the early Republican State intentionally followed a positivist school of thought, paraphrased in H.A.R. Gibb's statements: "Turkey became a positivistic mausoleum."⁶⁶ In order to suppress Islamic dogma and achieve a level of contemporary civilization, western positivism was imposed upon the youth in the new Republican Schools.⁶⁷ Bernard Lewis states that these positivist and secularist ideas enjoyed a certain trend during the Young Turks period.⁶⁸ For instance, the founder of *İttihad ve Terakki Partisi* Ahmed Rıza was the student of Auguste Comte and with his friends –members of the Young Turks– were admiring of Auguste Comte's positivist ideas to the degree of worshipping. Biological materialism and Darwinism become their religion. In order to replace religion with science, in 1885 Ahmet Rıza wrote that Islam is a kind of chronic neurological disorder (*sinir hastalığı*).⁶⁹ Here, to comprehend the format of *laiklik* and, later, its relationship with Islam in Turkey, it is important to note that *laiklik* in Turkey developed with the intention of constructing an "irreligious" state, the model for which emerged within the realm of positivism, despite being obviously militant and anti-religious.⁷⁰ The implementation of *laiklik* blocked not only religious freedom but also prevented the emergence of any civil initiative. Turkish secularism was a "social engineering project"⁷¹ in which the early Republicans in Turkey attempted to remove all religiosity from the social dimension and directed Islam as "personalization." This transformation contrasts with "liberalization" in the West, which in this case was not "liberalism" but an effort to reduce religiosity for future generations of Turks by imposing "unorganized religion." Hanioglu states that the thoughts of Jean-Marie Guyau, who was concerned with filling the large gap left by religion with a "moral" philosophy in order to free the public from religious obligations and sanctions, was one of the most discussed philosophical ideas in 1930's Turkey. The effort was meant to create a "non-religious social dimension" and maintain morality in Turkish society, but not be interested in religious activities, such as prayer or frequenting mosques.⁷²

It must be noted that Atatürk envisaged his secular project without considering the socio-historical context of Turkey. Turkish society became naturally divided between partisans of a traditional Islam and partisans of the new *laik* reforms. This division has cut even deeper in modern Turkey as Bora Kanra indicates in his work.⁷³ The implementation of secular principles came from the militarist elite class, who imposed it upon the people. *Laiklik* became a political model for the transformation of the traditional and conservative society. Although Islam was not entirely banned in the new Republic, it was strictly redefined to fit *Kemalist* ideology. To empower the authority of the new *laik* state, Atatürk institution-

alized an official Islamic discourse and consolidated all the religious organizations under the control of the new regime.⁷⁴ For instance, by abolishing the institution of the Caliphate in 1922 and replacing it with The Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) in 1924, he aimed to control religious activities in Turkey. Since then the president of The Presidency of Religious Affairs, ap-

pointed by the government and the *laik* state, has been the only official authority on religious affairs. The new regime thus chooses topics for the sermons (*khutbas*) in the Friday prayer (*Jumu'ah*) which have been delivered in Turkish, not Arabic, since 1927. This phenomenon is described as “state-directed *laïcité*” by Oliver Roy who explains that when Atatürk brought the Jacobin state model into Turkey, “he had no need to exclude the clergy because they did not constitute another center of legitimacy: he merely turned them into state employees.”⁷⁵ Further ideas about modernization, progress, and culture attempts that were made by authoritarian political elites of the early Republican Party essentially imitated Christianity, such as encouraging crowds to enter the mosques wearing shoes, training imams with musical information and allowing musical instrumentals in the mosques.⁷⁶ It was almost impossible to argue about freedom of religion and criticize the Turkish government’s policies in Turkey until 1950. It was virtual suicide to discuss those topics and if anybody dared to do so they would be persecuted. If you look at the journal archives you can see how many religious white bearded people were hanged.⁷⁷ It was this *laik*, positivist approach that brought various Muslim scholars, such as Said Nursi and intellectuals like Necip Fazıl Kısakürek to take the opposing position. This kind of religious response did not emerge only from Muslim theologians when they encountered the emergence of anti-religious thoughts; it also appeared from various Catholic thinkers after they faced the emergence of the ambit of positivism in France.⁷⁸

For some scholars, the conceptualized model of modernity and secularism in the mind of Mustafa Kemal was illustrated gloriously by French bourgeois culture.⁷⁹ Hanioglu in his book *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography*, points out that Mustafa Kemal was inspired mostly by French Nationalistic ideas and the French Republican system, particularly from the Third Republic (*Troisième République* – 1870-1940), in his construction of the *laik* Turkish Nationalist Republic.⁸⁰ Hanioglu asserts, “Like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he considered the principal aim of a republic was not to assure individual liberty but to give expression to the ‘general will.’”⁸¹ Atatürk favored France’s etatism, though he also read the works of economist Charles Gide, who claimed to follow a liberal

***Laiklik* in Turkey developed with the intention of constructing an “irreligious” state, the model for which emerged within the realm of positivism, despite being obviously militant and anti-religious**

The photo shows Atatürk and famous Turkish military commander Marshall Fevzi Çakmak praying for the victory of the Turkish army, during the Ramadan Feast.

AA PHOTO / BYEGM



Keynesian economic model.⁸² In addition to the anecdotes mentioned above, scholars have emphasized the fact that the modernity of Turkey, such as ideas of restrictive nationalism of nation-state “*modèle de la Petite Turquie*” and the anti-clerical Atatürk reference model, remained rooted in the French Enlightenment.⁸³ Further analyses have claimed that *laiklik* in Turkey ultimately had become a Jacobin model, that did not commence to separate religion but rather subdued it under the weight of the state. Binnaz Toprak also states that the Turkish secular experience, *laiklik*, which comes from *laïcité*, is akin to France’s Jacobin experiences, rather than secularism in the Anglo-Saxon world.⁸⁴

However, by analyzing the historical perspectives and development processes of the two models, many scholars have doubts that Turkish *laiklik* is akin to French *laïcité*. In fact, Ali Fuad Başgil who received his Ph.D. in France and later became a renowned law professor in İstanbul, in his book entitled *Din ve Laiklik* (Religion and *Laïcité*) argued that the Turkish *laiklik* denoted control over religions, and especially over the majority tendency of Islam, via the Directorate of Religious Affairs, created in 1924.⁸⁵ Pierre-Jean Luizard draws attention to the fact that *laiklik* in Turkey cannot be considered as similar to *laïcité* in France. He considers that in the beginning of the twentieth century, though *laiklik* was transferred to the Young Turks via Freemasons of the Grand Orient of France, they acclimatized to a radically different context.⁸⁶ In his book *Laïcités autoritaires en terres d’islam* (Authoritarian Secularism in Islamic Lands), he explains the variation of state/religion policies in Muslim lands which he considered authoritarian.⁸⁷ To support this argument, Luizard examines a process of *laïcité* in France and found that its social and civilian process

could have been observed during the Revolution. However, *laiklik* in Turkey was applied by the military elite in an authoritarian model, from the top down, and it was not part of a democratic or civil implementation process. Thus, contrary to the French civilian process towards *laïcité*, Turkish *laiklik* went through militarist and authoritarian phases.⁸⁸ Taking this into account, Rashid al Ghannushi comments on the phenomenon: “Secularism came to us on the back of a tank, and it has remained under its protection ever since.”⁸⁹ Luizard considers that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the religious policies of the colonial powers in Islamic lands addressed the colonial attitude of the western powers in Muslim lands. He says that indeed the western colonial project in Muslim lands was not conducted in the name of Christianity or secularism, but in the name of civilization. This project meant bringing a system of values from the French Enlightenment.⁹⁰

As I argued above, in France the central aim of *laïcité* is to prevent not only Catholic influence but also all religious influences from exercising their faith in the public sphere and to preserve dominant secular environments to provide freedom of conscience. Nevertheless, the state guarantees that it will remain neutral to all religions in order to assure freedom of faith and worship. Therefore, *laïcité* in France has developed after numerous social, democratic, and civil processes; quite the opposite of *Kemalist laiklik*, which was imposed in an authoritarian fashion. Yet both French and Turkish states have been involved in religious affairs, such as putting aid funds toward the building of mosques and creating Muslim councils.⁹¹ For instance, even today with a relatively conservative Islamist government, the Turkish constitution does not recognize Islam as the state’s religion, but imams are state employees and are recruited by the government.

The history of *laik Kemalism* in modern Turkey has emerged within the sphere of positivist ideology and become the one-party regime seen as “authoritarian, state-central, anti-religious and nationalist,” protected by its secular army and chosen elite. The major threat for Atatürk’s project was the Islamists, and he prevented any Islamic movement’s infringement on the political sphere. Thus, since its foundation, the socio-political system of Turkey was guaranteed by the military powers and the economic resources of the *laik* elite. While citizens chose their Parliamentary members through a democratic process, the Turkish army regularly interfered in elections to reshape the state per the *Kemalist*

***Laiklik* in Turkey was applied by military elite in an authoritarian model, from the top down, and it was not part of a democratic or civil implementation process. Thus, contrary to the French civilian process towards *laïcité*, Turkish *laiklik* went through militarist and authoritarian phases**

Eventually, *laiklik* became, in a sense, a means of protection for the *Kemalist* regime and not only blocked religious freedom but also prevented the emergence of any civil initiative

laik regime as occurred during the 28 February military memorandum incident in 1997. The memorandum requested the resignation of Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, the founder of the Islamist Welfare Party. This kind of secularism, as authoritarian domination, was similar to countries like the Soviet Union, Reza Shah's Iran, Ben Ali's Tunisia and the Baath regime

in the Middle East.⁹² Eventually, *laiklik* became, in a sense, a means of protection for the *Kemalist* regime and not only blocked religious freedom but also prevented the emergence of any civil initiative. Finally, the political rhetoric of the *laik* thoughts, based on the positivist system in opposition to the Islamic thoughts has failed to find viable solutions to nineteenth-century challenges.

Since the conservative Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AK Party – Development and Justice Party) has been in power since 2002, Turkey has undergone transformations in relation to the state-religion in Turkey, and Diyanet as an official representative of Islam in Turkey has shifted away from the *Kemalist laik* agenda towards promoting development of Islam in the society. The most successful accomplishments in economic development and modernizing rural areas of Turkey have been made during the rule of AK Party. Now we should raise the question whether modern Turkey is able or needs to reshape its own secularism in order to develop and respond to the modern world and respect the concept of modern civil society? ■

Endnotes

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2. Barry A. Kosmin, "Contemporary Secularity and Secularism," in Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar (eds.), *Secularism and Secularity: Contemporary International Perspectives*, (Hartford: ISSSC, 2007), p. 2.
3. The term secularism is not used as a synonym for *laïcité*. Following the thought of Jean Baubérot, I have distinguished between secularism and *laïcité*. According to Jean Baubérot the French term "laïcisation" refers to a socio-political historical process built within a particular context, whereas "secularization" is created to a socio-cultural process. *Laïcité* is therefore the result of a socio-political process. Applying the distinction made by Talal Asad in *Formation on the Secular*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 25, Baubérot also proposes to use secularism for the doctrine and secular to designate ideas, behaviors and sensibilities. *Laiklik* is used as a political *Kemalist* doctrine in the present essay. See further information on this topic Jean Baubérot, "La *Laïcité* the Secular State, etc...Petite Explication de Texte," *Blogspirit* retrieved January 12, 2013, from www.jeanbauberotlaicite.blogspirit.com/archive/2007/02/17/la-laicite-theseccular-state-etc-petite-explication-de-texte.html.
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(New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013), p. 709; Olivier Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 8-15.

5. Jacques Berlinerblau, *How to Be Secular: A Call to Arms for Religious Freedom*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing, 2012), p. 10.
6. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Boston: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 522.
7. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 29.
8. Danièle Hervieu-Leger, "France's Obsession with the 'Sectarian Threat,'" in Phillip Charles Lucas and Thomas Robbins (eds.), *New Religious Movements in the Twenty-First Century: Legal Political and Social Challenges in Global Perspective*, (New York-London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 42-43.
9. See, Baubérot, "La laïcité the Secular State, etc... Petite Explication de Texte," *Blogsprit*.
10. Jean Baubérot, *Histoire de la laïcité en France*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2010), pp. 3-4.
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13. For more details about the battle between church and state at the educational sphere in France during the 1789-1884 Jules Ferry period, see, Troy J. Hinkel, "Jules Ferry and Henri Maret: The Battle of Church and State at the Sorbonne, 1879-1884," (Ph.D. Thesis) University of Kansas, (2011), retrieved from http://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/8077/Hinkel_ku_0099D_11447_DATA_1.pdf?sequence=1.
14. Franck Fregosi (ed.), "Les Conditions d'Exercice du Culte Musulman en France - Analyse Comparée à Partir d'Implantations Locales de Lieux de Culte et de Carrés Musulmans," (FASILD, May 2005); *L'Exercice du Culte Musulman en France. Lieux de Prière et d'Inhumation*, (Paris: La Documentation française, Coll. Études et Recherches, 2006), pp. 26, 31.
15. See, Jean Baubérot, *Laïcité 1905-2005: Entre Passion et Raison*, (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 2004), pp. 175-179.
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24. José Casanova, "Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective," in Peter Beyer and Lori Beaman (eds.), *Religion, Globalization, and Culture*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 106.
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28. Franck Frégosi and Deniz Kosulu, "Religion and Religious Discrimination in the French Workplace: Increasing Tensions, Heated Debates, Perceptions of Labor, Unionists and Pragmatic Best Practices," *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law (IJDL)*, Vol. 13, No. 2-3 (July 2013), p. 197.
29. Roy, *Laïcité Face à l'Islam [Secularism Confronts Islam]*, translated by George Holoch, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 10-11.
30. Berlinerblau, *How to Be Secular*, pp. 47-48.
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33. Jocelyne Cesari, *When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslims in Europe and in the United States*, (New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2006), p.70.
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43. This term of "modernity," "modernism" or "modernization" has been used to refer to major changes and transition from the past in the conditions of social transform, however Raymond LM Lee explains that "By comparing these terms (Modernity, modernities and modernization) in relation to globality, reflexivity and multiplicity, the fate of traditions is once again given due attention through a focus on their revival and reinvention. This attention is vital for elucidating the privileging of tradition rather than its displacement in social change." "Consequently, the meaning of modernity would not be concerned with abrupt ruptures but with a state of becoming that does not always transcend the past." Raymond LM Lee, "Modernity, Modernities and Modernization: Tradition Reappraised," *SSI-Social Science Information (Information sur les Sciences Sociales)*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (2013), pp. 409-424.
44. Ali Fuad Başgöl, *Din ve Laiklik*, (İstanbul: Kubbealti Yayınları, 2016), p. 8.
45. Thierry Zarccone, *La Turquie Modern et l'Islam*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2004), pp. 134-135.
46. It should be noted here that Said Nursi supported values of Meşrutiyet (Constitutional Monarchy) against absolute Monarchy let by Sultan Abdulhamid II., and for creating a new constitutional state he allied with the *İttihad ve Terakki Partisi*.
47. Although the franc-maçonnerie were present in Ottoman Empire since 18th centuries their link with Muslims strengthened only in the middle of the 19th century. Zarccone, *La Turquie Modern et l'Islam*, p. 79.
48. Zarccone, *La Turquie Modern et l'Islam*, pp. 134-135. For an excellent work on the same topic see also Thierry Zarccone, *İslamda Sır ve Gizli Cemiyetler*, translated by Ali Berktaş, (İstanbul: Alkım Yayınevi, 2005).
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50. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 121.
51. For detail on this topic, see M. Şükrü Haniöğlü, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008).
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53. Hamit Bozarslan, *Histoire de la Turquie: De l'Empire à Nos Jours*, (Paris: Tallandier, 2013), pp. 323-325.
54. Zarccone, *La Turquie Modern et l'Islam*, p. 133.
55. Reha Bilge, "Atatürk Üzerine Yakup Kadri ve Şefket Süreyya ile bir Söyleşi," *Ekonomik Yaklaşım*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (1981), pp.107-120, retrieved June 15, 2015, from http://ekonomikyaklasim.org/pdfs2/EYD_V02_N06_A06.pdf.
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58. Heyd, *Language Reform in Modern Turkey*, pp. 77-78, 93.
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63. Quoted by Mohamed El Mansour, "Salafis and Modernists in the Moroccan Nationalist Movement," in John Ruedy (ed.), *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa*, (New York: ST. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 59. See also, Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi, *Contemporary Arab Thought Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History*, (London: Pluto Press, 2003), p. 397.
64. M. Şükrü Haniöğlü, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 130.
65. Abdülhak Adnan Adıvar, "Türkiye'de İslami ve Batılı Düşüncelerin Etkileşimi," in Davut Dursun (ed.), *Türkiye'de İslam ve Laiklik*, (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1995), p. 19.
66. Adıvar, "Türkiye'de İslami ve Batılı Düşüncelerin Etkileşimi," p. 20.
67. Adıvar, "Türkiye'de İslami ve Batılı Düşüncelerin Etkileşimi," p. 20.
68. He also wrote: "Comte and Haeckel as well as Voltaire and Rousseau found their translators and admirers, with effects that sometimes went beyond the intellectual circle –as for example the Young Turks officers who made a point of honor of drinking cognac and eating ham. More important than the out-and-out positivists were those who preached the separation of religion and the state- the forerunners of the laicism of the Republic." Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (2nd ed.), (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 402-403.
69. Pierre-Jean Luizard, *İslam Topraklarında Otoriter Rejimler*, translated by Egemen Demircioğlü, (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2013), p. 33.
70. Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam*, pp. 27-28.
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72. Şükrü Haniöğlü, "Erken Cumhuriyet'ten Beyaz Türklere 'Bireysel Dindarlık,'" *Sabah*, (February 23,

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76. Muhammed R. Feroze, "Laiklikte Aşırılık ve İlimlilik," in Davut Dursun (ed.), *Türkiye'de İslam ve Laiklik*, (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1995), p. 25. For further information see, Muhammad R. Feroze, *Islam and Secularism in Post-Kemalist Turkey*, (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1976).

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78. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (2nd ed.), (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 51.

79. Alev Çınar, *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 5.

80. Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography*, p. 134. Hanioglu made a footnote that "Mustafa Kemal read a Turkish rendition of Fouillée's well-known study of national character "Esquisse Psychologique de Peuples Européens," which deftly attacked anthropo sociology and its assertion that the struggle for life was the major law of society, with great interest and 'in a single night.'" Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography*, p. 153. Additionally, "when Mustafa Kemal read Voltaire's versus "La Mort du Fils des Rois Suffit à ma Vengeance / Étouffons Dans Son Sang la Fatale Semence," he noted, "The people will live to annihilate the kings." see Recep Cengiz (ed.), *Atatürk'ün Okuduğu Kitaplar*, (Ankara: Anıtkabir Derneği Yayınları, 2001); "Théâtre de Voltaire," Vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Garnier Frères, 1927), p. 124, cited in Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography*, p. 153.

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82. Recep Cengiz (ed.), *Atatürk'ün Okuduğu Kitaplar*, pp. 35-42.

83. Thierry Zarcone, *La Turquie: De l'Empire Ottoman à la République d'Atatürk*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), pp. 132-133.

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85. Başgil, *Din ve Laiklik*. See also, Zarcone, *La Turquie: De l'empire Ottoman à la République d'Atatürk*, pp. 138-139.

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88. Luizard, *Laïcités Autoritaires En Terres D'Islam*, pp. 1741, 1749, 1758, 1767, 1775, 1783, 1792.

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92. Berlinerblau, *How to Be Secular*, p. 5.