

A Secular State: The Turkish Dilemma

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Abstract

Kamal Ata Turk played an important role in westernization of modern day Turkey. The process of replacing caliphate with a republic brought a great deal of success but unfortunately it all came at the cost of the weakening connection from the glorious Islamic past of the country. To attain such transformation reforms were carried out to terminate the religious inspiration in constitutional, cultural and public spheres. By introducing the laicism as the state' philosophy, the republican elite established a secular way of life for Turkish nation. As a result of such repression of religion and religious practices modern Turkey has complex relations with Islam and with its own past. Today segments of the republic strongly support Ataturk's ideology while others voice in favor of going back to society with more Islamic standards and stronger ties with Muslim world.

Keywords: Turkey, Islam, Secularization, Kamalism, reforms

1. Introduction

The Caliphate was legitimately eliminated on March 3, 1924 and a new era began which was very much different from the previous era in almost all aspects. The elimination of the caliphate was followed by a wide -ranging effort to separate the governmental and religious associations. Mustafa Kamal Ataturk brought a series of changes in political, social, economic, legal, educational areas. Numerous restrictions were imposed to reshape the Turkey as a secular nation state, where practicing religion in any sphere of life was outlawed. These changes were put into practice under the headship of Mustafa Kamal Ataturk (1881-1938) in harmony with Kamalist dogma. Century's old connection between Turkey and Islam was brought to an end; Turkish patriotism and nationalism destabilized the religious identity.

From, the problem of our study is:

- How a complete upside down conversion was achieved in Turkey and what were the displays of unrest among Turkish Muslims?

2. Methodology

To answer the problem, we have divided this paper to three parts; the first will be devoted to the description of historical preview of circumstances that led to the secularization, the second to the analysis of secular reforms and their impact on a society having old ties with Islam. While the last part sums up the study with unrest among Islamic groups against secular system and current revival of Islam in Turkey.

3. Historical Preview

Islam was introduced to Turkey almost in the 8th and 9th centuries. Consequently to Islamic struggle, The Ottoman Empire came to existence under the leadership of Ghazi Usman, founder of the Ottoman dynasty. The Sufis and Ghazis of Anatolia played a major role in the movement. They derived their title of Sultan from the Abbasid Caliph in Cairo. In its formative stages, the Ottoman State was of a far more democratic character in comparison with its contemporaries, since its rulers depended for their power on the support of their people and the 'Ullema' (religious scholars). But when the Ottoman dominions expanded, the rulers became autocrats whose sole ambition was to conquer alien lands at every cost. The Empire lasted for more than 6 centuries; 1299-1922. The decline of the Ottoman dynasty can be justified with unqualified rulers, disputes of inheritors for throne, quitting expansion of the empire and lastly the poor economic conditions. These circumstances paved ways of secularization in Turkey. The whole process was multifaceted. Initially,

the downfall of the dynasty took place with the development of civilization while the intellectual activity was shortened or almost absent. The decline of the Islamic thought started when the caliphate failed to fulfill the needs of the developing civilization. It was basically the decline of the Islamic thought that was perceived as inability of Islam to satisfy the needs of the time. In such circumstances, secularism got an edge. Sultan Salem-III was the one who made the first move to introduce Westernization during his period. Furthermore it was supported by Sultan Mahmud II and his successors during the *Tanzimat* period (1839-1876). Midhat Pasha was the most vocal supporter of Western thoughts. He advised the Sheikh-ul-Islam to issue a Fatwa for implementation of Western laws in the courts, for the reason that Islam does not forbid their implementation.

The Fatwa of the Sheikh-ul-Islam and other likeminded intellectuals was supported by the following grounds: - (Zallum, 2000)

- (a) A Muslim state was permitted to adopt any thought, or rule, or law that did not contradict Islam and that had not been prohibited.
- (b) The absence of the reprimand is approval. So taking a question whose exclusion has not been declared would be Mubah. Consequently, any matter Shari'ah is silent about is Mubah. Hence the implementation of any rules and laws is Mubah about which Shari'ah did not stated any prevention.
- (c) Islam supports Shura' (consultation) justice and equality so democracy is from Islam. It's mentioned in the Qur'an also the Prophet (saw) headed for it.

3.1 *Modernization of Turkish Institutes*

Subsequently establishment of numerous Western Institutions like creation of new Courts of Law and modern educational setup etc. took place. Furthermore, administration and the defense services structure were also revamped. A conflicting mix of the old and the new institutions was quite evident in the beginning of 19th century. Despite all the hard work to create harmony and uniformity, it remained fruitless due to a wide gap between the two entirely different civilizations. Ottoman failed to create a nation of heterogeneous elements. Their indifference to nationalism, on account of the Ottoman universalism, caused irreparable losses to the Turks nation.

The movement of modernization and secularization of the traditional Caliphate gained momentum and drive from the French revolution, and continued passionately during the 19th century. Ironically in the Ottoman Empire, the Turks did not participate in economic affairs. Businessmen and technicians were non-Muslim. The Turks were either laborers or government officials. The Ottoman government depended almost entirely on its officials. The Turks suffered not only economically, but also culturally. The dawn of the 20th millennium brought countless miseries and in humiliation for the traditionally proud Turkish national. The Young Turk revolution of 1908, the growth of Turkish nationalism and the establishment of the Turkish Republic were express outcome of these frustrations. In a real term secularization of the Ottoman State took place when the nationalities of the Empire annulled the idea of a Muslim Ummah and acquired their national independence. Moreover, Arab mutinies bowed down the idea of the 'Islamic Ummah'. These historic developments gave birth to Turkish nationalism as the popular ideology of the Young Turk movement. (Hanioglu, 2001)

By then the dominant Young Turks faction whole heartedly concluded that, it was the Turkish people, not the Muslim Ummah that should be the actual force behind the national transformation. The slogan "To be Turk" became more significant than "to be Muslim". Such modification of identity resulted in decline of religious conviction at individual's level.

With that condition Mustafa Kamal aimed to end the centuries old caliphate. The Turkish Republic was formed in 1923. He succeeded in the implementation of secularist reforms mainly because the ground was gradually and favorably prepared by his predecessors since long. His fascinating personality, his popularity as the national hero of Turkish revolution and above all the decisive role of Turkish Nationalism Movement were the major contributory factors to establish a secular regime in Turkey after the victory that ended the War of Liberation in 1922. He founded a new nationalists and Secularist state of Turkey.

Ataturk's primary aspire was to modernize or even westernize the Turkish society by all means. As founders of republic of Turkey were determined to eliminate all the aspects of Ottoman Empire so vivid changes were made from top to bottom. Religion was banned on immediate basis, because to them, Religion would have been an obstruction to the process of so called westernization or modernization. New policies were adopted to attack the Islamic institutions; making excuse of "refining Islam of politics" the educational system was completely revamped. Islamic education was banned in favor of secular schools. The role of Islam was shrunk drastically in public as well as political life of Turkey. Aim was to uproot the religious consciousness of the Turkish people.

4. Secularization of Turkish Constitution and Role of Kamal Ataturk

4.1 Constitutional Progress:

The 1921 constitution was shaped during war of independence and it largely dealt with the national sovereignty idea, the constitution supported the establishment of a government system in which all the powers of sovereignty were embodied in the parliament. The constitution declared that Republic of Turkey would be a democratic state, where the willpower of the people, instead of Allah', would decide the laws and policies. So the Grand National Assembly was acknowledged the only representative of the country. Though the constitution supported the democratic system but secular order was not articulated; as constitution clearly announced Islam as official religion of state.

The constitution of 1924 was the first proper constitution endorsed by the Republic, the country' system was primarily the similar to that of the earlier Constitution. The new Constitution contained 105 articles, and was approved by a greater part of the Assembly on April 20, 1924. It's known as the longest living constitution in Turkish history. As, it was put into practice for 36 years and was mainly, conformed to the Secular ideas. The parliamentary system was implemented for forming the government and cooperative responsibility. The lawmaking and administrative powers were absolute in the Assembly and the Assembly had right to dissolve the government at any time. Oppositely, the government did not have the right to suspend the Assembly. On the other hand, the President and the commission of Ministers were granted executive powers. According to the 1924 Constitution, every person had unchallengeable equality before the law; torment and brutal or atypical punishment were not allowed; individual freedom, freedom of morals and religion, besides freedom of thought and expression were assured in addition to all civilian and political rights and freedoms. Also, there were no conditions on economic and social rights.

The 1961 constitution contained only four principles of Kamalism instead of the six mentioned in the Constitution of 1924. (Eligor, 2010) These principles include republicanism, nationalism, secularism and revolutionism. Socialism was adopted as an additional principle. Article 2 of this Constitution intensely declared that "The Turkish Republic is a secular democratic, national and social realm". While, Article 19 stated that "Nobody shall be tolerable to abuse religion or religious feelings or things in any way it's not permissible for political or private advantage or for gaining authority, also it will not be permitted to base even partially, the basic social, economic and legal order of the state on religious grounds .Anyone found violating this prevention, or even found persuading others to do so, shall be punished by the proper laws. If such violation is done by associations and political parties, then, the party shall be permanently closed down by authorized courts and finally by order of the Constitutional Court". Therefore, the 1961 Constitution firmly discouraged the use or practice of religion under the warning of penalties.

4.2 Reforms of Kamal Ataturk:

Since the foundation of the republic, the major problem Turkey is facing is the struggle between secularism, and Islam and traditional Islamic views. Ataturk had created a cultural mutiny, not only by closing down the foundation of Islam as a state religion, but also introduced changes in clothing and education, removing the Arabic alphabet and frequently trying to throw Turkey into the contemporary western world with even more vigor. On the whole purpose of all these initiatives was to shatter the power of Islam and Islamic values which had become the characteristic of Muslim Turkish culture. It was refusal of the religious representatives to rethink the Islamic law and correctly reinterpreting in Ottoman rule in the light of Qur'an and Sunnah. This ineffectiveness of the religious advisers resulted in secularism.

The reforms related to creating a secular society during 1923 to 1938 can be classified into four basic categories. (Karasipahi, 2009)

Category	Reforms
Legal	A secular Constitution adopted and enforced.
	Exclusion of Article which affirmed Islam as the country religion from the Constitution in 1928.
	Turkish state was officially declared secular in 1937.
	Abolishment of Religious courts
	The Constitution protected secularism in two oaths of office. The language used in the Constitution indicated the importance of secularism to its originators.
	The Islamic model of civil code was replaced by European model.
Political	Removal of Sultanate / Caliphate

	Declaration of Republic
Social and Religious	Social life was secularized eradicating the impression of Islamic morals from everyday routine.
	In 1925 Polygamy was outlawed and in 1926 civil marriage was enforced.
	The Gregorian calendar was adopted and Sunday was announced as approved holiday.
	Religious orders and societies like <i>Tarikat</i> were sealed while wearing a uniform-dress was imposed on and affiliates of the religious ministry.
	The call to prayer (Azaan) was planned to be made in Turkish and not in Arabic.
	European hats and caps were introduced and the traditional fez was banned with a declaration in Kastamonu.
	The substitution of religious symbols with the symbols of European civilization carried out.
	Equal rights to hold office for women were advocated.
Educational	Adoption of surname: In 1934, a law was passed about the adoption a surname. "Mustafa Kamal declared that no longer would names follow the traditional pattern of son-of-father, but that each person would adopt a family name, to continue through the generations.
	Closure of Religious School and Madrassas
	Replacement of Arabic alphabets with the Latin alphabet.
	Introduction of modern schools with co-education.

4.3 Impact of Reforms:

These reforms clearly depict that secularization was attained in the constitutional law, as well as in social life of Turkish society. In all forms of traditions, arts and culture: in songs, myths, dances, the aim was to build an identity that is non-Islamic in its all aspects and which is favorable for secular culture of a state. Every reform throughout the shaping period of the Republic was planned to scratch and damage the legacy of the Ottoman political and social influence and to set up a modern and secular structure to identify the latest Turkish realm. In order to get rid of every sign that had a connection with the Ottoman-Islamic tradition and to thoroughly "break from the Ottoman era," a whole detachment was ensured from intellectual and fictional characteristics of the past. The Turkish language for the state influential was to be purified, and as a result, it was purified from its Arabic and Islamic influence, supposed to scheduled and revise the secular characteristics through writings, education, and the media. After the introduction of the Latin alphabet, books, magazines, newspapers, and official papers were placed in the records for years to come. Also the acceptance of laws concerning to the unification of education assisted the budding of secular traditions, symbols, and practices.

Secularization in Turkey mainly functioned for the repression of the religious accomplishments and to bring Islam under state's control. In 1924 during early days of republic a religious association was formed and named as Religious Affairs Directory. (Ebaugh, 2009) Religious clergy became state officers. Interestingly the formation of the Religious Affairs Directory shows the partial separation of religion and state affairs which is in contrast to the certified explanation of secularization in the Turkish Constitution. It is an example of interruption in religion and religious affairs by state. The Turkish secularization signifies an exclusive application and description of Secularism. Where, on the one hand the constitutional definition of laicism, contradicts its official application; the Religious Affairs Directory, both stands as a sharp contrast to each other. Another most important step towards secularization was that Ataturk brought to an end the nation's quest for Jihad, substituting it with the expression: "Peace at home, peace in the world". Accordingly, this shift disconnected the religious concept of jihad from the government system.

The Kamalist reforms gave a soaring surge to Secularism from 1921 to 1928. That continued to encompass large areas of national life in Turkey with its appalling effects, until it reached its climax in 1945. It began to subside in 1949 with the introduction of optional religious education in schools. The year 1949 marks beginning of a period of modernization in secularism which has continued up to the present time. (Feroz, 1976) Some anti-secular tendencies had developed between 1950 and 1960 when the Democratic Party was in power.

The first attempt made by the Kamalist regime to separate Religion and State was aimed at limiting the practice of religion within the precincts of places of worship. Its actual result was the inferiority and dependency of religion to the state. Secular state of turkey not only suppressed the political and social influence of the Ulema, its main target seemed to be the total elimination of religion from the politics, cultural and social life of the Turkish nation. The opposing Islamic reforms of the Kamalist government put the religion defunct in Turkey as a social Institution. They failed to comprehend the deep-rooted influence of Islam over the Turkish people. The secular reforms actually played an essential function in Turkey. The lack of formal spiritual education in the 1930's seems to have provided a strong impetus for renewed efforts on the part of educated Muslims to produce abundant literature on the various aspects of Islam in 1940's. The Turkish government finally introduced optional religious education in schools early in 1949.

5. Conclusion

After the elimination of the Ottoman Caliphate, the Turkish Republic was formed under command of Kamal Ataturk, in 1923. Through his reforms in all aspects of life he initiated a new period in the history of Turkey. He always advocated the replacement of traditional life style with a new approach based on western mode. Furthermore he kept blaming the Ottoman Empire as well as Islam for the stagnation of Turkish nation. That's why to him the only way to achieve thorough modernization of Turkey is to eliminate the social and political influences of Islam. The reforms imposed in this regards clearly indicates that Kamal Ataturk' understanding of a country' heritage was not precise. We have example countries that hold old civilization and yet they had made their place among developed countries without sacrificing their historical affiliations.

Modernization means the alteration of intellectual, political, economic, social and psychological organisms. Transformation does not always mean the destruction or escape from the past. Ataturk not only misunderstood the term "transformation or Modernization" but also interpreted it incorrectly.

Even though the foundation of the Republic is generally attributed as the victory of democracy but in reality, since the establishment of republic and for upcoming 20 years, Republican Peoples party kept ruling the country without any major confrontation. And this is the prime reason behind the survival of secular rule in Turkey. But after the introduction of multiparty system, the appearance of rival groups and anti-system or Islamic movements against the Kamalist regime was a clear evidence of Kamal' upsetting acts. This growing struggle against the Kamal' legacy show that such rule of oppression and resistance for keeping Islam out of politics may not hold forever.

In a period of almost half a century the movement of Islamic revival was able to regain political power even though in a narrower sense. The success of Erbakan' Welfare party and recent incredible success of Erdogan's Justice and Development party in continuous three elections demonstrates the gradual increase in acceptance of Islam and specially the political Islam by Turkish public.

Today when some suppose Ataturk a true leader of Turkey, many others considers him a dictator who forced his will upon the nation and escaped from the country' history for his authoritarian intentions.

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