

Religion and Politics in Contemporary Turkey: Attitudes of Atheists

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Abstract. *As contemporary societies tend to experience a more heterogeneous religious landscape, it becomes more difficult for governments to accommodate religious differences, various beliefs and non-religion within the realm of politics. By drawing upon semi-structured interviews with 12 self-identified atheists from different backgrounds in Turkey, this paper explores the attitudes of atheists towards the intersection of religion and politics in contemporary Turkey. In this paper, the concept of hegemony by Antonio Gramsci is used in order to analyze the hegemonic position of Islam within the realm of politics in contemporary Turkish society. Rather than a Marxist view of a clear-cut dichotomy of classes as ruling and ruled, a Bourdieuan approach, where society is thought to be consisting of many "fields," including religion and many groups that strive to gain more power within these fields, was adopted. The results indicated that atheists perceive religion and politics as closely intertwined, as politics are perceived as being strongly influenced by religion. The close connection between politics and religion is then seen as leading to an increase in religiosity in society, as well as to increasing pressure on atheists both by the state and the public.*

Key words: *atheism, politics, religion, Turkey, Islam, hegemony.*

Introduction

Religion continues to play a central role in many societies and recent global occurrences have led to a resurgence of often politically motivated religion worldwide. This tendency became more noticeable in the post-Cold War era, especially among world religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism (Haynes 2009, 1). These are the religions that the majority of the world population affiliates with. Western European countries have been the exception to this religious upsurge in general; however, religious views are still significant while dealing with policies on certain issues such as migration and asylum seeking, ethics of genetic engineering and reproductive rights even in Western democracies (Beckford 2003, 200). The relations between religion and politics differ in each

country and it is important to examine these relations in different contexts and understand their influence on various groups.

Turkey is a country with special characteristics regarding debates about the religious upsurge, the role of religion in society, and secularism. A significant majority of Turkish people are Muslims; however, Turkey has no state religion and adopted the principle of secularism in 1937 (Daver 1988, 32). The concept of secularism in the case of Turkey does not reflect a strict separation of religion and state. On the contrary, the state is actively engaged in religious affairs. Through the Presidency of Religious Affairs (the Diyanet) which is the highest religious authority and operates under the office of Prime Ministry, the Turkish state does not only control, but also constructs and governs religion, promotes certain interpretations of Islam, tries to maintain national unity and collective solidarity, and defines what is religious and what is secular in line with state policies (Turner, Arslan 2013, 221-2). Therefore, in Turkey secularism is understood as 'separating state and religion and maintaining their separation in particular state spheres within a set of institutional relationships that ensure their integration and supervision as well' (Davison 2010, 35).

Atheists constitute a small minority in Turkey. The actual number or percentage of atheists is not known due to the automatic registration of people with Muslim parents as Muslim by the state. Atheists are often not organized and have low visibility within Turkish society. Despite the establishment of the Atheism Association in Turkey in 2014 with the motto "We are no longer alone", it is still difficult to claim that atheism is respected or accepted in Turkey. Since the studies on general attitudes and perspectives of atheists are lacking in Turkey, there is not much information about the causes atheists support. However, drawing on the information available on the web page of Atheism Association in Turkey (ateizmdernegi.org.tr) the association supports the freedom of expression, promotion of science and scientific education, gender equality, and ethics free from religion (2017).

The majority of Turkish people identify as Muslims and according to a survey conducted by Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs (2014, 240) 19.4% of the Turkish people consider themselves 'very religious', while 68.2% consider themselves 'religious'. It is worth noting that the term 'religious', in this survey, has not been defined or exemplified, hence the data may be skewed based on the informants' individual perceptions of the term 'religious'. There have been claims of increasing religious influence in Turkish politics in the recent years. Raising political expressions of Islam in the Middle East also influenced Turkey. The trends that point out a religious upsurge in Turkey can be listed briefly as: emergence of a religious entrepreneurial sector and a dominant political party with Islamic roots along with

debates about Kemalism¹ and its relevance to contemporary Turkish society (Rabasa, Larrabee 2008, 1). The atheists, as a minority group, deviate from the rest of society on religious grounds. In addition to being a minority in Turkish society, claims of increasing influence of political Islam in contemporary Turkey raises questions about atheists and their lives as part of a religious society, and possibly a religious political environment.

The aim of this paper is to explore the attitudes of atheists about the relationship between religion and politics in contemporary Turkey. The paper investigates the influence of Islam's hegemony within politics in contemporary Turkey based on atheists' attitudes and analyzes the influence of relations between religion and politics on the position of atheists in contemporary Turkey. Atheists are chosen for the study since they constitute an important proportion of non-Muslim people in Turkey. Moreover studies on atheists or non-religion in general are rather limited in Turkey and the study aims to also address this gap in the literature.

Religion, Politics and Atheism

Turkey is officially a secular country with no state religion since 1937. Nonetheless the general population is predominantly Muslim. Since everyone with Muslim parents is automatically registered as Muslim by the state, the number of people following Islam varies significantly based on the source. The rate is over 95% according to Joshua Project (2015) and 99.8% according to the CIA World Factbook (2016). While the figures leave a small percentage for other religions, the religious field of Turkey is still characterized by diverse Islamic communities and fraternities (Adil, Kenneth 2000).

Apart from Islam, Judaism and Christianity are also represented in contemporary Turkish society². The numbers of non-Muslim groups are rather low considering the population of Turkey which is around 75 million. The numbers have been decreasing since the foundation of the Republic due to various political and economic reasons such as population exchange of Orthodox Christians with Greece and wealth tax mainly imposed on non-Muslims (Özdalga 2008).

Non-religious orientations, especially atheism, are also a part of the religious field. Research on atheism in Turkey is scarce (Hendrich 2011)

- 1 Kemalism refers to the founding ideology of the Republic of Turkey that was implemented by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Laicism (Secularism) is one of the six major pillars of this ideology.
- 2 It is estimated that there are approximately 60,000 Armenian Orthodox Christians, 20,000 Jews, 2,000 to 3,000 Greek Orthodox Christians and 15,000–20,000 Syrian Orthodox Christians.

and, therefore, data regarding numbers or general tendencies of atheists are lacking. According to the Joshua Project, the rate of people with no religion is 3.1% in Turkey (Joshua Project 2015). In the report published by the Atheism Association, a project proposal to identify the numbers of atheists, non-religious and non-Muslim people are discussed and it is stated that such a project is aimed at ending the dominating discourse in Turkey which suggests that “we live in a country with 99% Muslim population” (Atheism Association 2014).

In the International Religious Freedom Report 2013 published by Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, USA, Turkey is considered a country where religious freedom is protected. However, there are many points of criticism in the report such as blasphemy charges against individuals for insulting Islam, lack of recognition for Alevi worship places and harassments experienced by individuals who convert from Islam.

Secularism, Religion and Politics in Turkey

Understanding the concept of *secularism* is essential in making sense of the relations between politics and religion in Turkey. Secularism, in Turkey, refers to ‘separating state and religion and maintaining their separation in particular state spheres within a set of institutional relationships that ensure their integration and supervision as well’ (Davison 2010, 35). This understanding of secularism has had many implications for Turkey. Atatürk, the founder of the nation, was determined to establish a country that would be culturally Westernized and wanted to eliminate the Islam of the state, with its official hierarchy and ideology, and to replace it with a modern Islam that was solely a personal faith (Szyliowicz 2003).

This was not an easy task. Several reforms started introducing secularism to the country over a 5 year period between 1924-1929 and meant a significant shift for the Turkish population. Such reforms included the following, abolishing the caliphate, recognizing Sunday as the weekend instead of Friday, abolishing the Ministry of Islamic law and pious foundations, shutting down of the religious seminaries and placing religious high schools under the authority of Ministry of Education, closing the Sufi Dervish lodges, prohibiting the fez and requiring all men to wear Western-style hats, removal of the lunar calendar and clock and instead adapting the Gregorian calendar and solar clock, approving a secular civil code in matters of marriage, inheritance, divorce and adoption, declaring Islamic law and Sharia courts null and void, eliminating the statement of Islam as the state religion on the constitution, dropping Arabic alphabet and adapting Latin-based

alphabet. Rather than Islam, a new type of nationalism emerged in the country as a result (Cagaptay 2006, 13-4).

These reforms resulted in substantial change. Yet secularism has always been a contested concept and became a significant issue in politics, paving the way for many conflicts since then. While providing a complete account of all these conflicts would not be necessary for this paper, it is worth noting that power struggle between secularists and supporters of more Islamic practices marked the history of Turkish politics.

In fact, the State provides many services for its Sunni-Muslim citizens, both domestically and abroad, through the Presidency of Religious Affairs. By teaching, training, and employing all religious personnel as well as through the offices of the mosques and publishing houses of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, the State holds the monopoly of monitoring religion's public presence. It also provides religious instruction within the national education system under the authority of the education ministry. Such a structure even today has important implications in the ongoing political battle within Turkey between forces supportive of more assertive or more elastic forms of separation, oversight, integration, monitoring, and control (Davison 2010).

Atheism in Turkey

Atheism is a part of religious field in Turkey, yet research on atheists is almost non-existent, thus data regarding numbers or general tendencies of atheists are lacking (Hendrich 2011). However, there are studies that explore attitudes of Turkish people towards other religions and nonreligious people which can provide insights about atheism in Turkey.

In surveys, Turkish people's acceptance of other religions or views seems limited. As the study on conservatism in Turkey suggests 39% of the participants would not like to live next to someone with a different religion, 77% believe in the case of conflict between sciences and religion, religion is always right, 79% think that only their religion is true, 55% believe that politicians who lack a belief in God are not a good fit for a leading position, 63% believe that books and publications that attack religion and religious values should be banned, and 44% believe restaurants should close down during Ramadan when Muslims fast (Cagaptay 2014, 95). 54% of the participants also state that they would not like to live next to a family that supports Sharia law. In another study on religion, society and politics in Turkey, 49% of the participants expressed objection for living next to an atheist family. Around 40% of the participants disfavored living next

to a Jewish, Armenian or Greek family, which the authors interpreted as a “learned view,” rather than based on experience. It is very unlikely for a Turkish citizen to have a Jewish, Armenian or Greek family as a neighbor as their numbers are rather low (Çarkoglu, Toprak 2007, 49-50).

Freedom of expression is an ongoing struggle for nonreligious people in Turkey. The provision “Any person who openly disrespects the religious belief of a group is punished with imprisonment from six months to one year if such act causes potential risk for public order” in Article 216/3 of the Turkish Penal Code aims at preventing hate speech against religious groups. However, nonreligious people can easily be subject to penalties since “potential risk for public order” is interpreted in broad terms in court (Şirin 2014, 76).

The report published by Atheism Association of Turkey (2014) listed fifteen cases where people such as novelists, caricaturists and online activists were put on trial for insulting religious representatives or values. The report also discussed Article 216, compulsory religion classes, legal status of atheists and nonreligious people, and funeral and burial procedures as problematic issues for atheists. The Association also mentioned a project to find out the real percentage of atheists and non-Muslims in Turkey in an attempt to ‘end the legend that 99% of Turkish population consists of Muslims’.

The Atheism Association is the first legally recognized atheist association in Turkey, while accepted among a highly Islamic public sphere (Sanderson 2015). However, such recognition does not guarantee much protection as the Association and its members are often subject to death threats, online attacks and insults (Atheism Association 2016). Despite its recognition, the association’s website was taken down by a court decision which was later waived (Hurriyetdailynews 2015). The Association has a motto of, “We are no longer alone”, and aims to encourage the free expression of philosophical views of people, prevent these people from getting oppressed, and defend their legal rights as stated on their website.

The above exemplifies the controversial public and political attitudes toward the association. In the book *Visible Islam in Modern Turkey*, Özdemir and Frank identify areas of controversy between secular and non-secular worldviews in Turkey, and include issues such as: decisions to construct mosques, personal dress in public and public offices, presence, abundance and activities of religious orders, language and quality of worship, training of religion functionaries, existence, size, financing as well as politicization of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, compulsory religious classes, the control exerted by the state on public religious activities, and state pressure for uniformity in religion (2000, 216-9). It is important to note that by secular worldviews, the authors did not necessarily mean atheists, but refer

to people who supported the secularism principle of Turkey, which may include Muslims as well. Still, such controversies reflect many of the issues that are challenging for atheists as well.

Theoretical Perspectives: Hegemony in the Religious Field of Turkey

Hegemony is a central concept in Antonio Gramsci's work. Gramsci defines hegemony as 'a condition in process in which a dominant class (in alliance with other classes or class fractions) does not merely rule a society but leads it through the exercise of intellectual and moral leadership...' (2009, 75). In hegemony, consensus is realized by promoting the interests of a particular social group as the interest of the whole society. In this case, the oppression or misuse does not really prevent subordinate social groups from supporting the values, ideals, objectives, and political and cultural meanings of the hegemonic class, and this further empowers the hegemonic class and the power structures in its favor (Storey 2015, 83).

This study uses the concept of hegemony in exploring the religious field in Turkey. Schröder states, it 'appears to be uniquely well-suited for a situation where a dominant institution has established a culture of consensus over time that marginalizes other institutions and cultural expressions' (Schröder 2011, 19) which is the case in Turkey. The perspective of hegemony acknowledges the existence of various religious options for people, but it considers them to be in a hierarchical position in society where the choices do not provide fair competition for all religions. Dominant religious institutions sustain their dominance over minority religions because of two advantages. Firstly, they hold social and political power, often thanks to their close ties with the political elite. Secondly, the entrenchment of the dominant religion into the national culture which makes it the natural choice for people and causes any other choice to appear as the unnatural, or other, in relation to the country's cultural heritage (Ališauskienė, Schröder 2012, 5).

Considering the variety of groups that operate in numerous categories within religious institutions, or in relation to structures of hegemony, it seems necessary for studies about religious hegemony to go beyond a Marxist view of a clear-cut dichotomy of classes as ruling and ruled and rather adapt a Bourdieuan approach where society is thought to be consisting of many "fields" including religion (Schröder 2011, 29). In addition to field, habitus and capital are also important concepts of Bourdieu that are suitable for the studies of religious hegemony (Grusendorf 2016).

Bourdieu defines field as a space where competing individuals and institutions struggle to possess capital which would enable them to have certain profits and put them in a more advantageous position against their competitors. The power possessed by an individual or institution determines its position in the field and in this field the agents are involved in actions that would enable them to produce, consume, and accumulate capital in line with their personal interests (Bourdieu, Wacquant 1992, 243).

Capital is a very important concept for Bourdieu and it has to be understood beyond its meaning in economy. In other words, capital is a power. The capital the agents possess in different fields determines their positions in the broader field of influence and control (Rey 2007, 51). Any form of capital that is not material is called symbolic capital. An important aspect of symbolic capital is its transferability. Due to transferability of capital between fields, a group or class can utilize its religious capital and facilitate the acquisition of more economic or political capital of elite agents or institutions, and by doing so enables them to empower themselves beyond religious fields. They may dominate the meta-field of power by strengthening their positions in other fields, such as political or economic (Ray 2007, 45-46).

Habitus is a widely used concept of Bourdieu. Bourdieu defines habitus as a property of social agents that has a 'structured and structuring structure' (1994, 170). Habitus tends to reproduce the same actions and conditions under which it was produced (Swartz 1998, 103). Reproduction of the conditions that structure the habitus also means a continuation of the advantageous or disadvantageous positions for certain individuals or groups.

Methodology of the Empirical Research

The study employed a qualitative approach and was based on semi-structured interviews conducted with self-identified atheists. The informants were recruited through the researcher's social networks at meetings and events organized by the Atheism Organization of Turkey, and via social media, using a snowballing technique. The main criterion to be included in the study was self-identification as an atheist. Semi-structured and face-to-face interviews were conducted in the three following cities of Turkey: Istanbul, Izmir and Trabzon with a total of 12 self-identified atheists during July 2015 and January 2016. The informants' ages ranged between 18 and 60. Half of the informants were below the age of 30. Often this was due to willingness of younger people to participate in the study and busy schedules of older people who could participate. All but one informant had background in Islam, however there were important differences in the level of

religiosity; one informant had a Jewish background. Informants were from, or residing in, different parts of Turkey, representing both urban and rural parts of the country. Some of them were members of atheists organizations, while majority were not members to any atheist organizations.

Upon receiving their informed consent orally, the informants were asked to provide information about their religious backgrounds, including their family's religious views, at the beginning of the interviews. After sharing their religious backgrounds, the informants were asked to discuss certain topics in relation to religion and politics in contemporary Turkey.

The interviews were transcribed in full and thematic analysis was employed, drawing on Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis aimed at reporting attitudes, meanings, and realities of the participants as well as examining the ways in which such attitudes, meanings and perceptions were shaped by a range of discourses operating in society.

Risk of harm was prevented by securing anonymity and confidentiality of the people involved as well as using pseudonyms for the informants as an ethical consideration. All the interviews were conducted upon verbal consent of the informants. An age limit of 18 years old was applied for the informants.

Attitudes of Atheists on Religion and Politics in Contemporary Turkey

The themes that emerged are presented in the following sections. Three main themes are religion for appealing to people, religion-based policies and religion imposed on people. The relationship between the themes and common patterns are the key to understanding the argument formulated in this paper.

Religion for Appealing to People

The informants discussed the relations between religion and politics in contemporary Turkey and touched upon a variety of topics. One of the major issues the informants mentioned and considered problematic was the politicians' approach to religion in attracting crowds of people. It was stated many times that politicians' approach to religion disadvantages minorities.

Dilan, a 31 year-old female from eastern Turkey who is actively involved in politics and works for the local branch of the political party, discussed some politicians' approach to religion and considered it to be very dangerous

for the society as it paves the way for polarization. She also underlined that politicians' approach to religion influence people and make them accept their disadvantageous position without questioning any further. She stated:

Simply by saying Allahuakber, they get the votes of thousands. We sometimes see people on the streets; half of the population is pushed into poverty in this country. Although people are trying to find food on dumping sites, try to survive without food and water, they (the poor people) still say "Thank Allah, we are able to live our religion. (Dilan, 31, F).

With this statement, Dilan reflected her view that politicians use religion to appeal to conservative people. Even if these people are in a difficult situation, they do not complain because what they deem as religious need is somehow met by the politicians. In a similar way, Hale, a 60 year-old female, stated:

A significant mass may consider the government the representative of religion. They show the Quran in their meetings, they translated the Quran into Kurdish to appeal to Kurdish people, they pray before their meetings, and lecture people about morals and this became even more obvious after the news of corruption. (Hale, 60, F).

While some of the informants especially underlined the rise of religion in politics since the government first came into power in 2002, some of them stated that all the political parties, in one way or another, involve religion in their actions or agendas.

Religion and politics are nested together in Turkey. Religion is in the agenda of every political party. While secularist parties try to make religious initiations to be more inclusive for religious people, nationalist parties make use of a religious and nationalist discourse and politicians in power try to teach a culture of being thankful to God. Therefore, they are nested together and it should not have been like this. (Osman, 26, M).

The data suggests that informants consider that political parties and politicians discuss religion actively and try to attract people by doing so. In their statements, politicians often consider only Muslims and pay scant attention to the needs of other religious groups. Such an approach is considered problematic for atheists since it becomes more difficult for them to voice their demands or concerns, and being Muslim becomes the norm for the whole society.

This situation can be explained with Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Islam is the major religion in Turkey; over 95% of the society identifies as Muslim. Considering the state structure of Turkey where religion is highly regulated by the state, it is rather easy for certain political figures to identify themselves with Islamic values, develop policies that favor Muslims and therefore get the support of the majority. By claiming to defend the interests of people and their religious needs, the hegemonic group creates a political environment that works for their own benefit. In other words, the hegemonic group transfers their symbolic capital within the religious field to the political field and strengthen their position within the meta-field of power which further confirms their hegemonic position. This approach becomes more apparent once the political parties or figures come into power and actually get the chance to regulate and supervise religion.

Religion-based Policies

The informants critiqued current legislation or bills supported by some politicians for not being inclusive. Many of the informants also stated that in light of such policies religiosity increases and the appreciation for politicians that support religious policies increases as well.

Harun, a 45 year-old male who was involved in a religious fraternity for over 15 years, expressed that the influence of religion has been increasing since 70's and reached its peak in contemporary Turkey. He described how politics and religion are influential in every part of social life and stated:

Today, politics rule our lives. Therefore, even if I give you an example about street animals, this is the result of politics regarding street animals. For example, if a government that thinks dogs are evil and they should be killed, as stated in some hadith, comes into power and applies this to law, then there would be no dogs in the streets. This means we can draw political conclusions based on even dogs and cats. (Harun, 45, M).

The informants also discussed other topics and expressed their discomfort with the politics concerned merely with Islamic values. They especially considered certain statements and actions of politicians related to science, gender, media, education, morals, urban planning, and arts problematic. Selim discussed the construction of a mosque in a green area of Istanbul, while Burçin criticized education policies of the government. They stated, respectively:

There is a mosque construction going on in Çamlıca. What are they doing? They destroy the nature and build a gigantic mosque. Why? Is this the level of civilization we have reached? Building an amazing mosque. People can worship perfectly now, but can they produce anything? Politics blind people. Instead of investing in religion, investing in a coffee shop would make more sense. People can have fun, socialize. Politicians use the sources in an unfair way. This society is not only consisted of Muslims. (Selim, 22, M).

Liberal ideas are not wanted. The number of religious schools, religious education starting from an early age and teaching of Arabic language; I know that all these policies are aiming at numbing the brains of young people. Because the government tries to raise a generation as it pleases and therefore creates policies to that end. (Burçin, 24, F).

The statements indicate that the politics are influential on religion and the society in general. The informants claimed that due to the politics of religion, the religiosity is increasing and since the society is religious, the politics tend to be based on religion. These relations between religion and politics can be explored through Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Habitus recreates the conditions that created it and therefore confirms the advantages and disadvantages for social groups in society. In other words, religious people support religious politicians and religious politicians develop religious politics. As a result, both the society and politics become more religious and this situation confirms the advantageous position of the hegemonic group and works for its interests. For atheists, on the other hand, the situation becomes even more difficult since the structure does not favor them and recreates their disadvantageous position.

Religion Imposed on People

The informants reflected on the relations between religion and politics and how those influence the society and their lives. Many of the informants stated that religion is often imposed on people irrespective of their religious beliefs and politics play an important role in this imposition.

Ahmet, a 24 year-old male, underlined the statement that is often repeated by media, politicians, and society: "99% of Turkish people are Muslims," and state, "they want nonbelievers to at least respect religion, even if they do not believe, and this translates to: even if you do not believe Islam, live as if you do."

Similarly, other informants mentioned that Islamic values are at times imposed on them. It was expressed that living a life that does not confirm

Islam may be problematic in the Turkish society and often the politics in Turkey are a factor that contributes to these problems. Merve, a 26 year-old female from a highly religious background, talked about the difficulties she encountered with regard to some politicians' statements which condemn men and women living together before marriage. She stated:

I am always under pressure. When my boyfriend visits me, my landlord comes and tells me that my boyfriend should not visit me. I do not know how many times I moved my home. (Merve, 26, F).

Merve stated that the introduction of a ban on alcohol sale after 10 pm is a form of Islamization and the fact that subway does not work in Istanbul after 11 pm prevents people from a night life. Such statements indicate that Merve feels her lifestyle is under threat and limited by Muslims as well as the statements of politicians that support a more conservative way of life.

Dilan is a 31-year old female who works at a textile company. She discussed her problems as an atheist and expressed that social pressure for not fasting during Ramadan got higher since the government came into power by stating, "In the company I work in, most people did not used to fast during Ramadan, but since the government came into power, I am seriously excluded for not fasting." Burçin explained the pressures and reflected that government targets atheists on purpose and promotes a bad image of atheists. By referring to anti-government protests, she said:

Despite there being all kinds of people involved in Gezi events, from religious people to non-religious, there was an attempt to create a perception that they are all atheist terrorists, associating atheism with terrorism. I mean, for years we have been struggling with terrorism. With the help of the media, when government uses such expressions that associates terrorism with atheism, this paves the way for some serious consequences. (Burçin, 24, F).

Many of the informants contended how some politicians impose a more religious lifestyle and especially enable a patriarchal society that intensifies a gender divide. Many also stated that media is strictly led by people who have political connections and therefore is biased against non-Muslim groups and in education where religious classes that teach only about Islam are being introduced in the curriculum. Such practices were interpreted as the result of the relations between religion and politics and considered to be harmful for the society and for atheists by the informants.

The presented research data demonstrates that atheists perceive the current relationship between politics and religion to want all members of society to live like Muslims, while political statements are influential on these expectations. With their statements or by openly targeting atheists, the politicians are influential on society's approach to atheists. Moreover, through politics, religion is enforced on society as a whole in different spheres of life. Such an effort can be interpreted as hegemonic group's strategy to increase its symbolic capital in religious field and also transfer it to other fields of the society. The hegemony is constantly at a struggle to maximize its capital and needs the consent of other groups in society. Since atheists do not consent willingly, they are subject to coercion of both the politicians and society. Not consenting often results in negative consequences. As a result, atheists become subject to social exclusion.

Conclusions

The informants reflected their opinions on religion and politics in contemporary Turkey. While there were some differences in their opinions, all the informants stated that there are close relations between religion and politics in Turkish society and further underlined an increase of religion's influence on society and politics. They provided examples related to religion and politics in different spheres of life such as gender, education, science, cohabitation and media.

Based on the attitudes of atheists, the paper indicated that hegemony of Islam in the religious sphere of Turkey influences its politics. Politicians and political parties make statements that favor Muslims and at times even target non-Muslims in an attempt to please the crowds and thus gain further support. By doing so, the politicians increase their power in both religious and political fields. Especially once a political party comes into power, it becomes entitled to make regulations regarding religion and this gives them a chance to strengthen their hegemonic position. Even the political parties which support secularist principles succumb to religious requests of the majority in order to appeal for more people. Such an approach results in ignorance of non-Muslim groups and an Islamic norm for Turkey.

The paper demonstrated that the relations between religion and politics influence atheists. Since the politicians often consider the priorities of Muslims and develop policies accordingly, the religiosity level of the society increases which also increases the pressure on atheists. Introduction of more religious classes to the curriculum, a religious media and the expectation of society from atheists to adhere to the Islamic norms were all provided as

examples among many others that were discussed in relation to politics in contemporary Turkey. Such changes enable the creation of a habitus which causes society to become more religious and create the advantages for the Muslim majority and disadvantages for the atheists.

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TAYFUN KASAPOGLU

Religija ir politika šiuolaikinėje Turkijoje: ateistų požiūris

Santrauka

Šiuolaikinės visuomenės pasižymi vis labiau heterogenišku religiniu kraštovaizdžiu, todėl vyriausybėms vis sudėtingiau suderinti skirtingas religines pažiūras ir nereliginius interesus politiniame lauke. Remiantis duomenimis, surinktais interviu su 12 ateistų iš skirtingų Turkijos visuomenės sluoksnių, tiriamas ateistų požiūris į religijos ir politikos sandūrą šiuolaikinėje Turkijoje. Čia vartojama Antonio Gramsci hegemonijos samprata, kuria remiantis analizuojamos hegemoniškos Islamo pozicijos šiuolaikinės Turkijos visuomenės politiniame lauke. Vietoje marksistinės dichotomijos tarp valdančiųjų ir valdomųjų pasitelkiama Bourdieuan prieiga, kurioje visuomenė matoma kaip susidedanti iš daugelio „sričių“, įskaitant religiją ir daug skirtingų dėl galios konkuruojančių grupių. Rezultatai parodė, kad ateistai mato religiją ir politiką kaip stipriai persipynusius laukus, nes religija daro didelę įtaką politikai. Stiprus politikos ir religijos ryšys matomas kaip veiksnys, kuri skatina visuomenės religingumą, o tai kelia visuomenės ir valstybės spaudimą ateistams.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: ateizmas, politika, religija, Turkija, Islamas, hegemonija.