

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SECULARISM AND DEMOCRACY:  
THE CASE OF TURKEY IN THE 2000s

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SECULARISM AND DEMOCRACY:

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Edgar Şar, certify that

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## ABSTRACT

### The Relationship Between Secularism and Democracy:

#### The Case of Turkey in the 2000s

This thesis offers a detailed analysis of the relationship between secularism and democracy, with particular reference to the case of Turkey. At a time when secularism is often associated with states' non-egalitarian and exclusionary practices, this thesis puts forward the concept of "secularism as a political principle" and presents it as a sine qua non condition for a polity to be an inclusionary democracy. Furthermore, with a detailed examination of the relevant literature, this thesis indicates that there is a decent consensus among the prominent scholars in this field on the positive relationship between correctly implemented secularism and a state's democratic credentials. In this regard, this thesis elaborates on the process of the "de-secularization of the state" in Turkey in the 2000s at the levels of ends, institutions, and law and policies and reveals that this process has so far gone hand in hand with increasing intensity of exclusion by the state and the domination of a particular comprehensive doctrine in the political sphere.

## ÖZET

Laiklik ve Demokrasi İlişkisi:

2000'lerde Türkiye Örneği

Bu tez laiklik ve demokrasi ilişkisini, Türkiye örneğine belli başlı referanslar vererek incelemektedir. Laikliğin devletlerin ayrımcı ve dışlayıcı uygulamalarıyla fazlasıyla ilişkilendirildiği bir zamanda, bu tez “siyasi bir ilke olarak laiklik” kavramını ortaya atmakta ve bu kavramı kapsayıcı bir demokrasi olma iddiasında olan devletler için olmazsa olmaz bir koşul olarak tanıtmaktadır. Ayrıca bu tez, ilgili literatürün ayrıntılı incelenmesi sonucu, bu alanın öne çıkan bilim insanları arasında, doğru uygulanan laiklik ile devletin demokratik yeterliliği arasındaki pozitif ilişki hakkında asgari bir görüş birliği olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bu tez Türkiye’de 2000’lerde gerçekleşen “desekularizasyon süreci”ni amaçlar, kurumlar ve yasa ve politikalar seviyelerinde irdelemekte ve bu sürecin, Türkiye’de devletin artan dışlayıcılığı ve belli bir dünya görüşünü dayatması ile paralel ilerlediğini göstermektedir.

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*to Rena and Riyad,  
who were with me at the beginning of my life  
and  
to the extremely lonely but courageous democrats of this country.*

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

In 2011, in his “Arab Spring tour” Turkish Prime Minister and the leader of country’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) Recep T. Erdoğan called on three uprising-hit Arab states – Egypt, Tunisia and Libya – to adopt secular government. “Turkey is a democratic, secular and social state of law” he said and promoted secularism, emphasizing “a secular state is the one that treats all religious groups equally, including Muslim, Christian, Jewish and atheist people.”<sup>1</sup> This is only one of the examples, where Turkey presents itself as an exemplary secular and democratic polity that the countries with Muslim-majority population should emulate (Ramadan, 2011). Its allies, too, have often hailed Turkey in this regard. In 2010, describing Turkey as “a great Muslim democracy”, US President Obama said: “the fact that it is both a democracy and a country with a Muslim majority makes it a critically important model for other Muslim countries in the region.”<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding such praises that came from both inside and outside Turkish public opinion, it is a fact that Turkish model secularism or *laiklik*<sup>3</sup> has long been criticized for being an exclusionary and anti-democratic ideology that was put

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<sup>1</sup> “Erdoğan offers ‘Arab Spring’ neo-laicism”, 15.09.2011, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=erdogan-offers-8216arab-spring8217-neo-laicism-2011-09-15>

<sup>2</sup> “Obama says Turkey should be full member of Europe”, 08.07.2010, <http://www.corriere.it/International/english/articoli/2010/07/08/Barack-Obama-exclusive-interview-Corriere-della-Sera.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> The Turkish *laiklik* means secularism. It has its roots in French word *laïque* (Turkish Language Association) and, thus, is commonly considered as synonymous for *laïcité*. The similarity between the concepts herein is not linguistic only. Many have compared French *laïcité* and Turkish *laiklik* in the literature, generally emphasizing upon their “assertive” character and the limitations they set to the public visibility of religion (See Ahmet T. Kuru 2011). Nevertheless, despite a number of linguistic and conceptual similarities with French *laïcité*, *laiklik* has been a quality of the state of Turkey, which allows it to intervene in religious affairs intensively. As Istar Gozaydın has shown, this kind of understanding of *laiklik* is inherited from Turkey’s territorial ancestors, the Ottoman and Byzantine Empires. See “Bizans, Osmanlı ve Cumhuriyet... Üçünde de din devletin kontrolünde”, 28.01.2015, retrieved from [http://sosyal.hurriyet.com.tr/yazar/ahmet-hakan\\_131/bizans-osmanli-ve-cumhuriyet-ucunde-de-din-devletin-kontrolunde\\_28065223](http://sosyal.hurriyet.com.tr/yazar/ahmet-hakan_131/bizans-osmanli-ve-cumhuriyet-ucunde-de-din-devletin-kontrolunde_28065223)

forward to tackle the predominantly religious society and violated freedom of conscience and religion. Moreover, being a quality of the regime of which the military has always considered itself the guarantor, *laiklik* was taken to be a sort of legitimacy-provider for the tutelage that the military exerted over the civilian politics. Particularly, during the “February 28 Process” of the late 1990s, when the military staged a “post-modern coup” against the Islamist Welfare Party-led coalition government, *laiklik* was intensely instrumentalized by the military to justify its interventions. Thereby, particularly in the early 2000s, *laiklik* was exposed to harsh criticisms by the liberals and democrats of Turkey.

Turkey was clearly not an exception in terms of the rise of harsh criticisms against secularism. Beginning from the early 2000s, the literature on secularism has increasingly drawn attention to “the crisis of secularism”, whereby the century-long reign of secularism and its taken-for-granted position are remarkably called into question (Stepan ,2011; Calhoun et al., 2011). In this questioning, similarly, secularism has been criticized to pave the way for exclusionary, majoritarian and non-egalitarian state practices (Mahmood, 2016).

AKP’s coming to power in 2002 with a strong parliamentary majority as a purportedly “conservative democratic party” that abandoned Islamism, reconciled with the secular system and adopted a pro-EU stance, was seen by many as a breaking point for the fate of *laiklik* in Turkey. Many liberals allied with AKP in the expectation that in its struggle against the military tutelage it would fix *laiklik* by redefining it in a completely new way so as to clear it of its authoritative and militaristic aspect and to render it an egalitarian and pluralist principle (Göle, 2012; Kuru 2011). Nevertheless, despite the fact that during the 14-year AKP era, *laiklik* gradually took up a very different outlook, it is hardly possible to conclude that the

state is less exclusionary now compared to 14 years ago. Therefore, it is worth studying secularism within the context of democracy and exclusion by the state, particularly in the case of Turkey, where the institutionalization of exclusion as a coping mechanism for religious and ethnic diversity is a historical fact. As in the case of Turkey, exclusion by the state is a political problem and thus requires a political solution. In that respect, the main question that I address in this thesis is what kind of a political principle the state needs to adopt and institutionalize in order to avoid exclusion and become inclusionary?

When avoiding exclusion by the state and ensuring political inclusion are at stake, the approach to diversity is obviously the key factor. Today most societies are characterized by diversity in various ways and undoubtedly the states that recognize this diversity and take it as a fact are more likely to be an inclusionary democracy. Throughout the AKP era, instead of rethinking and fixing its understanding of secularism, Turkey incrementally estranged itself from secularism in a conspicuous manner. Through my analysis of the case of Turkey I indicate that it was not secularism itself but a wrong conception and implementation of it that had to do with the exclusionary mechanisms of the state and the process of desecularization that the state has undergone did not lead to progress in inclusion and democracy but on the very contrary exacerbated the already existing exclusion and created even new forms. In this sense, I argue that adopting and institutionalizing secularism as a political principle centered on political inclusion and diversity is sine qua non for an inclusionary democracy. Keeping all these in mind, my hypothesis is as follows: In order for a state to be an inclusionary democracy, it needs to take diversity as a fact, which I argue is only possible by adopting and institutionalizing secularism as a political principle.

## 1.1 Main concepts

### 1.1.1 A political principle

In my question and hypothesis, *the political* as a central category plays a significant role. I borrow Rawls' conceptualization of the political, which is one of his primary references in the *Political Liberalism*. Despite not providing a one sentence long definition, Rawls profoundly elaborates the meaning of the political mostly by comparing it with its antonym: the comprehensive. For Rawls, a conception is comprehensive, if it is concerned with what is of value in human life and ideals of personal virtue and character (2005, p.175). A political conception, on the contrary, is about the basic structure, that is main political, social and economic institutions, of the society and thus applies to all citizens regardless of their identities and the comprehensive doctrines they affirm (p.11). In that sense, Rawls differentiates the political from *the comprehensive* with regard to its scope: Whereas a political conception provides a guiding framework that helps reach a political agreement on issues concerning the basic structure including the constitutional essentials and basic questions of justice, comprehensive conceptions comprise nonpolitical values and virtues that inevitably create gaps between individuals' conscientious convictions (p.156). Therefore, Rawls underlines, if a concept is political, then it does not presuppose a comprehensive doctrine and can thus be shared by all citizens regarded as free and equal (p.176).

### 1.1.2 Taking diversity as a fact

The very distinction between the political and the comprehensive, which I mentioned above, provides a ground for my understanding of society and how the state ought to

approach to society. In Rawlsian terms, each citizen affirms a comprehensive doctrine and this induces to a society characterized by numerous ideals, beliefs, lifestyles and so on (2005, p.4). The political, on the other hand, that is supposed to shape the basic structure of the society does not deny or ignore the comprehensive but takes it as a fact. It follows then that on political grounds the state must take diversity as a fact in its approach to the society.

Although the comprehensive does not only refer to religions or sects, considering the context that secularism has in common with it, I would like to draw a particular attention to religious diversity. Here I use Bhargava's conception of religious diversity, which he divides into two: First, diversity of religion exists in a society where "the people adhere to faiths with very diverse ethos, origins and civilizational backgrounds." This kind of religious diversity exists, for example, in a society that has Muslims and Jews or Muslims and Buddhists or Christians and Muslims so on. Second, diversity within religion refers to internal differences within a religious group and has two sorts: horizontal diversity and vertical diversity. Whereas horizontal diversity is about internal differentiations within a religion through sects, denominations, confessions such as Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism in Christianity, Sunni and Shi'a in Islam; vertical diversity refers to the cleavages through hierarchical relations among the people of the same religion (2011, p.95).

The fact that religious diversity can be this much multi-dimensional brings about two noteworthy conclusions: The first one is about how crosscutting religious cleavages may lead to religious domination. Bhargava's (2011, p.95) brief and to the point take on this point is again enlightening. To quote him:

Every form of diversity, including religious diversity, is enmeshed in power relations. If so, endemic to every religiously diverse society is an illegitimate use of power whereby the basic interests of one group are threatened by the actions of another. It further follows that inherent in religiously diverse societies is the possibility of both interreligious and intrareligious domination – a broad term that encompasses discrimination, marginalization, oppression, exclusions and the reproduction of hierarchy. (Two other forms of domination are also possible: the domination by the religious of the nonreligious and the domination of the religious by the nonreligious.)

The second point that I want to make explicit is significant in that it explains why the diversity must be taken as a fact. When we consider the high possibility of domination as a result of religious diversity and also the fact that the intergroup and intragroup power dynamics particularly along the religious – nonreligious line, may not remain static and fixed lead us to conclude that the diversity is and remains a durable fact. Taking it as a fact is not merely an acknowledgement but a commitment to equal recognition in a democratic context.

### 1.1.3 Political inclusion, an inclusionary democracy

As I already underlined, the political is a category that applies to the basic structure and thus all citizens as free and equal. It is therefore crucial for the basic structure to be organized in such a way that each individual and group may indeed be and feel included as free and equal. In this sense, political inclusion refers to a principle that guarantees the inclusion of all in a society as free and equal regardless of any cleavage related to religion, sect, ethnicity, race, color, gender and so on.

Conceptualized as such, I take political inclusion as an indispensable precondition for democracy. Therefore the term inclusionary democracy does not refer to any particular kind of democracy but I use the term to emphasize on the inclusionary aspect of democracy. So what is the distinguishing mark of an inclusionary democracy? I think an inclusionary democracy can best be distinguished by the way it approaches to and deals with (religious or any other form of) diversity, which is

taking diversity as a durable fact. By taking diversity as a fact, an inclusionary democracy guarantees two basic things: First, it promises to stand against all sorts of discrimination on the basis of difference and refrains from pursuing monist policies aiming at homogenization and second, it takes all necessary measures to avoid cultural relativism that would set the stage for practices that are discriminatory and violate human rights.

#### 1.1.4 Secularism as a political principle

Although secularism is definitely the primary concept of this thesis, it may clearly be noticed that I have not referred to it so far as frequently as one would expect. Under this heading, there will not be a huge or exhaustive content either. This is mainly because I base my conception of secularism mostly upon the concepts that I have addressed so far. Hence, two points need to be made explicit to wrap up my conception of secularism, which I have already begun to address prior to this heading. First, I take secularism as a political principle to be adopted by the state, which at the same time means that it is not a comprehensive ideology. It is particularly important to underline this, for in most of the relevant literature secularism is taken to have its own ideals, values and even a lifestyle. Like, the terms *the secular* and secularization are generally elaborated within the framework of secular – religious binary, which inevitably presents anything related to secularism as belonging to a particular comprehensive doctrine. On the very contrary, however, the fact that secularism is a political principle indicates that individuals and groups that affirm different comprehensive doctrines and have very distinct lifestyles can agree in endorsing the secular state in the sense that it would serve the purpose of inclusion and peaceful coexistence.

The second point I would like to make explicit gives an answer to the very question “What is secularism for?”, which prepares the basis for the elaboration of what secularism means in the context of this thesis. Because it is a political principle, I do not associate secularism with any comprehensive ideal, value or purpose but on the contrary contend that its *raison d’être* must be based on a practical purpose. According to my conception, secularism is the only political principle that can guarantee a state to be an inclusionary democracy. In this sense, the practical purpose of secularism is political inclusion, which it fulfills by acknowledging the reality of (religious) diversity in any society and endorsing the pursuit of ends, institutions, laws and policies. That is, taking diversity as a fact a secular state aims at avoiding any act that would lead to exclusion, homogenization or domination.

The direct relationship that I build between secularism and inclusionary democracy in my hypothesis encourages me to argue that secularism in the way I conceptualized it does not belong to any culture, nation or continent but on the contrary is a universalizable political principle that would function in any context where inclusionary democracy is desired to become dominant and even “in the situations where the term (secularism) has not been traditionally used” (Baubérot, 2010, p.57).

## 1.2 The outline

In Chapter 2, I go into the existing literature that particularly focuses on the relationship between secularism and democracy. I review the arguments of both the proponents and the opponents of a positive relationship between secularism and democracy within the context of questions concerning separation, culture and exclusion. Here I first reveal that the scholars who argue that secularism is necessary

for democracy and those who contend that secularism can well be dissociated from democracy use different methods and then demonstrate that even those who emphasize upon a negative relationship between secularism and democracy are not categorically against any form of secularism but certain practices of so-called secular states. At the end I come up with the conclusion that secularism as a concept should not be judged merely by particular practices and one should distinguish between different forms of secularism.

In chapter 3, I aim at providing a brief history of *laiklik* and a general overview of the debate on secularism in Turkey that would serve as the context of the developments during the AKP era. Tracing it back to the early republican era, I demonstrate that *laiklik* has never been a clearly defined principle and that the narratives that explain *laiklik* through simple binary oppositions can hardly be useful to understand the actual history of *laiklik* in Turkey. Then I profoundly analyze two conflicting narratives that dominate the literature and reflect on both within the context of the historical overview that I provided at the beginning of the chapter.

Finally, chapter 4 is the empirical chapter of the thesis. In the beginning of the chapter I provide a summary on the context of *laiklik* in the 2000s by analyzing the developments and debates during the early years of the AKP era and indicate how “collapse of *laiklik*” took place just before the 2010 – 2016 period. Thereafter I reflect on the concept of “deseccularization” and then illustrate how the process of deseccularization of state took place in the 2010 – 2016 period at the level of ends, institutions and law and policies.

## CHAPTER 2

### SECULARISM AND DEMOCRACY

During the recent debate on secularism whereby the taken-for-granted position of secularism was called into question by many, the relationship between secularism and democracy was by far the most prominent matter of discussion. As a matter of fact, for both the critics and the defendants of secularism, it was its relationship with democracy through which they could best substantiate their arguments. Besides, I find it useful to discuss secularism within the context of democracy – which is the ground of the question of this thesis – because experience shows that religiously motivated exclusion by the state goes hand in hand with the weakening democracy. In other words, exclusion of minorities or any group from the equal citizenship regime is a de-democratizing influence for constitutional democracies. Therefore, although there are sizeable separate literatures on both concepts, in this chapter I exclusively concentrate on the literature that dwells on the relationship between secularism and democracy both in a general context and particularly for Turkey.

*“Is secularism necessary for democracy?”* is the main question that the literature on the relationship between secularism and democracy poses. Since democracy is the dependent variable, it is secularism that is to be questioned with all its meanings and historical development in order to reach a conclusion about its relationship with democracy. How should this questioning be posed? While some scholars that will be referred to below prefer to ask what secularism is for and work out an understanding of secularism in order to examine its possible conceptual relationship with democracy, others either base their conception of secularism upon its stereotypical meanings that it is commonly identified with – such as strict

separation, exclusion and indifference – or focus on specific practices of secularism, generally within the context of a number of states that claim themselves to be secular states. This difference in methodology may have certain consequences that I intend to address at the end of this part.

The scholars who are skeptical about a positive relationship between secularism and democracy have so far come up with arguments that are either similar to or consistent with each other. I think most of the critiques based on this skepticism can be summarized under three subtopics: Questions concerning separation (1), questions concerning culture(s) (2) and questions concerning exclusion (3). Below I detail the arguments that underpin this skepticism as well as those that disagree with it.

## 2.1 Questions concerning separation

The scholars, who are skeptical about democracy's need for secularism, often refer to separation as the main element of secularism that makes this need questionable. Veit Bader, for instance, refers to a "strict wall of separation" and argues that, without giving any other detail, liberal democratic constitutions neither do nor should require it (2007, p.94). For Bader, "strict separation" is a part of independent political ethics, which is a "secular foundation" that excludes those who disagree with it and thus can hardly help govern religious diversity democratically. He instead puts forward the concept of "overlapping consensus" (see Rawls, 2005) based on certain universal principles and not any other ethic or comprehensive worldview.<sup>4</sup> Bader further argues that those who endorse overlapping consensus should not defend strict separation (2007, p.109). The problem here is that Bader does not provide any clue

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<sup>4</sup> Bader refers to three methods as to how secularism can be neutral towards societal diversity: Independent political ethics, common ground strategy and overlapping consensus. In the next two sections I reflect on these methods in a more detailed way.

about his own understanding of separation. From his reflections, it is clearly understood that he is against “strict separation”, as an element of various “secular totalitarian regimes” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Stalinism, Nazism and Baathism (p.97). Does it follow then that he is not categorically against separation per se? May his criticisms be circumvented by a softer version of separation, which is in line with democratic standards as, for instance, in the case of the USA? If yes, to what extent is separation plausible? Bader leaves these questions unanswered.

Another scholar who skeptically approaches towards a positive relationship between secularism and democracy is Alfred Stepan. Stepan’s main argument is that secularism is not a necessary condition for democracy (2011, p.114). Instead of secularism, Stepan argues, a democratic pattern of state-religion-state relations is possible through the satisfaction of what he calls “twin tolerations”<sup>5</sup>, for which the “separatist pattern”, which many identify with secularism, is neither the norm nor sufficient. For Stepan, there are at least three more models that can satisfy twin tolerations, even though they may not comply with separation. These are the “established religion” model, the “positive accommodation” model and the “respect all, positive cooperation and principled distance” model (p.115). Stepan is clearer than Bader about what he means by separation by presenting US and French models as being “close to the separatist pole” and argues that with their “policies of support of religion”<sup>6</sup> strong European democracies remarkably diverge from this separatist model [of the US and France] and this does not harm their democracies (p.115-117).

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<sup>5</sup> Stepan defines “twin tolerations” as the “minimal degree of toleration that democracy needs to receive or induce from religion and the minimal degree of toleration that religion (and civil society, more generally) needs to receive or induce from the state for the polity to be democratic” (2011, p.116).

<sup>6</sup> Here Stepan mentions some form of policies that differentiate the models that envisage affirmative relations between the state and the religious institutions from the separatist model of the US and France. The policies include governing funding of religious schools, organizations and clergy, official government department for religious affairs, some clerical positions made by government appointment etc. (2011, p.117).

This divergence supports Stepan's argument that there is not a single ideal model but various models that guarantee democratic state-religion-society relations (p.114). As a matter of fact, Stepan mentions a continuum with a separatist pole, which he thinks the US and French models are closer to, than the other three models that guarantee democratic state-religion-society relations by satisfying twin tolerations. Does it follow that these models are totally anti-separatist or against separation *per se*? The answer is clearly no, as Hashemi (2009, p.128-129) shows:

... The "twin tolerations" are "the minimal boundaries of freedom of action that must somehow be crafted for political institutions vis-à-vis religious authorities, and for religious individuals and groups vis-à-vis political institutions." Are these "boundaries" that Stepan insists "must somehow be crafted" between the "political institutions [of the state]" and "religious individuals and groups [in society]" not simply another way of calling for a separation of church and state, albeit by another name? ... After all, what is a "boundary" if not a form of separation?

Put differently, different models of state-religion-society may be situated in different points in continuum with regard to their understanding of separation, from which it does not follow, however, that the models that violate US or French norms of separation and are less close to the separatist pole than the US or France do not carry out a decent separation envisaged by secularism as a political principle. After all, any regime that we can plausibly call democracy does separate religion from state institutions in one form or another.

Bader and Stepan rightfully underline that separation between state and religion is not a guarantee for a strong democracy, since there were and still are many regimes that are separationist and call themselves secular but are at the same time far from being a democracy. The existence of separationist but undemocratic regimes can, on the one hand, prove the fact that separation is not a sufficient condition for a polity to be democratic but, on the other hand, it does not mean that it is not a necessary condition as there are many other criteria for calling a country

democratic, which are clearly as important as a democratic treatment towards religious diversity. However, any regime that is monolithic on religion and rejects religious diversity cannot be called a democracy either. As a matter of fact, the democratic states that Stepan thinks satisfy the twin tolerations except for the “separationist” US and France also carry out some kind of separation between church (or religion) and state including even those states with established religions in a vestigial and largely symbolic sense, like in England and Scandinavia (see also Taylor, 2011, p.34). By overlooking this, both Bader and Stepan fail to grasp the importance of a decent separation and fall into two widespread faults in the debates on secularism that Taylor draws attention to. For Taylor, the first fault is to define secularism in terms of some institutional arrangement, which he thinks leads many to miss its primary goals.<sup>7</sup> The second fault is indeed what follows the first one. In Taylor’s words, “if the whole matter is defined by one institutional formula, then one must just determine which arrangement of things best meets this formula, and there is no need to think further” (p.40). By falling into these faults, both Bader and Stepan label separation as a particular institutional model, concentrate on its negative connotations and do not dwell whatsoever on its goals, which I think are crucial for a democratic polity.

Separation can best be evaluated by questioning its *raison d’être*, rather than identifying it with a particular institutional arrangement and examining this arrangement. Is separation an end in itself or is it rather a means for reaching some other end? Rajeev Bhargava begins his analysis of secularism by considering these questions and posing even a simpler one: “Why separate?” Bhargava refers to three values, which he thinks provide a justification for separation: autonomy, equality and

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<sup>7</sup> In the next two sections, I go into these goals.

democracy. Herein Bhargava draws attention to the fact that if the state and religious institutions come together, they would damage individuals' and society's autonomy more than in case they are separate. Moreover, since religions are ultimate ideals with their own comprehensive views of good, a probable overlapping of religious and state institutions would inevitably result in concentration of power in any one institution or group and thus the imposition of a particular set of ultimate ideals over the entire society (1998, p.489-491). Therefore, for Bhargava it is only through separation between state and religious institutions that universalizable values like peace, toleration, religious liberty and equality of citizenship can be guaranteed (2011, p.98).

Besides, Bhargava acknowledges that there are multiple models of separation. Whereas one type identifies separation with exclusion, the other does not require the state to exclude religion but to commit neutrality (1998, p.493). I liken this distinction to that of Stepan, which indicates the remarkable difference between the "low-state-controlling separatist secularism" and "high-state-controlling separatist secularism" (2011, p.119). These distinctions are significant in that they demonstrate that separation can solely make a polity neither democratic nor anti-democratic. It is a means to reach various ends such as religious liberty and equality for individuals and groups. If this means is used properly in accordance with these ends, then separation is most likely to contribute to the development of inclusionary democracy in a polity.

## 2.2 Questions concerning culture(s)

One of the most problematized issues raised during the recent debate on secularism is about its universality. Does secularism reflect a set of particular values, ethics,

lifestyles of the context that it was born out of, namely the West, and thus belong to a particular nation, culture or continent, or does it encompass a reality that goes beyond particular cultures, nations or civilizations? This question constitutes the main axis of the debate on the relationship between secularism and culture(s). The “Universal Declaration on Secularism (*Laïcité*) in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” signed by 250 academics from 30 countries straightforwardly affirms that secularism does not belong to “any culture, nation or continent”. Because, the declaration puts forward, “the processes of secularization can take place or have already taken place in different cultures and civilizations in everything but name.”<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, some scholars such as T.N. Madan and Ashis Nandy, both of whom concentrate on secularism in India and engaged in debate with Bhargava and others, disagree with this and think that cultural conditions matter and are even decisive for the fate of secularism.

Madan puts forward three impossibility arguments for the adoption of secularism in South Asia. To him, secularism cannot be “a generally shared credo of life” (1), “a basis for state action” (2) and “a blueprint for a foreseeable future” (3) (1998, p.298), because of mainly the place that religion occupies in social and political life in the South Asian context. Madan underlines that because “South Asia’s major religious traditions –Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism– are totalizing in character, claiming all of a follower’s life” (p.302), religion is so much

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<sup>8</sup> Herein, I find it necessary to clarify what the declaration means by secularization (*laïcisation*), since it has various meanings. In Article 5 of the declaration, secularization is defined as a process whereby the state separates itself from any type of religious thought as a source of legitimacy and allows citizens to exercise their fundamental political rights through freely debating the subject. The declaration adds that any modern state, which respects its citizens’ diverse social, moral and religious beliefs, can easily integrate this process. Therefore, what is meant by secularization in this declaration has nothing to do with how religious the society and individuals are. Nor is this process concerned with whether or not religiosity in the society declines. The declaration defines secularism as a “fundamental principle of the state” and secularization, within this context, refers to the process whereby the need for adopting this principle emerges and becomes inevitable for the sake of diversity in the society. See [http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article\\_interactif/2005/12/09/declaration-universelle-sur-la-laicite-au-xxie-siecle\\_718769\\_3232.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article_interactif/2005/12/09/declaration-universelle-sur-la-laicite-au-xxie-siecle_718769_3232.html)

constitutive of society that the domains of the religious and the secular are neither visibly separate nor have equal weights. Therefore, to Madan, secularism, in the form of separation of politics from religion, has been the dream of a minority that wanted to impose its will to privatize religion in the social life and thus remained a “social myth” that could never be realized (p.298). To Madan, secularism based on separation of politics from religion, which is to be increasingly privatized, is therefore “a gift of Christianity to mankind”, which makes it impossible to work in traditional societies, where the history of secularization did not take place like in the West and religion remains constitutive of society (p.307). Under such cultural conditions, Madan argues, secularism fails to take root in the society and go beyond being a minority imposition, which made it “achieve the opposite of its stated intentions”, namely, the communal divide, religious radicalization etc. (p.301-302).<sup>9</sup>

Like Madan, Nandy, too, puts forth a comprehensive criticism on secularism and modernization, both of which he sees as inseparable. Nandy begins by making a distinction between two kinds of understandings on religion: religion-as-faith and religion-as-ideology. Religion is a faith, if it is only “a way of life, a tradition that is definitionally non-monolithic and operationally plural.” It is, however, an ideology, when it is “a subnational, national or cross-national identifier or populations contesting for or protecting non-religious, usually political or socio-economic interests.” To Nandy, the ideological aspect of religion produced by modernization has gained strength as a reaction to it. Secularism, as “an ideology of modern statecraft” endorsed by secularist intellectuals and modernizing middle class, is

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<sup>9</sup> Taking it as a comprehensive doctrine, Madan considers secularism as an elite ideal to be affirmed merely by a particular segment of the Indian society. Nevertheless, when considered as a political principle that guarantees equal rights and liberties of all citizens, it would not be fair to argue that Indian society feels totally antipathy towards secularism, as following article shows: Codi Robertson, “Indian Muslim Women Take Muslim Personal Law to Court”, retrieved from <http://www.clarionproject.org/analysis/indian-muslim-women-take-muslim-personal-law-supreme-court>

generated against religion-as-ideology and has no consideration and respect for religion-as-faith (1998, p.321-324). According to Nandy, secularism's main failure lies in its disregard about cultural and traditional conditions, where religion-as-faith has always had a primary place in South Asia. This disregard is what Nandy believes has exacerbated the social division between the secular modernist elite and the masses and thus resulted in the acceleration of religious radicalization as well as ethnic and communal violence (p.331-332). Likewise, the public-private distinction and separation of religion from politics that are immanent to secularism but not long-lasting traditions in South Asia, for Nandy, explains the communalization of politics. In other words, the more religious and cultural symbols are banned from politics, the more they get radically politicized and enter the public life "through the back door" (Bhargava, 1998, p.524). Like Madan, Nandy, too, thinks that secularism becomes counterproductive in the societies, where it does not traditionally exist, in that it exacerbates what it originally aims at targeting, namely, ethnic, communal and religious divide and violence.

The reflections of both Madan and Nandy on secularism apparently refer to a particular understanding of secularism, which is based on Indian experience as well as several stereotypical institutional arrangements such as separation of religion from politics, exclusion from public etc. I call them stereotypical, not because I do not think they are a part of secularism but because they highlight these arrangements without engaging in a conceptual assessment and restrict themselves to particular practices in Indian experience. This has two consequences: first, both scholars exaggerate the importance of the "cultural inadaptability thesis" (Bhargava, 1998, p.525) and, second, they overlook multiple motivations and functions of secularism with alternative conceptions of practices. Bhargava, who profoundly examines the

anti-secularist arguments of Madan and Nandy, too, draws attention to these consequences. In his critique of the “Madan-Nandy thesis”, Bhargava first underlines that they overestimate the problem of cultural inadaptability by merely reflecting on a single model of secularism, namely the “church-state model”, and failing to recognize another model, which he calls the “religious-strife model”. Because of the overemphasis on the church-state model in their thesis<sup>10</sup>, Madan and Nandy easily tend to see secularism entirely as “a gift of Christianity” (Madan, 1998, p.307). However, Bhargava puts forward, this is neither the only model nor the convenient one for deeply multicultural contexts like India. The religious-strife model of secularism is more about toleration of the religious others and thus how to handle religious diversity democratically.<sup>11</sup> Considering its deep diversity, Indian society provides necessary conditions for the religious-strife model to be applied and the existence of different cultural conditions with no church in play “does not affect the development of political secularism” (Bhargava, 1998, p.525).

For Bhargava, Madan-Nandy critique of secularism does not pay any attention to the differences between different forms of secularism either. They conflate hyper-substantive secularism and ultra-procedural secularism and completely overlook the distinction between these two versions, which is crucial to understand the grounds that Bhargava builds his favorite version of secularism on.

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<sup>10</sup> For Bhargava, the church-state model is in fact “a gift of Christianity and culture-specific”. This model is valid in the contexts, where a single Christian sect or denomination is dominant and there is a power struggle between the religious authority and the internal dissent. The development of secularism with the church-state model targets religious absolutism and aims at the fragmentation of power, which is possible through toleration of the internal dissent within a single religion, sect or denomination (1998, p.525).

<sup>11</sup> As opposed to church-state model, religious-strife model of secularism, for Bhargava, can accommodate deep diversity by first tolerating religious others and then granting them full liberty along with equal citizenship rights. So development of secularism with religious-strife model makes eventually religious affiliation irrelevant for citizenship. Bhargava states that the development of western secularism embodies both church-state model and religious-strife model. However, the dominant context in the west leads many to highlight the church-state narrative and overlook secularism’s commitment regarding religious diversity (1998, p.525 )

Before coming to Bhargava's examination of how Madan-Nandy thesis relates to it, I shall first reflect on his three versions of secularism. According to how separation of religion and state is legitimized, for Bhargava, there are two absolutist versions of secularism. When the separation of religion and state is based on a set of ultimate ideals and values<sup>12</sup> - for instance, individual autonomy - the outcome is the hyper-substantive secularism. In Bhargava's conceptualization, hyper-substantive secularism is absolutist in that it is legitimized absolutely by the values that it is based upon and brushes aside procedures almost totally. Procedures, however, are significant and come on the scene when the competition between the ultimate ideals and goods becomes so harsh as to disrupt social order. In such cases, some procedures should be developed in order to manage and handle the conflict. When such attempts result in the abandonment of all ultimate values for the sake of producing "universally acceptable procedures", then the outcome is another absolutist form of secularism, namely the ultra-procedural secularism. In ultra-procedural secularism, the motivation behind the separation of religion and state is the procedures themselves. Regardless of what goods and values are at stake, its ultimate goal is to abide by the procedural norms. Because both of these versions justify the separation of state and religion on absolute and authoritative grounds, Bhargava draws attention to the need for working out a third-way understanding of secularism, which is to underlie the separation of state and religion from a non-absolutist perspective on the grounds of both some values and procedures "without an *a priori* commitment to the absolute priority of either". Bhargava calls this contextual secularism. Contextual secularism is not against the ultimate ideals and allows them to be in public. It only resorts to certain "minimal procedures" to

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<sup>12</sup> By "ultimate ideals", Bhargava means comprehensive views that are broadly about what is and what is not good or worthy and that give meaning to individuals' life, like Rawls' conception of "comprehensive doctrine" (2005, p.174).

intervene, in case the conflict between these ideals in public life goes so far as to threaten “the structure of dignified life for all citizens”. In other words, contextual secularism is both for the procedures, because it uses them to guarantee “a life of dignity for all” whenever it is at risk and the substantive values, because it is committed not only to the protection of “a life of dignity for all” but also of any substantive value that endorses this idea. In order to keep this balance, Bhargava neither suggests total and undisputed exclusion of religion from state affairs nor compromises separation. Abiding by the reasons underlying separation, which I previously went into, Bhargava puts forward that the relations between state and religion should be organized within the framework of what he calls “principled distance”. Differently put, whether the state should intervene or refrain from intervening in any religious affair depends on the promotion of two main principles, namely religious liberty and equality of citizenship. These two principles apparently serve as equalizers. On the one hand, the principle of religious liberty may oblige the state to intervene in one religious affair or group more than the other, which might be considered against the common principle of “equal distance” at the first glance. However, through the principle of equal citizenship, on the other hand, state actions that envisage both intervention and non-intervention are to be “guided by non-sectarian principles consistent with a set of values constitutive of a life of dignity for all”. As opposed to absolutist versions of secularism, contextual secularism does not decide everything a priori but restricts itself to the mentioned universal principles based on “a life of equal dignity for all”. All other details regarding the form of separation must be worked out by each society, which makes this form of secularism genuinely contextual (1998, p.514-516).

Now getting back to Bhargava's examination of the Madan-Nandy thesis, Bhargava thinks that because it views separation only as exclusion and identifies secularism only with absolutism, the anti-secularist critique of Madan and Nandy is only effective against the hyper-substantive aspects of Indian secularism. Bhargava says that he can even agree with Madan and Nandy on their critique that targets "anti-religiosity" of hyper-substantial secularism that excludes religion from public. Nevertheless, because they did not clearly distinguish between hyper-substantial and ultra-procedural secularisms and tried to "knock down the whole edifice of modern secularism" by targeting hyper-substantial secularism, they automatically failed to figure out the deeper motivations underlying secularism not as an ideology but as a political principle. Addressing their critique of privatization or individualization of religion and rationalization of politics, Bhargava asks Madan and Nandy an essential question: what motivations lie behind individualization and rationalization? Considering how constitutive religion is of the society, both Madan and Nandy labeled "individualized religion" as a myth for the Indian context. Bhargava admits that traditional religions, as ethical visions of good life, require and already have social power through cultural communities. Indeed, contextual secularism would not prevent these cultural communities from having access to the public realm. Herein, however, Bhargava poses two critical questions. The first one is evoking the inter-sectarian religious wars in Europe: what if the conflict between religions as ultimate ideals goes beyond "a battle in the abstract, in the minds of people" and turns into "a battle that involves powerful communities"? The second question is about individualization of religion: how are matters to be decided, if a collision emerges between individuals and larger groups or only between individuals? For both cases, Bhargava puts forward the concept of "disengaged reason", "a reason disengaged

from all interests, practices and traditions”, which he believes can only offer a plausible framework for conflict resolution. As a matter of fact, although both Madan and Nandy suggest the rejection of secularism and put forward the need for revealing the resources of toleration in the traditional religions, Bhargava admits that “...with all its inadequacies secularism was invented for precisely those conditions where different religions mattered equally deeply to people. Modern secularism arose because the resources of tolerance within traditional religions had exhausted their possibilities” (1998, p.526-531).

Madan and Nandy’s critique of secularism and Bhargava’s almost point-by-point response in the form of a critique of the critique stand out as an illustrative debate on both theory and practice of secularism. The fact that they three focus on the case of India is, I believe, extra advantageous not only because it addresses the question of whether or not secularism can be adopted in a non-western culture, where religion is of vital importance and secularism has not existed traditionally, but also because, considering the highly diverse structure of Indian society, it helps draw attention to a forgotten fact, which I think the main focus should have always been upon, namely, that secularism is not there for anything but to guarantee peaceful co-existence between and equality of all individuals and groups in a society and refers to a political principle to be adopted by the state in order to guarantee liberty, equality and non-domination of any group in the society. Not surprisingly, focusing on the context of India, these three scholars problematize similar problems of the Indian society, that is, the communalization of politics, religious fanaticism etc. What they disagree on is how to solve these problems. Whereas Bhargava, as mentioned in a detailed way above, is for a contextual version of secularism that he thinks does not have any “cultural inadaptability” problem, Madan and Nandy openly argue that it is

nothing but secularism that brought about these problems (Madan, 1998, p.301-302; Nandy, 1998, p.324-325). What are then solutions that Madan and Nandy offer? They seem to come up with two incompatible kinds of solutions. First, both scholars openly propose the rejection of secularism and draw attention to the need to deploy the resources and notions of tolerance that they think all religious traditions in India somewhat have. Considering the important role played by religion in Indian society, they believe, religious tolerance can be the best solution to religious fanaticism and intolerance (Madan, 1998, p.302; Nandy, 1998, p.336). The second kind of solutions that Madan and Nandy come up with is more interesting. Even though both scholars have so far seemed to be categorically against secularism, there is a noteworthy space in the writings of both scholars, where they appear to give a chance to secularism. Madan, for example, openly says that the sentence “secularism must be put in its place”<sup>13</sup> that he centers his article upon does not demand of its rejection but questions if it is possible to find a more convenient way for its “expression”. Put differently, instead of totally rejecting secularism, Madan thinks that in multi-religious societies like India secularism should be different from as it is in the West by being “compatible with faith” and not being restricted to rationalism (1998, p.309).<sup>14</sup> As for Nandy, there are two kinds of secularism: the first one is the exclusivist western version, whose adoption in India he criticizes throughout his entire piece and the second one is its accommodative version, which “revolves equal respect for all religions” and endorses “a continuous dialogue among religious traditions and between the religious and the secular” (1998, p.327). Herein, both scholars seem to have preferred not to go into detail about the versions of secularism

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<sup>13</sup> His piece that I mostly referred to is called “Secularism in its Place”.

<sup>14</sup> Herein, too, he emphasizes upon rationalism because for Madan rationalism is the sole motivation of modern secular state, which requires total exclusion of religion from public life and is thus what makes secularism a cultural alien in societies like India.

that they find reasonable and compatible with their critique. As a matter of course, much depends on what they mean by the terms they used. Nevertheless, I think these are sufficient to state that in spite of all their critiques, Madan and Nandy are not categorically against the objectives of secularism, instead they seem to embrace these objectives and that a version of secularism can be developed, which can accommodate the contextual cultural conditions.

### 2.3 Questions concerning exclusion

In my thesis, as is mentioned in the introduction, I take secularism as a political principle of state to be applied to political and public institutions, which is an indispensable element for a polity to be an inclusionary democracy. As I will show, some scholars openly support this argument, while others think completely the opposite and argue that secularism is either unnecessary for or incompatible with democracy (and inclusion). Furthermore, the questions about separation and cultural adaptability that I went into above have much to do with the questions of exclusion, because the scholars who argue both for and against separation or cultural adaptability of secularism eventually justify their arguments with the concept of exclusion (and inclusion). Therefore, the matter of exclusion stands out definitely as the crux of the debates on secularism.

Interestingly enough, the scholars that argue against secularism justify their arguments by underlining the incompatibility of secularism and democracy/inclusion whereas those who argue for secularism do so by not coming up with a set of other reasons to adopt it but underlining the fact that it is *sui generis* for inclusion and democracy. Even though there appears to be a deadlock here due to the collision of diametrically opposite arguments, I think, it is an advantage that both groups have a

common problem: exclusion. As a matter of fact, considering the conception of secularism I use in this thesis, it would be much more preferable to discuss with someone who argues against secularism but is for inclusion than someone who is for secularism but considers unfair exclusion by the state legitimate for the sake of this or that ideology. Therefore, in spite of my arguments underlying the prominence of secularism for inclusionary democracy, I focus here on a collision on secularism and not inclusion, which I believe decreases the divergence between the scholars with opposing views on secularism.

One of the striking points that underlie the divergence between the scholars that are concerned about inclusion but have diametrically opposite arguments on secularism is apparently their conception of secularism. The questions about exclusion indicate that the compatibility of secularism with inclusion is, to a great extent, related to the question of whether it is a political concept,<sup>15</sup> namely a concept that does not include any disputed element of an ultimate truth, or a comprehensive doctrine that inherently features a conception of the good. Now that most societies today are characterized by not only religious diversity but various, complex and cross-cutting cleavages, which means that it is impossible for all individuals in a society to affirm a single conception of good and truth, the adoption of a comprehensive doctrine as a state principle would inevitably lead to exclusion by the state. Therefore, it is mainly the disagreement on whether secularism is a political principle or a comprehensive ideology that creates the divergence among the scholars about its relationship with inclusion. I think that there is a marked difference in the questions they ask to come to a conclusion about secularism. On the one hand, those who are skeptical do not have a carefully evaluated conception of secularism

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<sup>15</sup> In the introduction I elaborate what I mean by “the political” and “the comprehensive”. For more info see Rawls (2005, p.156, 175-176)

but rather attribute to it several clichés and a set of stereotypical institutional arrangements such as strict wall of separation, exclusion of religious reasons from the public etc. (Taylor, 2011, p.40-41) and, thus, concentrate on how secularism is applied today by various states that claim themselves to be secular states. Those who see an affirmative relationship between secularism and inclusion, on the other hand, mostly pose wider questions. Instead of focusing merely on how secularism is applied in some contexts, they contemplate on secularism by elaborating what it is for and how it emerged so as to ground its relationship with inclusion and democracy. In this approach, the underlying motivation behind secularism, which is to be found in its history, not only indicates that it should be a political principle to be adopted by the state in order to institutionalize inclusionary democracy in a polity by taking diversity as a fact but also provides the criteria to examine the states that claim themselves to be secular states.

For Taylor, to begin with, modern secularism originally emerged as a result of the search for a way out of battles of religion. Once it was understood that the existential fact of different sects could not be brought to an end by means of war, the “need for a common ground of coexistence for Christians of different confessional persuasions” came out. At that time, meeting that need required the recognition of diversity as a fact, which could then be done through two different strategies: first strategy was to find a common ground for all Christian denominations and even for all theists and the second one was to find a separate ethic independent of all kinds of religious beliefs on the grounds that humans are rational creatures and do not need “irrational” religious beliefs.<sup>16</sup> Now that, given the current diversification of modern

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<sup>16</sup> Common ground strategy aims at finding a common ground for the coexistence of all Christians that were fighting each other in the wars of religion. “The defenders of the common ground argued that our obligation to God required that we keep our word to fellow human beings (or perhaps theists), and that this trumped any demands stemming for confessional allegiance.” Independent political ethic,

societies, both strategies include various comprehensive elements that are potentially exclusionary – the common ground strategy takes belief in God as the center of its common ground and thus excludes atheists or polytheists while the independent political ethic refers to a particular conception of the good and is thus exclusionary not only for the religious in the society but other individuals and groups that do not affirm this particular comprehensive view – there is a need for a third way of coexistence that could guarantee inclusion for all. Taylor calls this third way “overlapping consensus”<sup>17</sup> and states that it requires the “acceptance of certain political principles” without demanding a universally agreed ethical basis for it. For demanding an ethical basis would indeed be to impose “some people’s philosophies on others”. Overlapping consensus, therefore, enables those who adhere to it to have an own understanding of the good and, in this manner, aims at respecting the diversity by taking it as a fact (1998, p.32-37). Taylor believes that overlapping consensus through which diversity is respected and protected and a convergence among individuals in the society can be built should underlie the development of secularism. Diversity is respected, because here there is no demand of full agreement on the values or ethics that define an ultimate truth. On the other hand, this will create a convergence between those who may and do disagree in their deeper understanding of the good, because this convergence will be around some political

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on the other hand, requires human beings to “abstract from all religious beliefs altogether” and “deduce certain exceptionless norms” about how they should treat each other and can peacefully coexist (Taylor, 1998, p.33-34).

<sup>17</sup> The term “overlapping consensus” was raised by Rawls (2005) and Taylor uses it as the viable alternative to the common ground strategy and independent political ethic. Taylor states that independent political ethic was indeed put forward, because common ground strategy became problematic as the society further diversified. Although independent political ethic refers to the acceptance of certain political ethic that individuals may affirm regardless of whether or not they are religious, it requires them to accept not only the ethic but also the foundation, which is by definition independent of religion (Taylor, 1998, p.38). Overlapping consensus, however, does not demand the sharing of the foundation, which means that it allows individuals to accept common and universal political principles based on not particular ethics but whatever comprehensive views of the good they affirm.

principles based on universal values like equal freedoms and rights of human beings (p.48-51). In this context, Taylor concludes, secularism, as a political principle that guarantees equality of individuals and groups affirming different comprehensive doctrines – be it in majority or minority – is not an optional extra for a modern democracy (p.53).

Bader seems to agree with Taylor about the plausibility of overlapping consensus as the only alternative to the common ground and independent political ethic. He thinks that overlapping consensus may “provide a fair and fairly stable ground for liberal-democratic polities” (Bader, 2007, p.108). However, unlike Taylor, Bader is hardly in favor of secularism based on overlapping consensus. Because there is no place for “exclusivist secularism” in overlapping consensus, Bader thinks, overlapping consensus should not be called “secular” (p.108). Put differently, Bader does not credit the compatibility of secularism with democracy on the grounds that it cannot be a political and non-comprehensive concept. He lists a number of reasons for this argument, two of which I think provide a summary. First, Bader refers to emerging modern states to justify his argument that being a secular state does not mean being a liberal or democratic state. Second, “some western states and politics in the last century were certainly ‘secular’ but violated not only minimal standards of liberal-democratic morality” (p.94).<sup>18</sup> As I mentioned earlier, the scholars that are skeptical about the compatibility of secularism with democracy mostly concentrate on certain practices of so-called “secular states” and define secularism accordingly instead of evaluating its objectives. Bader, too, does so by referring to emerging modern states, some western states and even totalitarian states

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<sup>18</sup> Bader thinks that liberal democracy should be underpinned a minimalist universal morality so that it does not impose a particular interpretation of some ethics or values to the larger society and can abide by its commitment to be neutral with regard to the competing comprehensive doctrines (2007, p.70-71).

of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as Germany during the Third Reich, the USSR, and Fascist Italy etc. to ground his argument that secularism is inherently a much demanding and comprehensive ideology that violate minimal morality of liberal democracy. Having not contemplated on the deeper motivations behind secularism, Bader considers anti-religious totalitarian or illiberal developing states as genuinely secular and puts forward that there are secularist threats as well as religiously motivated ones against liberal democracy. Therefore, for Bader, “it is counter-productive to appeal to the secular character of the state” for guaranteeing democracy and inclusion (p.97-99). Herein, I believe, lies the major inconsistency of Bader’s argument. While he, on the one hand, points out to overlapping consensus as the only viable option to institutionalize an inclusionary democracy, because he fails to see the originally positive relationship between inclusion and secularism that has been evident throughout its history, he does not distinguish between different forms of secularism, attributes the entire concept of secularism to an extremely exclusionary version and, thus and so, overlooks its primary motivations on the other.

So far I have tried to show that secularism, on the basis of reasons why it emerged that reflect the motivations behind it, might be conceived as a political principle and that the view, which considers it as having an inherently comprehensive content fails to grasp these motivations. However, from what I have shown so far it does not follow that there is no such thing as comprehensive or exclusionary secularism. Only someone with blinkered vision would deny the fact that in some contexts secularism is carried out in the form of a comprehensive doctrine, which includes the imposition of certain values, ethics and even lifestyles. I think, it is definitely the proliferation of practices underpinned by an understanding of secularism, which hardly kept in step with deepening diversity in most societies,

that led many scholars to engage in rethinking on it and work out a “rehabilitated” conception of secularism in line with its underlying motivations. Although some scholars like Bader do not agree with them (2007, p.94), Taylor, Bhargava, Connolly and others worked out some conceptions of secularism that are more likely to fit for inclusionary democracy. For Bhargava, in particular, it is worth doing, because a number of bad practices of secularism may suffice for criticizing it but does not provide any reasonable ground to totally reject it (2011, p.92). In this context, some scholars, unlike their colleagues who approach secularism as a monolithic concept, made a clear distinction between different ways to understand and implement secularism, particularly, along the inclusionary – exclusionary axis. Bhargava’s distinctions between ultra-procedural and hyper-substantial secularisms and between amoral and value-based secular states (1998, p.512-514; 2011, p.97-98), Casanova’s distinction between secularism as ideology and as statecraft doctrine (2011, p.66), Hashemi’s distinction between philosophical, sociological and political meanings of secularism (2009, p.106) and, finally, Stepan’s distinction between low-state-controlling and high-state-controlling separatist secularisms (2011, p.119) are only a few of the many examples.

I think that the main and distinctive feature of inclusionary version of secularism and its difference from the exclusionary one is about its goals. According to Milot and Baubérot, the constitutive element of secularism is the equality of those having different beliefs (2011, p.24). Notwithstanding that principle may have developed differently in different contexts with different historical-sociological processes, there should be a minimal threshold for secularism to be valid in all contexts (Baubérot, 2009, p.5), which, for Blancarte, is a social regime based on peaceful coexistence (2000, p.117). Taylor, too, thinks that secularism is in fact

about the “correct response of the democratic state to diversity” rather than merely a fixed relation between state and religion. In this context, for Taylor, secularism has three major principal goals: The first one is that “no one must be forced in the domain of religion or basic belief.” So the first goal refers to the freedom of conscience as well as free exercise of religion and aims at “protecting people in their belonging to and/or practice of whatever outlook they choose or find themselves in”. Second goal is that “there must be equality between people of different faiths or basic belief; no religious outlook or (religious or areligious) *Weltanschauung* can enjoy a privileged status, let alone be adopted as the official view of the state” and aims at guaranteeing an equal treatment by the state. The third goal, last but not least, is that “all spiritual families must be heard in the ongoing process of determining what the society is about (its political identity), and how it is going to realize these goals (the exact regime or rights and privileges).” Within the framework of these three goals, Taylor thinks, a fourth goal might be added: “one should try as much as possible to maintain relations of harmony and comity between the supporters of different religions and *Weltanschauungen*” (2011, p.34-37). Putting it in a superior position over that which is stuck in stereotypes related to state-religion relations, Taylor thinks that secularism modeled on these four goals enables a modern democratic state to correctly respond to diversity.

Bhargava and Baubérot seem to agree with Taylor on the values, namely religious liberty, equality and toleration, which should underlie secularism as an indispensable element of inclusionary democracy. In other words, the moment we consider secularism as an end to be achieved not for inclusion or the mentioned values but for the sake of itself, it becomes a comprehensive doctrine that cannot be affirmed by all individuals and groups in a society. Stepan, for instance, clearly states

that secularism is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for democracy. He substantiates this argument by referring to the fact that “separatist secularism can be and have been an integral part of regimes that are non-democratic” (2011, p.115). As I mentioned above, Stepan sees what he calls “twin tolerations” and not secularism as the base of a democratic state-society-religion relations. Therefore, instead of evaluating its objectives, he attributes secularism to the practices of the regimes that call themselves secular and dissociates it from inclusionary democracy. Herein, Stepan takes the case of Turkey as an example and lists six reasons to show why separatist secularism can be and is non-democratic.<sup>19</sup> In my opinion, however, such examples point out to the role of inclusion to assess how democratic state-society-religion relations in a context are. That is, if Turkish version of secularism is non-democratic, this is absolutely because it is exclusionary and not because Turkey is a secular state.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, if the US carries about separatist secularism and is still a democratic state, it is not merely because it is a secular state but because it adopted an inclusionary secularism. Therefore, in a nutshell, to decide whether or not secularism practiced in a particular context is democratic requires certain standards – Taylor calls it “three-principle secularism”, Stepan calls it “twin tolerations” and following Rawls I call it simply “taking diversity as a durable fact”. If a state does not meet these standards but still calls itself secular, it does not follow that secularism is not necessary for democracy but it just displays the importance to clearly distinguish between exclusionary and inclusionary versions of secularism.

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<sup>19</sup> Herein, Stepan refers to how religious affairs are organized by the state itself in Turkey and how Alevi and non-Muslim minorities are systematically excluded from the system.

<sup>20</sup> According to my conception of secularism, in fact, where inclusion is an integral part, a state cannot be a secular state by merely calling itself so.

To sum up, the relationship between secularism and democracy is the “trend topic” of the recent debate on secularism. The literature shows that the disagreement between the scholars on the question whether secularism is necessary for democracy arises, to a great extent, from their conceptions of secularism. Whereas those who are skeptical about a positive relationship between secularism and democracy mostly index secularism to several practices of so-called secular states that do not set necessarily a good example, others contemplate on the concept, traces it back to when it first emerged and derive the deeper motivations it. This reveals the essential side of secularism, which has been hidden by a recent series of senseless debates on the matter and thus helps see the big picture.

The scholars who are skeptical about a positive relationship between secularism and democracy have recently raised three issues that underlie their skepticism:

- Separation is generally seen as one of the constitutive elements of a secular regime. The debate shows that even those scholars who consider separation as the main element of secularism that dissociates it from democracy draw attention to the need for separation, as long as it does not lead to exclusion. As a matter of fact, separation envisaged by secularism as a political principle is not an end in itself but aims at guaranteeing basic principles and goals of secularism.
- Culture has often been raised as an obstacle to the development of secularism in the contexts, where it has not been traditionally used. Madan and Nandy, the scholars that made famous the cultural inadaptability thesis acknowledge that secularism can indeed be accommodated to the local cultural conditions and Bhargava’s contextual secularism sets a good example.
- Exclusion is the crux of the recent debate on secularism, since the exclusionary practices of some secular states has been what set the stage for increasing

skepticism on the compatibility of secularism and democracy. The debate shows that even those who fail to grasp secularism's motivations and goals and consider it exclusionary in theory and/or in practice recognize the cases where secularism is fully compatible with democracy. In fact, secularism's primary motivation is inclusion and it tries to guarantee it based universal political values such as religious liberty, equality and religious non-domination.

## CHAPTER 3

### SECULARISM AND DEMOCRACY IN TURKEY

In the previous chapter, I tried to show the intrinsic tie between secularism as a political principle and inclusion by the state. As I indicated, even the scholars that seem very much skeptical about this tie and highlight the exclusionary secularist policies around the world somewhat imply that it is not secularism *per se* but exclusion by the state what they are against, acknowledging the “possibility” of the compatibility between secularism and inclusion and, thus, democracy.

I think that Turkey is a good case to go into empirical questions regarding the relationship between secularism and democracy for at least two reasons. First, Turkey was often presented as the only secular polity with a Muslim majority population and is thus traditionally referred to as a “good example” to be emulated by other Muslim majority countries. Independent of whether or not Turkey can be a good model for countries with overwhelming Muslim majority, its experience of secularism, with its good and bad aspects, in a traditionally non-western context where social diversity has always been considered as an “unsettled matter” makes the case of Turkey even more interesting in terms of how secularism and democracy relate to each other. Second, as I underlined in the previous chapter, the arguments of the skeptics heavily rely on the implementation rather than the conception of secularism in certain contexts, namely the exclusionary policies institutionalized and implemented by some so-called secular states. In this regard, there is a consensus that Turkish secularism or *laiklik* has been a source of exclusion by the state with its conventional institutions and policies (Taylor, p.2011; Stepan, p.2011). Even though this appears to paint a picture that validates the arguments of Madan and Nandy,

namely that secularism is by definition likely to produce anti-democratic and exclusionary policies in non-Christian context where religion is of a constitutive social value, the state's approach to religion in Turkey over the past decade that has gradually estranged from any sort of secularism enables us to examine the effects of the process that I call de-secularization of the state over dealing of the state with the diversity in general.

To lay the groundwork of my empirical research in the following chapter on how secularism was dealt with throughout the AKP era, I intend to overview, in this chapter, major debates on *laiklik* and reflect particularly on whether and, if yes, how things changed following AKP's coming to power. In this context, I will mainly focus on the literature that asks the following questions: Has *laiklik* been always separationist and exclusionary? In what direction did AKP transform *laiklik*? What major differences are there between the *laiklik* in its conventional form and the one AKP adopted? Has *laiklik* become more inclusionary and democratic with AKP's policies?

### 3.1 Tracing back the *laiklik*: A principle for all seasons

*Laiklik* has been a constitutionally defined characteristic of state since 1937. It became an unamendable provision in 1961 and survived two military coups thereafter, each followed by introduction of a new constitution. Having remained constitutionally unchanged over the decades, *laiklik* may well be expected to be a deep-rooted state principle with a set of steady political values and goals that all governments in the republican era endorsed despite ideological differences. This depiction is, however, far from reality. From the fact that *laiklik* has always had its place in Turkish constitutions so far, in fact, it does not follow that it has consistently

been implemented in the same way. Neither is it a gradual change in the conception and understanding of *laiklik* in line with evolving societal dynamics that might account for this inconsistency. On the very contrary, many studies show that throughout the republican era the policies pursued based on *laiklik* have constantly been determined according to shifting political landscape (Somer, 2013, p.592). Under the guise of *laiklik*, almost antipodal policies were legitimized and pursued at different times by governments with different views for the sake of short-term political goals. Therefore, *laiklik* has been more likely a principle for all seasons than a consistently preserved or gradually evolved state principle.

The abolition of the caliphate in 1924 is generally taken as the beginning of history of secularism in Turkey. By abolishing the caliphate, the state did not only give up its “legitimate” authority over the Islamic *umma*, at the cost of being accused of rejecting Islam and being *kafir* (Berkes, 2009, p.506-508), but also clearly set forth that the identity of the new Turkish *nation* was no longer to be defined within the so-called Islamo-Ottoman context (Karpat, 2011, p.58). Nevertheless, however important the abolition of the caliphate was for the constitutionalization of *laiklik*, the fact that it was accompanied by the creation of a new office, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), indicates that the state was not willing to relinquish its oversight and control over religion. The *Diyanet* was introduced as an institution attached to the Prime Minister’s office – it still is – and authorized to administer the mosques, religious lodges etc., to hire and fire *imams* and other mosque staff and to oversee the *muftis* (Lewis, 2013, p.557). Having remarkably expanded so far, the *Diyanet*, with its branches overseas that serve the Turkish diaspora, nowadays commands the second largest budget among the institutions within Turkish bureaucracy (Gözaydın, 2009) (see Chapter 4).

Following the abolition of the caliphate, the constitutionalization process of *laiklik* continued with the removal of Islam as the official religion from the constitution in 1928 and finally with the introduction of *laiklik* as a characteristic of the state in 1937. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, many reforms were made for the secularization of Turkish legal and educational system. However significant these were at that time, evidence shows that *laiklik* could not be institutionalized in a way that would ensure a gradual development of separation between state and religion but was on the very contrary based on an extended state control over religion (Zürcher, 2012, p.277). For Karpat, *laiklik* was a complementary rather than a sophisticated element in the ideology of the founding Republican People's Party (CHP). Being underpinned and redefined by *laiklik*, nationalism was freed from the Islamo-Ottoman content (2011, p.58-59). I think, it is mainly because of its close tie with nationalism that the republican regime adopted an understanding of *laiklik* that sustained its predecessor regimes' (the Hamidian and the Committee of Union and Progress) quest of instrumentalizing and controlling the religion (Gülalp, 2005). This is apparently the reason why *laiklik* failed to lead to a certain separation of state and religion to an extent that is essential for an inclusionary democracy (1) and despite constitutional provisions *laiklik* in reality fell short to encompass notions of civic citizenship that guarantee an inclusive and pluralistic polity (2) (Kandiyoti, 2012, p.517).

The republican reforms that were made in the 1923-30 period particularly aimed at a break with the past by means of secularizing the legal and educational system and were further consolidated in the 1930-45 through additional and relatively small-scale reforms (Karpat, 2011, p.27). As was underlined above as well, it was in fact the secularist flavor in the reforms that made them nationalistic and

revolutionary in character. Throughout the single-party era, moreover, these reforms kept state's hand strong in its quest to control religion, which still had a pretty significant place for the masses in Turkish society (p.58). Since they in a way integrate rather than separate the religious affairs from those of state and, given its nationalistic flavor, did not lead to a regime of equal citizenship, the policies of *laiklik* in Turkey were distinctively vague. Not surprisingly, therefore, whilst on the one hand policies of *laiklik* were strictly implemented, some structural inequalities dominated state policies as in the examples of assimilation of Alevis, law on wealth tax applied particularly to non-Muslims etc.

The post-war period marked a new era for Turkish democracy. The establishment of multi-party democracy in 1946 brought about a much wider freedom of expression for various movements of thought (Lewis, 2013, p.563). In the meantime, the onset of competitive politics that arose from the foundation of a new party, the Democrat Party (DP), somewhat enforced the ruling CHP to pay more attention to the masses' expectations, at the cost of revising its policies of *laiklik* that had hitherto been consistently implemented. In the 7<sup>th</sup> congress of CHP that was held in November 1947, it was widely voiced that conventional *laiklik* policies had to be softened and religion got to be the cement of the society (TBMM). As a matter of fact, certain policies of *laiklik* were remarkably softened thereafter (Bila, 1999, p.53). The first-ever emphasis upon the "freedom of conscience" in the government program, reintroduction of religious education in public schools, opening of *Imam Hatip* schools, opening of *türbes* to visit and state-led facilitation for *haj* are the most outstanding developments of this softening process. In the 1946-50 period, religion and, thus, policies of *laiklik* apparently became a means of electioneering and have remained so since then.

The interest-based clientelistic relationship between politics and religion took root in Turkey throughout the 1950s. Particularly early on in the decade, the ruling Democrat Party developed considerably affirmative relations with the conservative sections of the society, including Islamist communities, by restoring the *ezan* in Arabic, abolishing the ban over the activities of *tekkes* and *tarikats* and extending the scope of the previously introduced religious education – turning it into compulsory in public schools and increasing the number of *Imam Hatip* schools. These affirmative relations went so far as to form election-alliances with some popular *tarikats*, such as *Nurcus*. Taken altogether, the DP is generally identified with the “revival of Islam” through which Islamization gathered pace in the 1950s (Ahmad, 1993). Nevertheless, from these developments it does not follow that the DP completely abandoned *laiklik*. In order to redress the balance and not to lose the control over the religious masses, the DP first introduced the Law on Protection of Atatürk in 1951 and the Law on Protection of Freedom of Conscience in 1953, which it thought would guarantee the separation of religion from political matters, namely the *laiklik*. When compared with the single party era of the 1930s and 40s, the bi-party politics of the 1950s marked serious differences in terms of state-religion-society relations. However different the policies regulating those relations may be between these decades, there was also a significant continuity: the instrumentalization of religion under the cover of *laiklik* for political purposes (Narlı, 2014, p.27).

As opposed to the expectations, the leaders of the military junta in 1960 did not pursue militant laicist policies. As a matter of fact, the *Diyanet* became a constitutional institution and was supported to be engaged in religious activities in favor of the state (p.28). Thus, state’s quest to further control religion remained despite the relatively “libertarian” atmosphere that came out of the 1961

Constitution. The control and instrumentalization of religion by the state, moreover, gained a new dimension throughout the 1960s. Particularly, when the conservative right was in power, the religion was used as an ideological counterforce against growing socialism. The Islamic communities that had previously been banned and, benefiting from the freedom of organization envisaged by the new constitution, took to the stage as associations and interest groups supported the conservative right (p.28). Given the fact that the Islamic movement was increasingly gaining strength and taking root in the society, religion got politicized and became an even more important instrument for the state. In the late 1960s, the Islamists got their own party for the first time that came to power in 1973 as the smaller coalition partner of the CHP and, later, as one of the partners of National Front coalitions. The existence of an Islamist party in the governments made itself evident particularly in educational policies. Both the number of *Imam Hatip* schools and their students marked a huge increase throughout the 1970s (Kandiyoti, 2012, p.518). “In the meantime, the state-led and funded religious schools were bearing fruit in terms of recruitment into state cadres. The graduates were not only religious functionaries but received places in universities and state bureaucracy” (p.519).

In the 1980s, the instrumentalization of religion by the state had never been as intensive as it was then. Beyond an ideological counterforce, religion became the central instrument in the hand of the state to pursue a comprehensive social engineering. Turkish-Islam Synthesis was promoted as the official state ideology and all other alternatives were presented as a threat to Turkish national culture (p.520). The extension of the *Diyanet* and *Imam Hatip* schools and the introduction of compulsory religious classes in public schools are some of the outstanding policies of the military junta in the early 1980s. In spite of the state-led Islamization that

gathered pace in the 1980s, the military junta never abandoned *laiklik* and voiced on all occasions that what was done was done for the sake of *laiklik*. Kandiyoti calls this “the transmogrification” of *laiklik* and contends that it aimed at further legitimizing the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis and outlawing all other alternatives including the Islamic ones to put forward *laiklik* as the preferred narrative (p.521). In other words, both Islam and *laiklik* were welcome by the state, as far as state’s version of these was promoted.

In 1987, the ban over the political party leaders of the pre-coup period from politics that had been introduced by the military junta was abolished by popular vote. This led to the establishment of a new Islamist Party, the Welfare Party (RP) in the ideological line of the 1970s, which was on the rise in the early 1990s with its remarkable solution offers to the lasting economic crises. In fact, despite the apparent similarities in the approach to the role of Islam in politics, because of its history and ideology RP’s program was not in line with the establishment of the military junta, which, though in appearance and discourse only, laid emphasis on *laiklik*. Therefore, the “February 28 Process” in 1997, when the military intervened in the politics, this intervention this time broke with “a pattern of state-Islam relations that allowed for negotiation and compromise between Turkey’s political Islamists and the establishment” (p.524). The abolition of secondary *Imam Hatip* schools, the introduction of eight-year mandatory schooling system, the de-facto ban on headscarf in public universities and the presentation of *irtica*, the Islamic reaction, as one of the biggest threat to Turkish nation and state are some of the prominent measures that were taken during the February 28 Process.

In fact, much more could be said on the history of *laiklik* in Turkey. Yet, through these decade-based snapshots I would like to show how *laiklik* has become a “principle for all seasons” that was constantly used to legitimize the practices of the establishment of the day, however divergent these practices may be. The fact that, instead of referring to a set of consistent principles, *laiklik* has constantly changed shape throughout the republican era makes it harder to produce a theory of it. Therefore, the accounts that rely on binary oppositions about how *laiklik* developed or was implemented in Turkey are generally too simplistic to be useful. In the following section, I approach critically to the existing narratives of *laiklik* in order to find out which one of them provides an explanation that could gather up these historical tracks.

### 3.2 Conflicting narratives on *laiklik*

While it is relatively easy to provide a short history of *laiklik*, as I tried to do in the last section, it is hardly possible to produce a coherent narrative out of it. As a matter of fact, the literature on *laiklik* is full of contradictory claims generally based on binary oppositions, such as secular people versus religious people, secular state versus religious society, secular public space versus religious private space etc. I think, such accounts based on binary oppositions are too simple to explain the complex history of the *laiklik*, where the actions of the *laik* state have been clearly inconsistent. To give an example, the early 1980s, where *laiklik* was always presented as a nonnegotiable state principle, witnessed an explicit state-led Islamization both in the level of discourse and policy. Then, it was the military in the first place that was dominant in policy-making process. The same military, however, came up with apparently religion-hostile measures, again for the sake of

nonnegotiable *laiklik*, that it enforced the government to take 15 years later during the February 28 Process. These measures included the introduction of strict limitations on religious education and public visibility of religion. Similar inconsistencies can also be found earlier in the history of the republic. Therefore, it is definitely necessary to see the big picture rather than temporary ups and downs to profoundly understand what went awry with *laiklik*.

Two general kinds of narratives seem to dominate the literature of *laiklik*. The first one, which for Kandiyoti achieved the stature of a “master narrative” (2012, p.515), provides a reading of history, where the state, as a modern secular one, has conventionally been hostile to religion, whereas the Turkish society and culture are mainly religious (Somer, 2012, p.585). According to Hakan Yavuz, for example, “modern Turkey, like a transgendered body with the soul of one gender in the body of another, is in constant tension... The soul of white Turkey and its Kemalist identity is in constant pain with the national body politic of Turkey” (2000, p.21). In other words, the implementation of *laiklik* brought about an oppositional state-society relationship, where the values of the modern secular state are at odds with those of the larger society. This conflict spilled over even into the realm of habitus, cultural codes and lifestyles (Göle, p.1997) and, thus, makes the public sphere a contested zone between the modern secularist state and the religious/conservative society. Ahmet Kuru, for instance, maintains that *laiklik*, in the form of what he calls “assertive secularism”, always tried to remove religion from public, privatize it and confine it to the individual conscience (2011, p.173-176), whereas the passive secularists including the Muslim-conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) wanted to protect the freedom of conscience while avoiding to favor a particular religion (p.177).

The second narrative provides an alternative reading of history with full of observations that clearly diverge from those of the “master narrative”. It calls into question the secular vocation of *laiklik*, arguing that through the implementation of *laiklik* Turkish state has controlled and also promoted Islam (Kandiyoti, 2012, p.516; Somer 2013, 586). According to Davison, for instance, Turkish state has never approached to religion as a completely private matter and, thus, religion and state have never been entirely separate. The state, on the contrary, has established an own version of Islam by institutionally supporting, financing and promulgating it (2003, p.340-341). Somer draws attention to the incompatibility of these claims with the “master narrative” maintaining that “the state cannot simultaneously oppress/privatize and establish/promote religion” (2013, p.587). Kuru and Stepan, whose main argument is that *laiklik* systematically excludes religion from the public sphere, claim that this argument is not incompatible with but complementary for Davison’s argument that the state has established and publicly promoted Islam through its understanding of *laiklik* (2012, p.6). Somer (2013, p.587) opposes it saying “I cannot see how this is possible” and continues:

Whether or not Turkish state removes, or tries to remove, religion from the public realm is an empirically testable claim. This can be done for example by counting changes in the number of mosques, identifying state involvement in their construction, and observing other religion-related state practices in public realms such as education, social policy, public security, national defense, and regulation of the public sphere.

In fact, the short history of *laiklik*, too, evidently shows that religion has constantly been controlled and instrumentalized by the state for political purposes. However different the ways to do it were throughout the 1923 – 2002 period, there is a significant common trait concerning the state’s approach to the religion, which I would like to summarize in two points. First, given the way the state instrumentalized religion throughout the republican era, it is impossible to maintain,

as the accounts based on a binary opposition between secular state and religious society do, that “the rise of Islamic actors owes its momentum exclusively, or even primarily, to dynamics emanating from the grass-roots of society while the state remained secular” (Kandiyoti, 2012, p.519). Turkish state’s actions, particularly during the late 1940s, 1950s and 1980s, portray an “integrationist and symbiotic relationship” between state and religion where the state is the controlling and dominant party (Somer, 2013, p.588). Second, if we understand secularism as a political principle, like I do in this thesis, that is supposed to take diversity as a fact and thus imply an inclusionary and pluralistic polity, “the secular credentials of the modern Turkish state appear fairly thin”. Despite the significant transformations that the way it is done has undergone through time, “Turkish nationhood and claims of national belonging were never divorced from being Muslim and Sunni” (Kandiyoti, 2012, p.516-517) and Islam has constantly been promoted for nation-building, public morality and bolstering state legitimacy (Somer, 2013, p.587).

### 3.3 *Laiklik* in the 2000s

In global sense, the early 2000s mark the proliferation of studies on the “crisis of secularism” whereby secularism’s taken-for-granted status has been challenged in many countries around the world.<sup>21</sup> In most of these studies, secularism was

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<sup>21</sup> The so-called “crisis of secularism” began in the 1980s with the establishment of “modern theocracy in Iran and spread to Egypt, Sudan, Algeria, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Chad, Senegal, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Movements that challenged the seemingly the undisputed reign of secular states were not restricted to Muslim societies. Singhalese Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka, Hindu nationalists in India, religious ultra-orthodoxy in Israel, and Sikh nationalists who demanded a separate state partly on the ground that Sikhism does not recognize the separation of religion and state all signaled a deep challenge to the secular character of states. Strong anti-Muslim and anti-Catholic movements of Protestants decrying secular states emerged in Kenya, Guatemala, and the Philippines. Religiously grounded political movements arose in Poland, and Protestant fundamentalism became a force in American politics. In western Europe too, where religion is largely a personal response to divinity still largely private, rather than an organized system of practices, the challenge to the secular character of states has come both from migrant workers of former colonies and from intensified globalization” (Bhargava, 2011, p.92-93).

commonly defined as an outmoded state ideology intrinsically based on modernism and “falsified” secularization thesis (Asad, 2003) and thus put under severe criticism, emphasizing upon its inadaptability to the ever-deepening diversity, for which an increasing consciousness emerged in most societies since the early 1980s. The national political landscape was also convenient for the development of an atmosphere to put *laiklik* under pressure. It was a period where the military sought to protect its power and maintain its tutelage over civilian politics by means of laicist policies.<sup>22</sup> In such an atmosphere, AKP’s discourses and actions stressing on civilian democratic politics including a remarkably accommodationist understanding of *laiklik* and an enthusiastic pro-EU stance appeared to have justified the ruthless criticisms against secularism that strengthened the perception equating de-secularization with democratization in Turkey and gave rise to the popularization of concepts such as “Muslim democracy” and “moderate political Islam”.

In the next chapter, my entire focus will be upon in what way state’s approach to religion has evolved since AKP came to power. For many, AKP’s coming to power in 2002 was a turning point for the state-religion-society relations in Turkey. Did *laiklik* become less interventionist and more tolerant or does the state’s maintain its bid to control and instrumentalize religion in line with its political purposes? Has the state adopted a more democratic stance to extend religious freedoms and take diversity as a fact or does it go on restricting religious freedoms? What about the religious minorities? Posing these questions, I will look at what kind

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<sup>22</sup> The military’s adherence to secularist policies is often presented as a fact that has remained unchanged since the establishment of the republic. However, as I show in the short history of *laiklik*, the military’s approach to state-religion relations have always been adjusted to shifting political landscapes throughout the republican era. Even though it would be fair to claim that the military has never given up its discourse of *laiklik*, the argument that the military has conventionally been secularist, defending the exclusion of religion from the public sphere (Kuru, 2007) is apparently the product of an incomplete reading of history that overlooks a significant part of it, given, for instance, the fact that the military initiated a comprehensive state-led Islamization in the early 1980s.

of a state approach to religion has been developed by AKP in the levels of ends, institutions and law and policies.

## CHAPTER 4

### *LAIKLİK* IN THE 2000S: DESECULARIZATION OF THE STATE

#### 4.1 The context of *laiklik* in the early 2000s

In the aftermath of the National Security Council (MGK) meeting on February 28, 1997, a new era started, where the military that had already intensified its tutelage over politics publicly launched a campaign against *irtica* (reaction). Having been classified as a threat to national security, this military-led campaign against *irtica* had several results that would have an impact on the political climate of the next period. Among these are the closure of the previously governing Welfare Party, removal of many military officers and bureaucrats from their posts due to their alleged Islamic lifestyle and the ban on headscarf in all educational institutions.

It was mainly the consequences of the “February 28 Process” and the military tutelage over politics that kept *laiklik* at the top of the national political agenda as Turkey was entering the new millennium. The three-party coalition government called an early election and scheduled it on November 3, 2002. In the course of the election campaigns, a newly founded political party attracted more notice than any other new formations that came out before the snap elections and this party was the Justice and Development Party (AKP). The reason for that attraction was not only that the new party appeared to be by far in the lead in most of the opinion polls but also that the party openly distinguished itself from *Milli Görüş* (National View), the ideological line of its predecessors, and declared itself to be a “conservative democratic party”, which, unlike its predecessors, did not have a categorical antagonism to the West and its values as well as Turkish *laik* constitutional system.

AKP's decision to abandon the traditional ideology of its prominent founders and to remain within the system was undoubtedly related to the fate of all former parties of *Milli Görüş*. According to Gérard Groc, the main reason behind AKP's preference to remain within the system was to be able to handle its victory after the November 3 elections and to not relinquish its right to use the means of power, decision-making mechanisms and its overwhelming majority in the parliament. After all it was through the elections that the "excluded" came to power in 1995 and 2002. "Acting and keeping itself within the system", Groc argues, "AKP could consolidate its power to challenge the system and, thus, be its 'changer' or even its 'annihilator'" (2011, p.43-44). Nevertheless, in its first term AKP was far from being an anti-system party but, on the contrary, it challenged the military tutelage over politics through certain legislations, emphasizing upon the importance of political inclusion, democracy and freedom of conscience. Among those was the reform package of 2003 that aimed at de-militarization of the system for the adaptation to the EU norms the most remarkable.

Despite AKP's victory in the November 3 elections that enabled it to form a single-party government, the military tried to preserve the power it gained during the February 28 Process and make sure that the process continued. In that context, the concerns about *laiklik* arising from the commonly known past of AKP's prominent leaders were predominantly voiced by the top generals and high court judges as well as the President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, who himself was former Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court. For them, *laiklik* is not merely a political principle that denotes to the separation between state and religious affairs but is a "philosophy of life" that refers to the separation of all worldly affairs from religion (TCC, 1998). Being defined as such, *laiklik* was apparently not a political principle that is to guarantee

basic rights and freedoms but, on the very contrary, a comprehensive doctrine that is superior to them. Meanwhile, AKP took a remarkably accommodationist stance on *laiklik*, obviously considering that it was the achilles' heel of the former political parties of *Milli Görüş*. According to AKP's "conservative democratic" approach, religion is a social phenomenon in the first place and, thus, deserves to have proper relations with politics (Akdoğan, 2003, p.100). In this context, the function of *laiklik* is to enable the state to treat all beliefs in an egalitarian way and to create a pluralist environment where religious differences can coexist (p.97). Hence, "*laiklik* is the guarantee of religious freedom, as it is understood in all stable democracies" (p.95). Consequently, defining *laiklik* as compatible with conservative democracy that it officially held, AKP wanted to show that it was possible to relate religion to politics in a pluralist and democratic basis (Groc, 2011, p.51).

During the early 2000s, thereby, there were basically two diverging understandings of *laiklik*: comprehensive secularism that was dominant throughout the February 28 Process and political secularism that dominated the discourses of top AKP officials and liberals.<sup>23</sup> Within that period, what happened between these different approaches was not a sophisticated deliberation that would result in a democratic, pluralist and inclusionary conclusion but rather a clash based on "my version is more of true meaning of *laiklik*" claims. I think that the reason for the lack of a fruitful intellectual and public deliberation on "what should be *laiklik* for?" is twofold. First, the supporters of comprehensive secularism never believed that AKP

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<sup>23</sup> Ahmet Kuru's distinction between *assertive secularism* and *passive secularism* may also be of use to signify the mentioned divergence (2011). However, I do not prefer to use the conception based on this distinction due to two reasons. First, as I showed in the previous chapter, the history of *laiklik* in Turkey cannot be merely explained by two types of approaches. It is rather the dominant political landscape and actors' interests that have been the driving force in the formation and pursuit of state policies. Second, in Kuru's terms it is predominantly whether the state allows or bans religions to be publicly visible, what differentiates between passive and assertive secularism. In my comprehensive – political distinction, however, it is mainly equality and inclusion what make two concepts different from one another, which I believe much more openly asserts the difference between two types of secularisms.

had abandoned *Milli Görüş* and was sincere in its remarks on *laiklik* and never trusted it in the sense that it had an inherently anti-secularist “hidden agenda”. As a matter of fact, President Sezer with his veto power, military with their public remarks and “e-coup” on April 27, 2007, and judiciary with the closure case were openly at war with AKP. Second, the liberal-looking political secularism discourse that AKP developed by emphasizing on democratization, peaceful co-existence of different religious views and freedom of conscience was never supported with concrete actions. AKP has never been as effective for the rights of Alevis and non-Muslims as it has been for the headscarf ban and the educational restrictions on Imam-Hatip students, which had been the most significant problems of its own social base. More importantly, AKP has mainly preserved the *status quo* with regard to the status of the *Diyanet* and obligatory religious instruction in public schools and, thus, failed to extend its emancipatory activism to encompass all individuals and groups in Turkey.

As a result, the polemical discussions on “the true meaning of *laiklik*” not only failed to lead to a broad-based debate on how *laiklik* had to be rethought so that freedom of conscience and equality could go beyond government discourse but also made *laiklik* a source of confusion and tension. It became a source of confusion because neither the supporters of comprehensive secularism nor those of political secularism could produce a consistency between their discourses and actions. For although both parties justify their standpoints by referring to freedom and equality, their practices were either clearly anti-democratic or fell short to be consistent with the discourses. Even more importantly, it became a source of tension because the more comprehensive secularists emphasizing AKP’s “insincerity” about *laiklik* resorted to anti-democratic ways to undermine it, the more *laiklik* became a social

fault line that deepened the polarization between the AKP's social base and those in opposition. Meanwhile, *laiklik* started to be increasingly considered as an ideology reminiscent of military tutelage and thus those voicing their concerns about it were labeled as anti-democrats. Having coincided with the proliferation of studies on the "crisis of secularism" whereby secularism's taken-for-granted status was challenged in the literature<sup>24</sup>, this process resulted in, to use Groc's term, the collapse of *laiklik* (2011, p.45). Groc uses the term of "collapse" to refer to confusion and tension that *laiklik* became a source of. However, what I think would be even more appropriate to call "collapse of *laiklik*" was the view that equates de-secularization with democratization, which considerably dominated then the political and academic circles.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4.2 De-secularization: concept and argument

In the literature on secularism, secularization is not taken as a concept with a single meaning but refers to multiple processes, whereby the relation between "the religious" and "the secular" takes a new shape. According to Casanova, secularization refers to "three disparate and not necessarily interrelated components

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<sup>24</sup> In most of these studies, secularism was commonly defined as an outmoded state ideology intrinsically based on modernism and "falsified" secularization thesis (Asad, 2003) and thus put under severe criticism, emphasizing upon its inadaptability to the ever-deepening diversity, for which an increasing consciousness emerged in most societies since the early 1980s, where the so-called "crisis of secularism" began with the establishment of "modern theocracy in Iran and spread to Egypt, Sudan, Algeria, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Chad, Senegal, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Movements that challenged the seemingly the undisputed reign of secular states were not restricted to Muslim societies. Singhalese Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka, Hindu nationalists in India, religious ultra-orthodoxy in Israel, and Sikh nationalists who demanded a separate state partly on the ground that Sikhism does not recognize the separation of religion and state all signaled a deep challenge to the secular character of states. Strong anti-Muslim and anti-Catholic movements of Protestants decrying secular states emerged in Kenya, Guatemala, and the Philippines. Religiously grounded political movements arose in Poland, and Protestant fundamentalism became a force in American politics. In western Europe too, where religion is largely a personal response to divinity still largely private, rather than an organized system of practices, the challenge to the secular character of states has come both from migrant workers of former colonies and from intensified globalization" (Bhargava, 2011, p.92-93).

<sup>25</sup> "Secularism v Democracy", 03.05.2005, *The Economics*, retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/node/9116841>

or subtheses”, namely, institutional differentiation of state from religious institutions, decline of religious beliefs and practices and privatization or individualization of religion, where its public role erodes (2011, p.60). However ambiguous the concept may be, the first thing that comes to mind, when secularization is in question, is a social process where religion’s importance, dominance or significance diminishes. Therefore, to avoid a misunderstanding or confusion, there are two points that I have to note:

- (1) First, by de-secularization of state, I refer to a process, whereby state moves away from secularism as a political principle. Such a divergence takes place to the extent that the state takes up a comprehensive outlook through its self-understanding and policies and tries to implant that comprehensive doctrine on the society, usually by using social engineering methods. In this respect, de-secularization refers to the regress in state's taking diversity as a fact and thus inevitably leads to exclusion and homogenization.
- (2) Second, the question of whether a state is secular or not, in the sense of pursuing secularism as a political principle, cannot usually be answered with a simple yes/no answer. A state, with the totality of public institutions, may display qualities that are secular and comprehensive and this is, at any point in time, an empirical question that can be elucidated only through empirical analysis of various pivotal institutions and policies as well as broader ends under which they are formed.

Within this framework, my argument is that state of Turkey underwent a relentless de-secularization process, that is, distanced itself from secularism as a political principle in the 2010 – 2016 period. From this argument, it does not follow that Turkey was genuinely secular before that period. In fact, the 2002 – 2010 period,

which I showed marked the collapse of *laiklik*, was the preparer of the de-secularization of state in the next period, where a clear regress in taking diversity as a fact occurred and thus the state made itself less secular even in respects that it had been previously secular. To analyze the process of de-secularization of state, I think, Bhargava's "three orders of connection" is pretty useful, whereby the state can *connect* or *disconnect* itself with religion in three levels: ends, institutions, and law and policies. For Bhargava, being both non-theocratic and against the establishment of religions, a secular state should absolutely disconnect itself from religions at the first and second level, namely, ends and institutions (2011, p.97). In this context, below I analyze the de-secularization of state of Turkey in the 2010 – 2016 period in three levels and show that the state apparently exceeded the limits of connection with religion for a secular state and thus de-secularized itself.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.3 Ends

For Bhargava, a secular state is both non-theocratic and against the establishment of religions. By means of disconnection from religion with respect to its ends, a secular state distinguishes itself from both theocracies and states with established religions.

To be more precise, "a secular state has its own secular ends" (2011, p.97).<sup>27</sup> In this

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<sup>26</sup> Bhargava uses "three orders of connection" to distinguish between "secular states" and "religion-centered states", each having its own distinct versions. In this regard, Bhargava also distinguishes between various types of secular states; namely, amoral and value-based secular states as well as states that are committed to *disconnection*, *one-sided exclusion* or *principled distance* (2011, p.96-99). Referring to the concept of principled distance, which is an integral element of contextual secularism, his favorite model of state – religion relations, Bhargava asserts that a secular state does not have to 'make a fetish' of the third-order disconnection, which is to say that abiding by certain *principles* a secular state may connect itself with religion through some laws and policies (p.105). Nevertheless, I prefer to look at all three orders of connection in my analysis of de-secularization of state in order to show that the connection between state and religion overreached the limits set by secularism as a political principle, also at the level of law and policies, which causes a dangerous regress in state's capacity to take diversity as a fact.

<sup>27</sup> In his very article, Bhargava does not discuss in detail what he means by "secular ends" or in what sense the ends are 'secular'. Considering the variety of meanings that the concept 'the secular' has in usage, I feel the need to emphasize that the conception of "secular ends" is based on secularism as a political principle and not the understanding of "the secular" as an anti-religious category. Within the

regard, de-secularization may well be expected to refer to a process, whereby ends of state become comprehensive and, thus, estrange from being secular.

Ends of state are made up almost purely of written and spoken discourses and their analysis thus always includes the risk of being too idealistic or mere speculation and not reflecting what is indeed going on. To take a related and familiar example, Turkey has constitutionally called itself a *laik* state, namely, a state that separates religion from its affairs; however, I have shown above that this was hardly the case throughout the republican history. For this reason, in order to reach valid conclusions regarding the transformation of ends, it is important to examine the concrete actions – such as adoption of new laws, policies, and institutions – that this transformation concomitantly brings about. Within this context, the analysis of ends is helpful to reveal a process like de-secularization of state for at least two reasons. First, ends reflect short- and long-term goals and objectives of a state and thus demonstrate whether this set-up will be followed by a process of continuity or change. In fact, a process of change mostly begins with a change in the level of discourse, which gives an idea about the route of that change. Second, a change in ends not only sets forth a new set of goals and objectives but also designates how to achieve them and prepares the ground to do so. Therefore, when analyzed in tandem with the subsequent actions, ends can reveal much more than a mere discourse could about a process of change.

Taking all these into account, a scrutiny of ends of state gives an idea about, if not completely explains, the story of change of the 14-year AKP rule from 2002 to 2016. In terms of ends, the first remarkable change took place with regard to *Weltanschauung*. In the earlier period of its 14-year rule (2002 – 2010 period), as a

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context of this thesis, therefore, “secular ends” can be synonymously used with “non-comprehensive ends”.

party that claimed itself to be the representative of the victimized and excluded masses, AKP emphasized that the social diversity is under the guarantee of universal values, human rights and freedoms and the state should recognize and not intervene it (AKP, 2002; Akdoğan, 2003). Here, AKP explicitly criticizes state's resort to social engineering techniques in dealing with the groups that it claims to represent, particularly during the "February 28 Process" and refers to democracy, human rights and universal values as the guarantee of social diversity as well as the solution of that problem. In the later stages of its rule, however, the emphasis on the universal values gradually decreased and was ultimately replaced by the reference to "our ancient values" (*kadim değerlerimiz*), which the restoration or the building of *Yeni Türkiye* (New Turkey) was to be based on.<sup>28</sup> In Ahmet Davutoğlu's terms, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister who is also known as the originator of this discourse, it is clear that these concepts point out to some kind of discontent about how Turkey's identity was constructed in the period of modernity and nationalization and restoration of "ancient civilization's values" aims at designing a new identity and thus transforming the society (TMFA, 2013; Miş & Aslan, 2014). In this regard, I think, following quotation from Aziz Babuşçu, then head of AKP's Istanbul Organization and now AKP Istanbul MP, is very interesting:

Those who were somehow our partners over the past ten years, say liberals, will not be able to be our partner in ten years to come. (...) No matter if they put up with it or not, next ten years will make up the "building period" and the building period will not be as they would like it to be. Our government has accomplished much in ten years, yet all these accomplishments may easily be ruled out, unless they are written in state's institutional memory, for which AK Party must remain in power for a longer period.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "İşte Erdoğan'ın Vizyon Belgesi", 15.07.2014, *CNNTurk*, retrieved from <http://www.cnntrk.com/fotogaleri/turkiye/iste-erdoganin-vizyon-belgesi?page=1>

<sup>29</sup> "Babuşçu: Gelecek 10 yıl liberaller gibi eski paydaşlarımızın arzuladığı gibi olmayacak", 01.04.2013, *T24*, retrieved from <http://t24.com.tr/haber/babuscu-onumuzdeki-10-yil-liberaller-gibi-eski-paydaslarimizin-kabullenecegi-gibi-olmayacak,226892>

As this quotation clearly puts forward, the concepts “building”, “restoration” and “ancient values” that underlie the discourses during the 2010 – 2016 period point out to a sort of estrangement from liberal universal values and are associated with a new societal imagination, which requires, as I will elaborate below, the use of social engineering techniques.

The remarkable change in *Weltanschauung*, which reshaped the state’s stance in its relations with the society, brought about an expected change in the role of religion in state – society relations. As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, AKP took a considerably accommodationist stance towards secularism, interpreting it as a quality of state that guarantees equal treatment towards all religions and beliefs (AKP, 2002). Although party and government officials have mostly preserved this interpretation of secularism so far<sup>30</sup>, a set of new ends were adopted that charge the state with religio-moral “missions”.<sup>31</sup> These missions that are mainly concerned with education, youth and children are to be accomplished to realize the greater societal imagination. To begin with, education of children and youth comprise a greater part of the new ends of state. In 2002, AKP declared that its education policy would be designed so as to raise a generation that is free in thought and conscience (AKP, 2002). In the 2010 – 2016 period, however, the ends of education became radically comprehensive at the level of discourse. In 2014, the envisioned aim of

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<sup>30</sup> After what I called earlier “the collapse of *laiklik*”, secularism has never become again a daily matter of discussion like in the early 2000s but was discussed twice in the 2010 – 2016 period. First, in his “Arab Spring tour” in 2011 Prime Minister Erdoğan called on three uprising-hit Arab states – Egypt, Tunisia and Libya – to adopt secular government, saying “a secular state is the one that treats all religious groups equally, including Muslim, Christian, Jewish and atheist people” see “Erdoğan calls for a secular Egypt”, 13.09.2011, *Egypt Independent*, retrieved from <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/erdogan-calls-secular-egypt> and second, in 2016 the Speaker of Turkish Parliament İsmail Kahraman suggested the removal of secularism in the new constitution and Erdoğan disagreed with him, emphasizing on the state’s equal distance from all religions, which is guaranteed by secularism. See “President Erdoğan defends secularism after remarks by parliament speaker”, 11.05.2016, *Hurriyet Daily News*, retrieved from <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/president-erdogan-defends-secularism-after-remarks-by-parliament-speaker.aspx?pageID=238&nID=98392&NewsCatID=338>

<sup>31</sup> “İşte Erdoğan’ın Vizyon Belgesi”, 15.07.2014, *CNNTurk*, Retrieved from <http://www.cnnturk.com/fotogaleri/turkiye/iste-erdoganin-vizyon-belgesi?page=1>

education was declared to be for “a youth that is moral and faithful to its past and values”.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, President Erdoğan made a number of statements, where he refers to education as a crucial means to reach the imaginary society and that for this purpose it should be “radically reconstructed”.<sup>33</sup> He said more than once that it was part of its government’s objectives to raise not atheist but “devout generations”<sup>34</sup> and that the education system should offer a particular lifestyle to students from pre-school onwards.<sup>35</sup>

In sum, there are significant differences between the earlier and later periods in terms of ends of state. The most notable change is concerned with the role of the state in its relations with the society. In the 2002 – 2010 period AKP’s discourses reflect a democratic state – society relationship whereby the state recognizes and even welcomes social diversity and does not aim at designing the society by means of social engineering techniques. The 2010 – 2016 period, on the very contrary, witnessed a state – society relationship, whereby universal values, like freedom and diversity, no longer prevail and the state takes over the role of a designer to produce a society in line with a set of comprehensive values and a specific social imaginary. Resorting to social engineering methods, the state undermined its capability in both taking diversity as a fact and treating all individuals and groups equally. Therefore, despite the continuity of how *laiklik* was interpreted as a quality of state, the change

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<sup>32</sup> “İşte Erdoğan’ın Vizyon Belgesi”, 15.07.2014, *CNNTurk*, retrieved from <http://www.cnntrk.com/fotogaleri/turkiye/iste-erdoganin-vizyon-belgesi?page=1>

<sup>33</sup> “Erdoğan eğitimi yeniden inşa etmekten, radikal adımlar atmaktan bahsetti”, 26.03.2016, *Diken* <http://www.diken.com.tr/erdogan-egitimde-radikal-kararlar-atmaktan-bahsetti/>

<sup>34</sup> “Dindar Gençlik Yetiştireceğiz”, 02.02.2012, *Diken* <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dindar-genclik-yetistirecegiz-19825231> and “Erdoğan hedefine bağlılık bildirdi: Dindar nesil yetiştireceğiz”, 27.02.2016, *Diken*, retrieved from <http://www.diken.com.tr/erdogan-sozunden-vazgecmehedefimiz-dindar-nesil-yetistirmek/>

<sup>35</sup> “Erdoğan Eğitim Şurası’nda konuştu: Anaokulundan başlayarak yeni bir yaşam tarzı...”, 02.12.2014, *Hurriyet*, retrieved from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/erdogan-egitim-s-rasinda-konustu-anaokulundan-baslayarak-yeni-bir-hayat-tarzi-27691352> and “Evlatlarımız değerlerimiz çerçevesinde hazırlanan çizgi filmleri izlemeli”, 19.06.2015, *Posta*, retrieved from <http://www.posta.com.tr/siyaset/HaberDetay/-Evlatlarımız-degerlerimiz-cercevesinde-hazirlanan-cizgi-filmleri-izlemeli-.htm?ArticleID=287637>

in ends of state points out a process de-secularization of state in the 2010 – 2016 period.

#### 4.4 Institutions

While there are still several disputes between various secularization theses on what characterizes a secular state, there is a relatively wide consensus on institutional differentiation of the sphere of state from religious institutions and norms as an undisputed component of secularization (Casanova, 2011, p.60; Gorski, 2000, p.140). As a matter of fact, for Bhargava, too, second order disconnection between state and religion, namely at the level of institutions, is an essential characteristic of secular states (2011, p.97).<sup>36</sup>

The absence of a church-like religious institution and a clerical class “equipped with holy abilities to speak on behalf of God and religion” (Bardakoğlu 2006, p.11) in Islam was generally used by states as a source of legitimacy to engage in religious affairs. In Turkish case, as a matter of fact, although foundation of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) is attributed to state’s response to the social need for provision of religious services (Bardakoğlu, 2004, p.368), it is a fact that the state aimed at keeping religion under its control by this means. Hence, as far as Turkey is concerned, the state never fully disconnected itself from religion at the institutional level and *Diyanet* has always been the key actor in state’s engagement in religious affairs throughout the republican era.

As there is not a normative model as to how religion should be managed and state – religion – society relations are rooted in socio-historical conditions in a given

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<sup>36</sup> According to Bhargava, disconnecting itself from religion at the institutional level, a state becomes non-theocratic. Put differently, secular states and the states that establish religion(s) differ from theocracies in that they adopt a sufficient degree of institutional differentiation between their institutions and those of religion (2011, p.96-97).

society, the way that the state deals with religion at the institutional level might differ from one context to another (Stepan, 2011, p.115; Mutluer, 2014, p.4). In this regard, a supervisory engagement of state in the provision of religious services by public or private entities does not necessarily contradict with secularism as a political principle (Gözaydın, 2014, p.13). However, in the case of *Diyanet* there are at least two features that are by definition exclusionary and thus are incompatible with secularism as a political principle. First, *Diyanet*'s function is beyond providing religious services and includes the enlightenment of society about Islam, which makes it an administrative tool to propagate and inculcate official view about religion and Islam (Gözaydın, 2014, p.13). In fact, in Friday *khutbas* state-employed Imams deliver the same sermon, which is based on the official text sent each week by *Diyanet*. Moreover, being the only legal religious institution that is constitutionally charged with seeking national unity and solidarity (Turkish Constitution Article Nr.136), *Diyanet* is a source of homogenizing and monist power that all Turkish governments have made use of in various forms in line with power relations and conjunctural developments (Mutluer, 2014, p.3-5). Second, despite being financed by tax money as a governmental institution, *Diyanet* is providing services exclusively for Sunni Muslims in Turkey. In other words, Alevis, non-Muslims and non-believers are neither represented in the only legal religious institution of the country that they are equal citizens of nor able to claim any kind of tax exemption for financing an exclusively Sunni institution. This reflects how *Diyanet*'s homogenizing and monist power with the denial of non-Sunni religious identities and rights has consolidated the institutional domination of Sunni Islam in Turkey.

The reflections on *Diyanet* as a governmental institution that I have pointed out so far can be summed up in two points. First, even though it does not signal unification between state and religious institutions, the way that *Diyanet* is organized weakens state's credentials of institutional separation from religion and thus threatens its impartiality between different religious views. Second, being an institution that is instrumentalized by the state to implant a selected religious view over the society by means of social engineering techniques, *Diyanet* stands out as an exclusionary institution that undermines equal citizenship and freedom of conscience. That is to say that independent of AKP's policies the way that *Diyanet* is organized has conventionally been an obstacle for the state to adopt secularism as a political principle. Keeping this in mind, I would like to argue that *Diyanet* marked a significant expansion in the 2000s, which enlarged the scope of its exclusionary practices and brought about a further desecularization of state at the institutional level throughout the AKP era. This expansion can be analyzed in two respects: field of activity and budget.

To begin with, *Diyanet* significantly expanded in terms of its field of activity in the 2000s and especially after 2010. Even before this expansion, in fact, *Diyanet* was never merely an organization to provide religious services but had always certain political and sociological functions. However, with the revision of its law on organization in 2010 *Diyanet* became a much more influential governmental institution that has an important position in the network of political and social relations (Mutluer, 2014, p.8; 64). In other words, *Diyanet's* activities spilled out of the mosques and spread into new fields both at home and abroad. As for at home, the expansion of its working field led *Diyanet* to become an instrument of social engineering in the hands of the government, particularly in the field of social policy.

This is evident in the deepening cooperation between *Diyanet* and several national ministries, which I list as follows:

- *Diyanet's* cooperation protocol with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011 enlarged the scope of its activities regarding woman and family and aimed at 'protecting and strengthening family structure and values to hand down the next generations and raising awareness over the problems that threat family and its members within the society'. In 2013, likewise, the ministry signed a protocol with Turkiye Diyanet Foundation, which aims at organizing joint meetings with several institutions to enlighten the family on psychological, economic, cultural and religious matters in line with religious values. Herewith, *Diyanet* became a part of policy-making and implementation process on contemporary social policy issues like gender equality, violence against women, family and upbringing of children (TMFSP 2011, 2013).
- *Diyanet's* cooperation protocol with the Ministry of Youth and Sports on “values education” dated 26.02.2015 aims at “contributing to youth’s spiritual development”, “providing the demanding students with instruction on religion and values” and “organizing *umrah* trips for the spiritual development of the youth” (TMYS, 2015).
- *Diyanet's* cooperation protocol with the Ministry of Health dated 07.01.2015 aims at providing “faith-based moral motivation” for the demanding sick and their acquaintances in the public hospitals (TMH, 2015).
- *Diyanet's* cooperation protocol with the Ministry of Justice dated 10.02.2011 aims at improving the moral and religious emotions of the arrested and convicted people to contribute to their process of decarceration (TMJ, 2011).

The expansion of *Diyanet*'s field of activity is evident in its international activities as well. In fact, *Diyanet*'s work abroad is nothing new and can be traced back to the 1970s, when it started to provide growing Turkish immigrant communities in Europe with religious services. A special department to conduct foreign affairs within the *Diyanet* was established in 1983 and it has been organized in various European countries since then (Lepeska, 2015). Nevertheless, with the new organizational law introduced in 2010, *Diyanet*'s started focusing more on its international activities (Mutluer, 2014, p.8). These activities are carried out by *Diyanet*'s foreign organizations and Turkiye Diyanet Foundation and include providing humanitarian aid for victimized Muslims around the world, building mosques around the world, providing religious education for Turkish and foreigner Muslims both abroad and Turkey, printing and handing out Qur'an, opening up schools abroad, organizing conferences, panels, symposiums and so on. Like in its activities at the national level, *Diyanet*'s international activities that have a transnational target group, too, aim at providing "healthy information" regarding Islam. However, given the fact that it is a governmental institution, *Diyanet*'s activities abroad can hardly be thought separately from Turkish Government's foreign policy plans and objectives. As a matter of fact, the rising international activism of the *Diyanet* has gone hand in hand with the civilizational discourse that dominated AKP's foreign policy since 2010. So, being a governmental institution that affirms Turkish official ideology and values regarding Islam, *Diyanet*'s activism abroad can be considered as a means of cultural imperialism to achieve foreign policy goals of Turkish government (Gözaydın, 2015; Gürsel, 2015).

The second aspect that illustrates *Diyanet*'s expansion in the 2000s, though partially only, is concerned with its budget. In her profound analysis of *Diyanet*'s

budget, Mutluer points out to the fact that a considerable part of *Diyamet*'s activities, particularly those introduced after 2010, have been carried out by Turkiye Diyanet Foundation, whose budget and personnel data is not open to public. Given the fact that *Diyamet*'s official budget, which is a part of governmental budget, have been subject to remarkable changes over decades in line with economic and political conjuncture, Mutluer underlines, analyzing Turkiye Diyanet Foundation's budget would help reveal much more regarding *Diyamet*'s recent expansion (2014, p.18).

Nevertheless, *Diyamet*'s budget analysis is solely illustrative enough to mark its distinguished expansion that started in the 2000s. In this regard I will refer to two data analyses. The first one is about the real budget amounts of *Diyamet*. As Figure 1 illustrates, the 2000s marked the biggest real increases in *Diyamet*'s budget throughout the entire republican era. The real increase in 2012 with respect to 2002 is 176% (Mutluer, 2014, p.22).

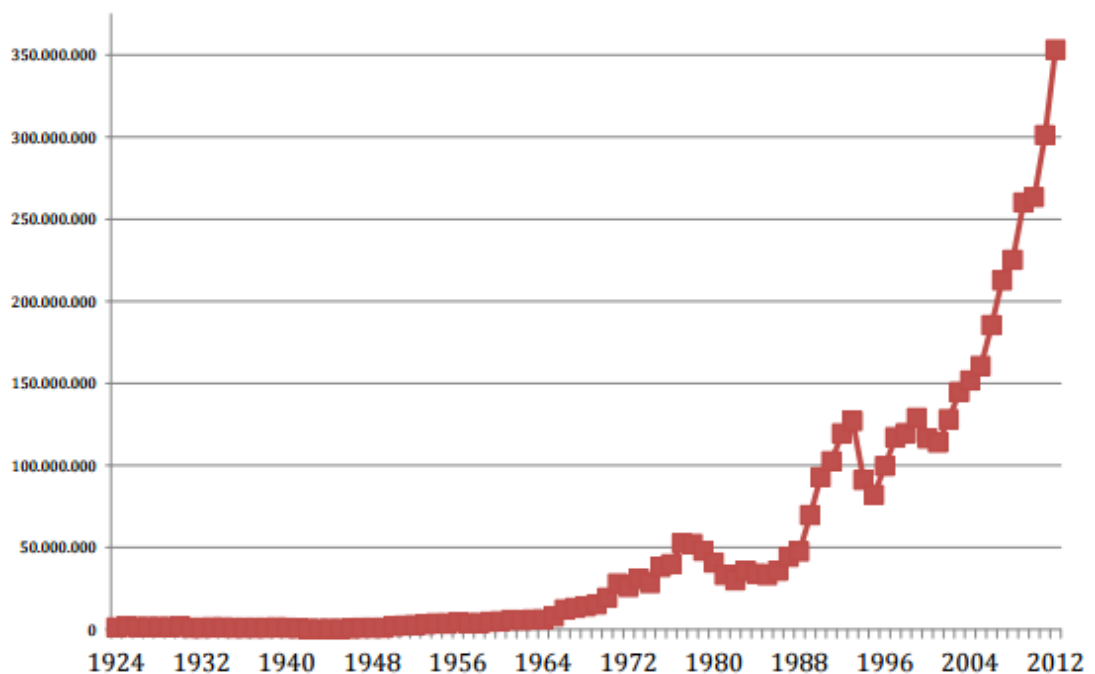


Figure 1: Real Development of Diyanet's Budget based on 1998 Prices (Mutluer 2014, 22)

The second one is concerned with a comparison between the budget increases of *Diyanet* and the amounts appropriated for other policy areas such as education, health, and transport, each of which has an own ministry to be responsible for. As Figure 2 clearly indicates, the budget increase of *Diyanet* overweighed that of other important budget items such as health, education and culture & tourism in the 2002 – 2012 period. In 2002, for instance, *Diyanet*'s budget was 5.5% of the education budget and 6.29% of the health budget, whereas in 2012 these ratios became 7.56% and 8,82% respectively. Moreover, as Mutluer rightfully underlines, given the wide range of activities that the Turkiye Diyanet Foundation carries out, the increase in the budget for *Diyanet*-overseen activities is probably much more remarkable than it seems with the available data (2014, p.26).

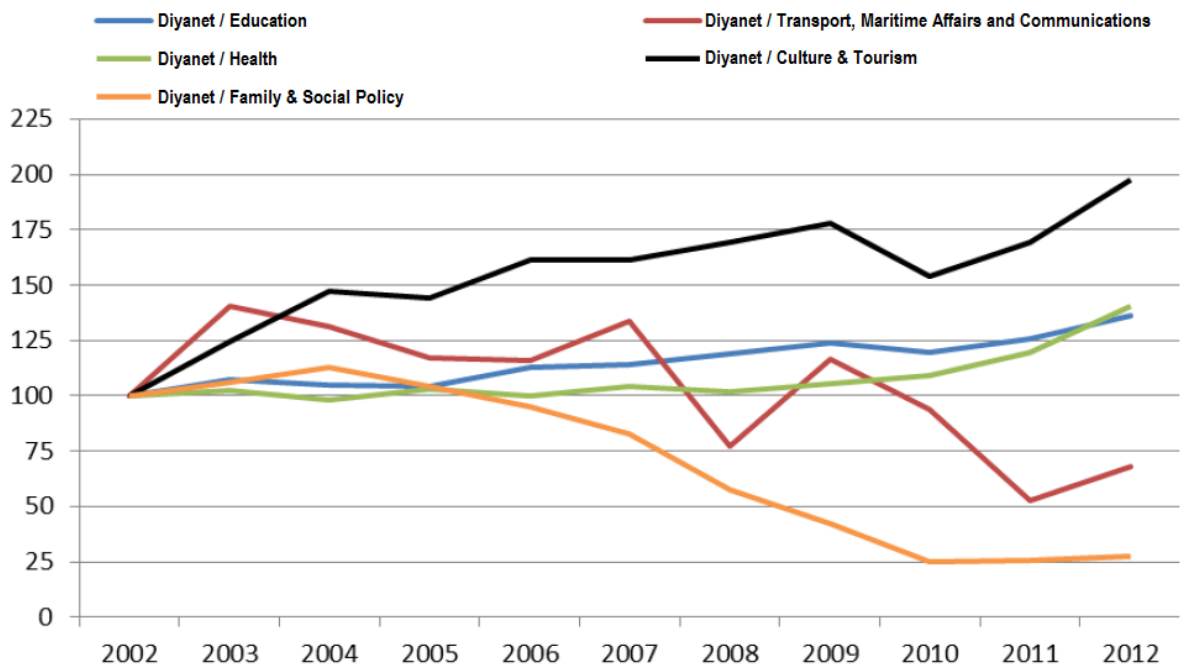


Figure 2: Trends in the Ratios of *Diyanet*'s Budget to Budgets of Other Ministries (2002 – 2012) (Mutluer 2014, 24).

To sum up, *Diyanet* is a governmental institution, whose not only organization and operation but also existence has been called into question and is still debated. The

critics of *Diyanet* commonly point out to two features of the institution – lack of autonomy from the state (1) and exclusion of non-Sunni citizens that also finance the institution (2) – and call for either total abolition or reform. Reform proposals include allowing non-Sunni groups to be represented in *Diyanet* and making it a more autonomous institution with a more democratic organization.<sup>37</sup> As a matter of fact, with the current form of *Diyanet*, the state institutionalizes the exclusion of a no small segment of the society (Alevi, non-Muslims, non-believers) and thus undermines its neutral and egalitarian credentials. Moreover, poll shows that there is also a strong public support for change in *Diyanet*'s organization and operation. While most of the participants are not categorically against *Diyanet*'s existence, only 13% of them agree to the preservation of its current Sunni-dominated form. Besides, 61% of the participants demand a more democratic form of organization, where executive branch is made up of elected and not appointed officials (KONDA, 2014).

Nevertheless, no reform was witnessed in *Diyanet*'s organization and operation in the 2002 – 2016 period but on the very contrary a clear expansion has been observed in its current form since 2010, which I argued remarkably deepened the exclusionary character of *Diyanet*. As I indicated, this expansion is evident both in its extended function as a powerful governmental organization that is very active in social policy field both at home and abroad and in its budget that marked an unprecedented increase in the 2002 – 2016 period. This expansion proves how rightful Mutluer is in her argument that given its capacity to address and reach the masses, governments usually do not tend to reform the current form of *Diyanet* but on the contrary prefer continue to utilize it in line with their interests (2014, p.64). In fact, President Erdoğan, too, publicly stated that he was against any reform that

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<sup>37</sup> “Farklı İnanç Grupları ve İnançsızlar Diyanet İçin Ne Diyor?”, *Bianet*, 20.04.2015, retrieved from <http://bianet.org/bianet/din/164209-farkli-inanc-gruplari-ve-inancsizlar-diyamet-icin-ne-diyor>

would make *Diyanet* an institution that treats equally towards all religious groups, saying “(...) why should *Diyanet* be at equal distance towards all religions? The religion of this nation is clear” (Tremblay, 2015). This is a clear-cut example of how *Diyanet* has been instrumentalized by the state to propagate and implant the official ideology of the day to the society throughout the republican era. As for the 2010 – 2016 period, we can conclude that given its evident expansion, *Diyanet*’s exclusionary capacity reached its peak and its very existence became more threatening than ever for secularism as a political principle.

#### 4.5 Law and policies

The third-order disconnection, as Bhargava puts it, differs from the first and the second-order disconnection in that it does not point out to a level, at which an absolute separation between state and religion is a necessity for a secular state. While some secular states prefer an absolute separation of state and religion in all three levels, others that adopt the policy of what Bhargava calls “principled distance” between state and religion may connect with religion at the level of law and policy, provided that this connection promotes freedom, equality or any other constituent value of secularism as a political principle (2011, p.105-106). Therefore, what I would like to indicate here is not merely the increasing connection between state and religion at the level of law and policies but the fact that the process of de-secularization of state has taken place also at the level of law and policies, which I argue undermined freedom and equality as the essential values of secularism as a political principle.

In the 2010 – 2016 period, de-secularization of state at the level of laws and policies is evident in many social policy areas, such as education, family, woman,

youth etc. In each of these, government has been recently pursuing conspicuously homogenizing and exclusionary policies that reflect a particular ideological *Weltanschauung* and aim at designing the society accordingly. Knowing that each process of de-secularization that these policy areas have been through is a subject broad enough to be dealt with by separate theses, I would like to focus exclusively on educational policies owing to two main reasons. First, being one of the widest policy areas, education touches on each social policy area specified above and, thus, government's approach while forming and pursuing educational policies is usually reflective of its approach to other social policy areas. Therefore, analyzing educational policies enables to draw indicative and valid conclusions regarding the de-secularizing stance of the state while enacting law and policies. Second, particularly in Turkish political history, education has always been the first policy area to be reorganized, whenever there was a change in the dominant official ideology. In order to implant and indoctrinate the official ideology over the younger generations, social engineering techniques used by state are usually manifested first in educational policies.

What kind of an educational policy does a state that adopts secularism as a political principle pursue? And more importantly, what does such an educational policy have to do with the state being secular? In fact, adopting secularism as political principle a state vows to take diversity of comprehensive doctrines in a society as a fact and maintain an atmosphere, in which these can peacefully coexist. A secular state, therefore, does not have comprehensive ends, such as imposing a particular ideology, worldview or lifestyle, but on the very contrary maintains impartiality, guarantees equality and promotes basic freedoms while forming and pursuing its educational policies. In this regard, secularism as a political principle is

in favor of “inclusive education”, whereby the state takes all necessary measures that the educational system, both its management and content, responds the needs of all children and learners without any kind of discrimination (UNESCO, 2008).

In Turkey, the 2000s inherited some substantial problems regarding the management and content of education, most of which were the legacy of the coup d'état of 1980 and the February 28 Process. Among these the most notable ones were compulsory religious instruction in public schools, the headscarf ban in the universities and the limitations on Imam-Hatip students to enter universities. AKP governments' officials have constantly voiced their objection the legacies of these coups but took a conspicuously selective stand in abandoning and reversing the policies of these legacies. As a matter of fact, whilst the problematic laws and policies regarding the freedoms of headscarfed students and women and Imam-Hatip students were eventually resolved, other problems of the educational system that created exclusion for Alevis, non-Muslims, other minorities, non-believers etc. not only remained unresolved but also clearly worsened. Herein, I argue that the worsening of educational policies, in terms of both its management and content, points out to the process of de-secularization of state at the level of law and policies and in what follows I would like to provide some empirical data that explicitly reveal this process.

To begin with, management of education is an important element of inclusive education. For the educational system to be inclusive, managerial elements such as legislation, policy-formation and implementation should also be inclusive, participatory and non-discriminatory (UNESCO, 2008). In Turkey, however, the 2010 – 2016 period witnessed a clear regress in inclusiveness of educational management in at least two ways. First, Turkish educational systems underwent a

substantial revision in 2012 and the processes of policy formation and legislation were harshly criticized not be inclusive and participatory. In fact, the bill of the “4+4+4 educational system”, as is publicly known, was neither developed in a participatory way nor discussed sufficiently by public. Even throughout the legislation process, where public discussion mechanisms by means of parliamentary commissions and sub-commissions of civil society representatives are procedurally definite, there was only a limited public debate and eventually the bill remained nearly unrevised after all feedbacks had been given by the stakeholders (ERG, 2011, p.39-41). The report of the Education Reform Initiative (ERG) draws attention to the fact that the bill was apparently not based on a preplanned governmental program either. The bill was released to the public after the 2011 elections won by the AKP and AKP did not mention in its election declarations about such a substantial change in educational system. The bill was based merely on an advice of National Educational Council, which is the highest advisory council for the National Ministry of Education and is responsible for examining the educational system to improve its quality and taking advisory decisions. In this regard, the bill may be taken to have certain legitimacy given the existence of representatives and stakeholders in the council. However, this reveals a further problem regarding the composition of the council. In 2010, with a substantial by-law change, the ratio of ministry-appointed members of the council increased from 60% to 75%. The ERG report puts forward that with this change the contribution of the council to the supposedly participatory formation of educational policies is open to discussion (2011, p.41). Moreover, despite all of the problems regarding its composition and non-transparent membership appointments, in its 19<sup>th</sup> summit in 2014 the council brought up quite substantial propositions such as the abolition of mixed education and intensification

of religious education in public schools. The decisions concerning the substantial elements of education could be publicly debated, after they become definite. This is a structural problem for the inclusive and participatory management of education (ERG, 2015, p.29-30).

Another development about the management of education that threatens both state impartiality and inclusiveness of education is the increasing engagement of a set of foundations, all publicly known to have particular religious identities that are close to that of AKP, with the management and the content of public education. According to the available data, the Ministry of National Education signed 22 protocols regarding religious education with certain foundations. These include TÜRGEV, Ensar Foundation, Hizmet Foundation, İlim Yayma Cemiyeti and Şuurlu Öğretmenler Derneği.<sup>38</sup> I find it substantially problematical that these foundations engage with public education for at least two reasons. First, as I underlined earlier, these foundations declare themselves to affirm particular comprehensive doctrines in their missions and visions that include elements such as “spiritual dynamics”, “ethical development”, “jihadist consciousness” and “spreading of the truth”.<sup>39</sup> Thereby, engagement of these foundations with regular national education activities would certainly point out to the involvement of such thick and comprehensive elements in public education, which undoubtedly destroy the prospects of inclusive education. Secondly, the protocols that the ministry or the directorates of national education signed with these foundations mostly involve certain objectives and purposes, particularly regarding the content of education, which from legal perspective directly fall into the area of responsibility of the ministry itself, which

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<sup>38</sup> “Bakanlık devre dışı, eğitimin dümeni dinci vakıflarda”, *Birgün*, 03.06.2015

<sup>39</sup> See “Ensar Vakfı” retrieved from [http://www.ensar.org/ensar-vakfi\\_W26.html](http://www.ensar.org/ensar-vakfi_W26.html) , “Niçin ÖĞ-DER Şuurlu Öğretmenler Derneği” retrieved from <http://www.ogder.org/tr/genel.asp?islem=incele&id=82> and “Hizmet Vakfı Tarihçesi” retrieved from <http://www.hizmetvakfi.org/tarihce>

makes sense given the fact that inclusion of public education can better be guaranteed by public institutions than private foundations with particular *Weltanschauungen*. Arguably due to legal concerns, AKP government has been recently working on a bill on the establishment of a new state-mandated foundation called Maarif Vakfi<sup>40</sup>, which is supposed to take over the activities of the Ministry of National Education abroad and train its own instructors. According to the bill passed on June 17, 2016, the board of trustees will have seven permanent members, for appointed by the president and three appointed by the council of ministers, and an amount of 1 million TL will be transferred to the foundation from the budget of the Ministry of National Education. The opposition parties severely objected the bill drawing attention to the risks of a foundation that is managerially dependent on the governing party's leaders taking over a part of national ministry's tasks and budget for the inclusiveness of education and impartiality of state.<sup>41</sup>

The second element of inclusive education is the content of education. For the educational system to be inclusive, the content of education should meet the criteria of neutrality and objectivity and must not include any discriminatory element. So far the curriculum of Turkish public education has been profoundly handled by a number of academic works as well as various reports regarding the content of education. Due to the limitations of space and scope of this thesis, I can neither refer to all of these works nor provide a new examination of the entire curriculum but owing to its prevalent place in the debates on secularism I would rather focus on the issue of religious instruction and its content in public education.

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<sup>40</sup> "Maarif" has an arabic origin and means education in Ottoman Turkish. The preference of this word to the much more widely used and known "milli eğitim" (national education) has been also publicly discussed and attributed to the will of imposing particular values by means of public education.

<sup>41</sup> "Maarif Vakfi yeni bir cemaat yapılanması", 13.06.2016, *Birgün*, retrieved from <http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/bakanlik-devre-disi-egitimin-dumeni-dinci-vakiflarda-114522.html>

Religious instruction in public schools has been a constitutional provision since 1982. From the perspective of inclusive education, the religious instruction in Turkish public schools (the course Religious Culture and Ethics) has two substantial problems. First, it is among the compulsory courses of the curriculum and exemption is possible merely for non-Muslim pupils and based on declaration. Nevertheless, reports of some minority communities reveal that there have been some cases, where non-Muslim pupils' parents faced either bureaucratic or practical difficulties in using their right of exemption (Protestan Kiliseler Derneği, 2014). Second, being a “religious course” on a particular interpretation of Sunni Islam rather than a “course on religions”, the curriculum of the compulsory Religious Culture and Ethics is monist, exclusionary and propagandist. The imposition of Sunni religious instruction to the Alevis, non-Muslims or non-believers has long been discussed in public and this problem became a matter of judicial case several times. Turkish administrative courts gave contradictory rulings on the issue. Whereas provincial administrative courts of Sakarya and Sivas found the curriculum of the course one-dimensional and exclusionary for Alevis, the provincial administrative court of Ankara found it acceptable and “supra-sectarian” and Council of State approved its ruling (ERG, 2010, p.81-82). The issue was brought before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in 2007 and 2014. In 2007, the ECHR ruled that the course of Religious Culture and Ethics seeks to infuse a specific religious interpretation and thus is against the criteria of neutrality and objectivity as required by the law of human rights (ECHR, 2007). The court also drew attention to the inexistence of a non-discriminatory exemption mechanism. Following this ruling, the curriculum of the course Religious Culture and Ethics was revised twice. However, as Yıldırım

reveals, despite some positive changes the curriculum still maintains its characteristics of being a religious education of Sunni Islam (Yıldırım, 2012) and is thus against the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools.<sup>42</sup> As a matter of fact, in 2014 the ECHR almost repeated its ruling regarding the compulsory religious instruction in Turkey, drawing attention to the need for a neutral and pluralist content for the course (ECHR, 2014).

In fact, the courses regarding religion and belief offered in public education are directly related to human rights, particularly in the context of freedom of thought and conscience. As ECHR rulings also reveal, Turkey has done very little to make the religious education compatible with human rights. Within the context of the European Convention of Human Rights, the courses on religion and belief should be not compulsory but optional and the content has to be neutral and egalitarian. Furthermore, the right of exemption should be performed without having to declare one's belief and granted to all (ERG, 2015, p.83). Nevertheless, while problems regarding the compulsory Religious Culture and Ethics course are still unresolved, a new set of elective courses regarding religion and belief – Qur'an, the Life of Prophet Mohammed, and Religious Basics – was introduced with the adoption of 4+4+4 educational system. The fact that these courses are elective courses does not mean that they are totally compatible with freedom of thought and conscience but without the state taking certain measures, these elective courses can turn into a mechanism of declaration of belief and pressure. The ERG report draws attention to the fact that parents or pupils might feel obliged to elect these courses to avoid any probable discrimination and exclusion (2012, p.104). Besides, the report reveals that several non-Muslim and Alevi pupils had to elect these courses due to practical

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<sup>42</sup> Toledo Principles aim at providing a guide about how to perform the education about religions and beliefs based on respect for growing religious diversity and human rights and emphasizes upon an inclusionary, non-doctrinal and neutral curriculum (OSCE, 2007).

inadequacies in public schools across Turkey (p.104). Therefore, the state must guarantee that these elective courses do not become *de facto* compulsory courses by offering a sufficient number of alternative courses. Furthermore, the state should be neutral, take a pluralist stand and respect diversity in deciding about what courses to offer, the content, the finance and the implementation.

Last not but least, I want to touch upon the project of “values education” organized by a bilateral protocol between the Ministry of National Education and Hizmet Foundation. As explained in the protocol, the values education aims at raising new generations that are loyal to national, ethical, human, spiritual and cultural values. While the ministry did not share an official content for the values education, it sent a 39-page booklet to the all Provincial Directorates of National Education, which it prepared jointly with Hizmet Foundation and includes the content of the values education.<sup>43</sup> As is obvious in the selection of Hizmet Foundation that publicly declares its aim to be “to infuse the reality of Qur’an” as the partner, the content of values education is predominantly based on values of a specific interpretation of Sunni Islam and thus at least as exclusionary and partial as the compulsory Religious Culture and Ethics course. In this respect, values education is an outstanding component of the exclusion- and social engineering- based educational policies that became much more common following the adoption of the 4+4+4 educational system.

To conclude, the 2000s inherited substantial problems regarding both the management and the content of education, which were severely undermining the inclusive and pluralistic credentials of the educational system. Thus, it would not be fair to entirely attribute these problems with the policies of the AKP governments of

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<sup>43</sup> The booklet is available in the website of Provincial Directorate of National Education of Bitlis, retrieved from [https://bitlis.meb.gov.tr/meb\\_iys\\_dosyalar/2014\\_10/27085706\\_deerlereitimi.pdf](https://bitlis.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2014_10/27085706_deerlereitimi.pdf)

the day. I rather argued that the AKP governments took a selective stand towards those problems, eventually fixing, on the one hand, the problems of its own base such as headscarf ban and limitations for Imam-Hatip students in entering the universities and neglecting, on the other hand, the problems of social groups outside its base such as exclusion and marginalization of non-Sunni pupils through compulsory religious education. However, the actual developments that point out to a process of de-secularization of state at the level of law and policies was initiated in 2012, when the educational system was substantially reorganized. With the introduction of 4+4+4 educational system that brought about serious changes in both the management and the content of education, AKP government's bid to instrumentalize education for its social engineering purposes became clear. In this process, religious education in public schools, which ECHR ruled twice should have been moderated and accorded with freedom of conscience and thought, was extended and supported by values education. Because the state moved away from secularism as a political principle due to the pursuit of conspicuously exclusionary policies that are based on the propaganda of a particular comprehensive doctrine, I take this process to refer to de-secularization of state at the level of law and policies.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

In this thesis I put forward the concept of “secularism as a political principle” and in this concluding chapter I would like to reemphasize and note some important points. First and foremost, adopting secularism as a political principle, a state does not make a set of secular comprehensive values dominant over political sphere and public institutions but, on the very contrary, guarantees that the state and public institutions be characterized by an overlapping consensus based on equal citizenship, basic freedoms and human rights that does not intend to face off against any reasonable<sup>44</sup> comprehensive doctrine but enables all to coexist peacefully. As I show in Chapter 2, even the scholars commonly known with their skeptical or even negative approach to secularism in terms of its relationship with democracy, who;

- attributes secularism with a cultural inadaptability problem for the non-western, non-Christian societies, where secularism cannot get in harmony with traditional values and social dynamics and,
- assert that any form of secularism is definitionally comprehensive and can only exist by imposing itself to the non-secular social segments

did occasionally utter that these are not inherent problems of secularism and imply that they are not against an understanding of secularism modeled on equal citizenship, basic freedoms and human rights. Since it was always “the crisis of secularism” that was put under the spotlight and taken as the highlight of the recent literature on secularism, I think, it is crucial to reveal the existence of a democratic

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<sup>44</sup> A “reasonable comprehensive doctrine” is one that does not have the aim to impose or the implant itself to the entire society and, thereby, recognizes the right of other comprehensive doctrines to exist (Rawls, 2005, p.463).

form of secularism that even the highly skeptics could agree to and I take this as one of the important contributions of this thesis.

As for Turkey, as I show in Chapter 3, although it has remained unchanged as a constitutional state principle since the late 1930s, *laiklik* has been more of a “principle of all seasons”, as I call it, which never embodied a regime that is consistently and stubbornly based on certain given principles and was constantly reshaped in line with the changing political landscape and conjuncture throughout the republican era and particularly after the transition to multi-party democracy. More importantly, as a quality of the state, *laiklik* hardly helped realize the institutionalization of a regime that is genuinely in favor of equal citizenship, basic freedoms and human rights but on the very contrary became the basis for the violation of these at times. Particularly since the 1980s, *laiklik* has been commonly perceived to represent certain *Weltanschauungen* and lifestyles that the state intended to systematically implant over the society.

With AKP coming to power, the prospects for a democratic and non-exclusionary fixing of *laiklik* that became increasingly a source of political problems toward the 2000s were commonly voiced. As the idea that political Islam can coexist with democracy and freedom flourished and the concepts like “Muslim democracy” and “moderate Islam” were widely raised by academic circles, Turkey under AKP consolidated its profile as the exemplary model for other countries with Muslim majority populations before the international community. Undoubtedly, as a political movement that had suffered much from state-led exclusion and imposition of certain comprehensive values, AKP’s democratic and liberal discourse in the early 2000s was found credible by secular liberals at home as well as by the international

community.<sup>45</sup> Those who expected Turkey to become a model of liberal “Muslim democracy” ruled by conservative Muslims who embraced pluralist values ruled out the possibility that AKP would instrumentalize state power to do social engineering and impose its own comprehensive doctrine over the entire society when it consolidates its power. *Laiklik*’s collapse over time through fruitless daily political polemics, gradual elimination of any sort of checks and balances and increasing monism in public and political institutions initiated a process, where Turkey under AKP is no longer presented as an example for Arab and Middle Eastern countries to emulate. In this process, which I call “de-secularization of the state”, the state on the one hand institutionalized exclusion by preventing the reflection of the diversity that exists within the society to the public sphere and political institutions and moved away from an egalitarian and non-discriminatory attitude on the other. That makes it clearly a bad example.

With its authoritarian and exclusionary policies becoming conspicuous in the course of the process desecularization of the state, AKP not only broke its promise to change the exclusionary and discriminatory structure of the state but also ignored the values such as equality, liberty and dialogue that considerably helped it consolidate its power. As Shadi Hamid underlines, the discourses of the AKP officials explicitly lacked the talk of “compromise” and did not even sound open to peaceful coexistence with the secular social segments (2016). As I show in Chapter 4, the state underwent an unprecedented desecularization at the levels of ends, institutions and law and policies. If we consider the building of Turkish national identity, of which being Sunni and Turk is an inseparable part and Turkish state’s conventional institutional support and finance (of an own version) of Islam as symptoms of a

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<sup>45</sup> “Interview: We misread AKP and Erdoğan, legitimized crude power grab”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 29.08.2015, retrieved from <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/interview-west-misread-akp-and-erdogan-legitimized-crude-power-grab.aspx?pageID=238&nid=87678>

“covert establishment” of Sunni Islam in disguise of secularism, then we can well conclude that the process of desecularization of state points out to an “overt establishment”, whereby a particular interpretation of Sunni Islam moves beyond being a defining element of national identity and becomes the official ideology of the state at the levels of ends, institutions and law and policies.

The consequences of the processes of desecularization of the state and the transition from covert to overt establishment evidently brought about a move away from inclusionary democracy in Turkey. Nonetheless, other experiences of non-secular state and *de facto* establishment of a religion are also noteworthy, since it is not merely in Turkey that Islam – state relations have led to the curtailment of democracy. Hamid, for instance, argues that endless conflicts in the Middle Eastern countries have to do with how Islam relates to the state and politics. In this thesis, I provided an analysis of the relationship between democracy and how state and Islam relate to each other. Yet, because it is case specific and its scope is relatively narrow, this thesis does not provide a full account of this story. The question of how state – religion – society relations should be in Muslim majority countries will be and should be further discussed. For the present what is certain is that current forms of these relations are at odds with inclusionary democracy. Secularism, in fact, comes out as a viable alternative, though Islam is commonly taken to have a historical resistance to a sociological and, thus, political secularization.<sup>46</sup> However, the fact that secularism is a viable option does not necessarily mean that there is only a single determined path to adopt it. Secularism as a political principle is based on a set of democratic principles and is, thereby, remarkably different from the sorts of secularism that countries like Turkey, Iran, Tunisia, Egypt etc. have historical

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<sup>46</sup> “Interview: Shadi Hamid on the Past and the Future of Political Islam”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 04.06.2016, retrieved from <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/interview-shadi-hamid-on-the-past-and-future-of-political-islam.aspx?pageID=238&nID=100049&NewsCatID=386>

traumas about. In this regard, not being a comprehensive doctrine, secularism as a political principle is open to contextual adaptation. As a matter of fact, the expectation of and the demand for the secularization of the state (not the society) accompanied by a process of rethinking secularism and revisiting its history have recently flourished. Iran sets an interesting example with its quest for democracy that began with a move away from secularism and currently requires the reinstatement of secularism as a political principle. As Telek shows, Iranian liberal intellectuals, who were leading actors during the revolution of 1979 that turned Iran into a theocracy and then became the critics of the regime by supporting “democratic Islam” throughout the 1990s eventually came to stand up for political secularism in their writings (2016). When read in tandem with the conceptual change in the writings of the liberal *Post-Reformist Intellectuals*, the post-1979 history of Iran provides an illustrative account of how and why secularism as a political principle came to be seen as *sine qua non* for a polity to be an inclusionary democracy. In Tunisia, too, there has recently been a process, whereby secularism is increasingly associated with democracy, equality and freedom. Islamist Ennahda said it renounced political Islam and decided to introduce a separation between its political and religious affairs. Being presented as the only successful case of Arab Spring that achieved a peaceful and relatively stable transition to democracy, it is a remarkably progressive step for Tunisia to associate secularism with liberties and equality instead of attributing it to the autocratic rule of Ben Ali. Of course it is too early to argue for a full force secularization of state in Middle East and North Africa. Indeed, further research should be conducted to trace the changes in understanding of traditional Islamist movements on how Islam should relate to state and politics. Yet, it is undoubtedly worth underlining that secularism has increasingly been considered as a viable option

among the intellectuals and the members of political society and further desecularization and establishment are apparently not in demand in the region.

As I underlined many times in this thesis, the debate on the “crisis of secularism” that dominated the literature on secularism over last two decades is not over yet. Mahmood, for instance, raised solid critiques as to how secularism is carried out in Egypt as well as elsewhere in the West (2016). Yet, as she also underlines, these critiques aim at a positive contribution to the rethinking of secularism, whereby equality, liberties and inclusion are more respected in the building of state – religion – society relations. Nevertheless, it is a fact that the polarization between the secularists and its opponents is increasing all over the world (Cohen, 2016). Given the exclusionary and one-sided practices both in the West and elsewhere in the name of secularism, it is clear that such a rethinking is indispensable. However, I have been observing an increasing consensus that this rethinking should be done by keeping two points in mind, which Cohen draws attention to (2016, p.2-3). First, the achievements of constitutional democracy that contemporary human rights and liberties are based upon, particularly those related to gender equality have been hard-won and should not be compromised. Second, differentiation between state and religious institutions, non-establishment and non-domination of any comprehensive doctrine over state institutions, namely the basic elements of secularism as a political principle, are essential for the basic liberal, republican and democratic principles. Putting forward secularism as a political principle as *sine qua non* for free, equal and peaceful coexistence in this thesis, I aim at contributing to this rethinking process with the case of Turkey.

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