

READING FRIDAY SERMONS AS PRAGMATIC POLITICS: SERMONS IN
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ABSTRACT

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The literature tends to interpret the last few decades of transformation in public sphere as the Islamization of Turkey. Similarly, it presents the discourse and practices of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA) as instrumentalization for this purpose considering the subject and content of the Friday sermons. However, whether the public sphere in Turkey moving away from secularism to a more religious and particularly Islamist direction needs to be carefully analyzed. This thesis examines the broader debates of secularism, secularization, and rise of religion in the public sphere by focusing on the PRA and particularly the public messages of the PRA via Friday sermons. It engages with the theoretical perspective of post-secularism that problematizes the binary perception of secularism and the visibility of religion in the public sphere by displaying the complex and intertwined relations between religion and secularism. It examines the PRA and Friday sermons and tries to examine how and to what extent the PRA is autonomous from political authority or organically connected to the political authority or an instrument of political authority for pursuing a pragmatic agenda setting. The thesis is grounded on case

studies and examination of Friday sermons in 2016 and 2022. The thesis argues that the PRA is a product of post-secularism rather than being an institution for secularism or Islamisation in its addressing and responding to the current political, social, and economic issues during the JDP rule.

Keywords: Post-secularism, JDP Government, PRA, Friday Sermons

ÖZ

CUMA HUTBELERİNİ PRAGMATİK SİYASETİN TEZAHÜRÜ OLARAK OKUMAK: 2016-2022 YILLARI ARASINDA TÜRKİYE’DE HUTBELER

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Literatür, kamusal alandaki son on yıllık dönüşümü Türkiye’nin İslamlaşması olarak yorumlama eğilimindedir. Benzer şekilde, Cuma hutbelerinin konusunu ve içeriğini dikkate alarak, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı’nın (DİB) söylem ve uygulamalarını İslamlaşma amacıyla araştırdığını öne sürmektedir. Ancak, Türkiye’de kamusal alanın laiklikten uzaklaşıp daha dini ve özellikle İslamcı bir yöne doğru kaydığını savunan tartışmaların dikkatli bir şekilde analiz edilmesi gerekiyor. Bu tez, laiklik, sekülerleşme ve dinin kamusal alanda yükselişine ilişkin daha kapsamlı tartışmaları, DİB’e ve özellikle de Cuma hutbeleri aracılığıyla DİB’in kamusal mesajlarına odaklanarak incelemektedir. Din ve laiklik arasındaki karmaşık ve iç içe geçmiş ilişkileri göstererek, laiklik algısı ve dinin kamusal alanda görünürlüğünü arasındaki kutupsallaşmayı sorunsallaştıran post-sekülerizmin teorik perspektifiyle ilgilenir. Bu tez Diyanet ve Cuma vaazlarını incelemektedir ve DİB’in siyasi otoriteden nasıl ve ne ölçüde özerk olduğunu ve viirganicviic bir gündem belirleme için siyasi otoriteye veya siyasi otoritenin bir aracına viirganic olarak bağlı

olduđunu arařtırmaktadır. Tez, vaka alıřması yntemiyle 2016 ve 2022 yılları arasında yayınlanan Cuma hutbelerini analiz etmektedir. Bu tez, AKP iktidarında, DİB'in mevcut siyasi, sosyal sorunlara hitap etmesi ve bunlara yanıt vermesi bakımından laiklik iin veya İslamlařtırmaya ynelik bir kurum olmaktan ziyade post-sekler dnemin rn olduđunu savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Post seklerizm, AKP Hkmeti, DİB, Cuma Hutbeleri

To my dear aunt and cousin who passed away in 20

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

PRA	Presidency of Religious Affairs
JDP	Justice and Development Party
NMP	Nationalist Movement Party
RPP	Republican People's Party

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the literature, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) period in Turkey has been presented as the period of the rise of political Islam and characterized by increased tension between secular and Islamist ideologies. For instance, according to Ayhan Kaya, controversies on the headscarf problem, Imam Hatip schools, religious groups, Alevism, the ascension of the Islamic bourgeoisie, which is rooted in Anatolian culture, the occurrence of consumerist lifestyles both among secular and Islamic parts of the Turkish society, and, lastly, the loss of legitimacy of the Turkish military as “the protector of national unity and the secularism” have been interpreted as that the Turkish society and politics have been subtly Islamizing (2015: 23). It is crucial to study to what extent the overall influence of Islam has changed Turkish society and politics since 2002. The central to this discussion has been the secular vs the Islamist binary. During the JDP's 20 years in power in constitutionally secular Turkey, on the one hand, the place of political Islam has caused intense debates. On the other hand, the status and continuity of the secular ideology of the state have been questioned. The central question is as follows: how do we interpret the claimed rise of Islamism in Turkey under the JDP with regards to the secularism vs Islamism binary? Does the JDP's period of government indicate a conflict between the religious and the secular, as often presented in the literature, or alternatively, does it show signs of a compromise

of religion and secularism in a peculiar way beyond the secular vs the Islamist dichotomy?

The broader history of the Turkish Republic has often been characterized in terms of the secular vs Islamist dichotomy. As stated by Hakan Yavuz, “modern Turkish history has often been viewed as the conflict between two Turkeys that is a division highlighting either Turkey as a secularist and progressive nation or as an Islamic and conservative one” (2019: 1). This polarizing view is common not only among the partisans of two camps; even academic studies have largely failed to recognize the complex and encompassing relationship between Islam and secularism (Yavuz, 2019: 126). For instance, Ayhan Kaya sees the JDP rule as aggressive and exclusionary towards the secular segment; as a deliberate effort for the Islamization of education and bureaucracy; and as de-secularization of the state and the re-Islamization of politics and society (2015: 35). However, there are other scholars such as Hakan Yavuz and Ahmet Öztürk who remark that it is not easy to find a way to separating secularism from Islam or Islam from secularism in today's Turkey (2019: 130). Similarly, Fumiko Sawea states that “to understand how the ideals and practices of secularism have been contextualized in Turkey, it is essential to study secularism and Islamism as mutually constitutive and interactive concepts” (Sawea in Yavuz, 2019:2). In his work, the evidence for this point is abundant: especially, after the 1980 military coup, bilateral policies based on reconciliation, various religious sects were bargaining with political parties in return for a vote during the right-wing governments; Imam Hatip schools were opened, the obligatory religious classes were initiated; the Turkish-Islamic synthesis became the official ideology; the Islamisation is used as a tool against the

rise of left-wing organizations. As president of post-coup Turkey, Kenan Evren sought support from various religious sect leaders, indicating that state-religion relations have always been intertwined in Turkey (Öztürk, 2016: 54).

The literature supports that the binary construction of secularism and religion is problematic. According to Jurgen Habermas (2008) and José Casanova (2013), a post-secular process prevails in the world of the 21st century. Post-secularism is a process to refer to increased visibility of religion in the public and political sphere, including in secular states. The post-secularism discussion is emerging, showing a meaningful way for a non-atavistic understanding of religion to be incorporated into the public sphere. It is much better to see secularism and religion as phenomena that communicate with each other in different ways and differ according to time and place on earth (Casanova, 2013: 56). José Casanova states the factors that accelerated the transition of religion from private to the public under four main headings: “the 1979 Iranian revolution; the rise of Solidarity in Poland; the political engagement of Catholicism in Latin America; and the growth of the Christian right in US politics” (1994: 78). With these developments, besides the rise of religion in secularized countries, it has also revealed that it has the power even to influence the state and religion relations.

Post-secularism discussions show that the sphere of influence of religion is not limited to non-secular countries. The Western world, called the most secular, is also experiencing the penetration of religion into the public sphere. For example, Islamic finance emerged in Egypt in the early 1960s (Possamai, 2017: 146). This Islamic finance, which emerged as a response to the capitalism of western colonialism, has

spread its influence beyond Islam and even to the rest of the world, including the entire west. In the 1990s, three decades later, Christian finance came to hand. Lionel Obadia uses the definition of “indices trying to create a capitalism with a Christian perspective” (Obadia in Possamai, 2017: 146).

The post-secularism discussions may contribute to our understanding of the current Islamism vs secularism binary in Turkey by displaying the complex and intertwined relations of religion and secularism as an alternative view of separating these as two opposing ideologies. Moreover, it can shed light on the specific discussion on whether and to what degree the JDP government has been pursuing an Islamist or Islamizing ideology. Specifically, post-secularism discussions may reveal the nature of the JDP’s engagement with Islam and Islamism, i.e., if its Islamic attitude in politics is due to the party's Islamizing ideology or due to such pragmatic reasons as enhancing the party's political power.

In a political system where secularism and religion are intertwined, the idea of a government instrumentalizing Islam for pragmatic reasons rather than following an ideology (i.e., Islamic values and morals) seems to be the hegemonic perspective in academia. In fact, it is a different perspective that can be found in a limited number of critical studies. According to Şerif Mardin, the JDP does not try to theorize Islam; Islamic ideology is not among its priorities either (Mardin in Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008: 52). What, at first glance, appears as Islamization is the following: “It is not a question of the state imposing an Islamic agenda, but of spontaneous actions by lower-level officials who believe that it is part of their mission” (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008: 56). In this view, the JDP's Islamism may be more of a phenomenon that can vary

depending on unforeseen possibilities and situations in the political and social field rather than a religious ideology. Furthermore, Gamze Çavdar argues in the 2000s that political Islamists in Turkey became moderate both according to hypothetical and structurally changing situations in international and domestic settings (2006: 15). Then, it is important to examine whether today's Islamists also adjust themselves to circumstances as those in 2000s. If such moderation is the case today, one may argue that, rather than ideological position, Islamist groups prioritize pragmatic orientations and respond to surrounding circumstances. At this point, it is important to understand whether some policies, reforms, and discourses that seem to be the manifestation of Islamization during the JDP era indicate an ideological change or are tools that serve political pragmatism.

Within the context of the controversies about the Islamism and secularism dichotomy in the JDP period, the situation of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, PRA) has a specific place. The PRA has a specific position as a religious institution of the constitutionally secular state. The thesis examines the PRA in secular Turkey by focusing not on the existence, function, and place of the PRA but the PRA to illuminate the current political system of Turkey because the PRA seems to be an institution that blurs the secular vs. Islamist dichotomy by being a secular state institution while its discourses and practices are on religion. I also examine the relation of the PRA as the state institution with the executive authority, i.e., the governing political parties, in terms of the PRA's degree of autonomy from the political authority. I examine the PRA's Friday Sermons as data to examine the relation between the PRA

and the political authority, in this case the JDP. I argue that the PRA's expansion and enlargement in the last two decades is an indicator of how it can become a tool for a government's political pragmatism, if and when the sermons address the concerns of not only a state institution, i.e., the PRA, but the political authority. Thus, my thesis examines the PRA's Friday Sermons since 2016 with a focus on social, political, and economic issues and debates directly covered and addressed as well as indirectly implied in the sermons. In doing so, the thesis investigates the degree of religious-ideological motivation and political pragmatism in such coverage.

The reasons why this thesis focuses on the period of 2016 and beyond is the occurrence of impasse and intense circumstances in Turkish politics. One of the turning points in the last period of Turkish politics is the coup attempt on 15 July 2016 (Kakışım & Erdoğan, 2018). 15 July brought radical changes in Turkish politics. The government was able to put pressure on all institutions in the civil society, especially with the opportunities provided by the state of emergency declared on 20 July, 2016, right after the 15 July coup attempt (Ayan, 2019: 152). The closure of some universities, unions, associations, and foundations shows the crisis of the historical bloc that was being established. The political society-centered crises of the historical bloc that was being established after 2016 pushed the government into an uncompromising position in every field and in every sense (Ayan, 2019: 155). The media was also greatly affected by this attitude of the JDP. The concussions of the government in the political area caused many organizations that owned the means of production were completely liquidated after 2016 (Akçay, 2019: 70). Especially in the post-2016 period, according to literature, the increasing authoritarianism process, which resulted in the change of

political regime (transition from the parliamentary system to the presidential system) in 2017, brought about a slowdown in economic growth (Akçay, 2019: 64). All these events led JDP to instrumentalize PRA, which makes it meaningful to examine the Turkish context after 2016.

The Friday sermon is a short sermon delivered by the imams after the Friday prayer, which serves as a channel to convey Islam which interpreted by the PRA to the Turkish community. “Particularly after the 28 February intervention in 1997 (the so-called post-modern or ‘soft’ coup), sermons began to be controlled by the central administration of the PRA and were prepared by a sermon commission within the Higher Council of Religious Affairs” (Bilgili et al., 2011: 51). By 2006, the heavily centralized production of the sermons was loosened. Organizing sermons for the needs and problems of various regions and segments assigned to the regional mufti committees under the PRA's control. “Decentralization of responsibility in this area is relative; even if the sermon is prepared by a specific imam, the office of the mufti to which the imam is tied has to check and approve the text before it is delivered in the mosque” (Bilgili et al., 2011: 52). On the other hand, the excessive centralization of the Friday sermons was not an ongoing practice of the PRA. The content of the sermons were not determined by the PRA’s staff; they were shaped in accordance with the government’s preferences (Gözaydın, 2008: 91). Therefore, Friday sermons play a crucial role as a communication channel for the government in reflecting their political agenda. Moreover, an in-depth analysis of the Friday sermons reveals the nature and the level of the PRA's relationship with the government. On this occasion, I argue that the religion vs the politics and the Secular vs Islamist dichotomies are overly

simplistic. At the same time these form a complex, intertwined relationship full, sometimes with contradictions and sometimes with agreements.

The literature on Friday sermons examines sermons' subject and contents and argues for their contribution to the Islamization process of Turkey on the grounds that the PRA designs Friday Sermons in line with the current government ideology and that it instrumentalizes sermons for supporting the governmental ideology (see Yanarocak, 2015, Gözaydın, 2008, Öztürk, 2016). Moreover, Ceren Lord claims that besides being a state apparatus, the PRA is also an important tool in maintaining the society's pledge to the Sunni Islam and serves to the common Islamization cause with the government (2018: 62). However, one question needs an answer: to what extent is the literature accurate in depicting the truth of the JDPs discourse as Islamization and in portraying such Islamization as shaping the structure of the state and society in practice?

This thesis examines the Friday sermons to address the issue that whether Turkey is simply moving away from secularism to a more religious, Islamist direction, as claimed in the literature. The thesis approaches the Friday sermons as text by the officially religious institution of a constitutionally secular state and argues that these sermons seem to blur the presumed polarization of the secular and nonsecular "camps" in Turkey. It asks the following questions: Do Friday sermons simply operate as a tool for the JDP's peculiar Islamization ideology? Alternatively, do they indicate the JDP's political pragmatism via the instrumentalization of the PRA as the official state apparatus on religion?

Problematizing the secular vs Islamist binary could have been done by focusing on fields other than Friday sermons. Yet, I focus on the Friday Sermons as an instrument of the PRA, a state apparatus that has acted to support and protect the secular and Kemalist ideology of the state since the early republican period. This focus will enable a discussion of its relationship with the government in today's Turkey. The Friday sermons' use in its earlier form and current form can be different as well, depending on the structure of the apparatus and the ideology it serves to. Examining Friday sermons have a key role in understanding historical and current governmental ideology and its relations with religion, politics, and the state.

Currently, the instrumentalization of Friday sermons shows that the PRA strongly supports the JDP government (Öztürk, 2016: 72). For instance, before the June 2015 parliament, some imams called for the public to “vote for the Muslims,” to whom they mean the JDP. Other similar examples show the harmony and conformity between the JDP's political agenda and the sermons' contents. The most crucial point that draws attention in the Friday sermons related to political issues is that submission and obedience to the government as the basis of Islam. All of these sounds like a test for the secular state, which is overwhelmed by its own Islamic heritage, as if the secular vs Islamist binary is accurate. However, this study examines an underexamined secular vs Islamist binary with its aim to assess the complicated ways the PRA utilizes the Friday sermons under the JDP rule.

This thesis could have focused on a historical analysis of Friday sermons since its initiation at the early republican Turkey today. Yet, instead of such broad historical analysis, I focus deliberately on the JDP period because of this period's unique dynamics such as the particularly intertwined relations between religion and politics and the manifestation of political pragmatism in Friday sermons. Examining the Friday sermons will question the view that the JDP period indicates the collapse of secularism and the rise of Islamism. Contrary to mainstream literature, Friday sermons, where a secular institution addresses religious issues, are expected to illuminate an intricate and more complex relationship between the secular and the religious.

The primary research question of the thesis is what kind of relationship and interaction between secularism and Islamism is revealed in the Friday sermons of the PRA under the JDP government. The secondary question is how the discourse on the decline of secularism and the increase of Islamism, which is claimed to have taken place during the JDP period should be interpreted? The study argues that Friday sermons reveal a pragmatic relationship between the JDP and PRA. My argument is that messages in the Friday sermons does not indicate that Turkey is moving from secularism to more Islamist direction. Rather, the JDP instrumentalized its Friday sermons to legitimize its pragmatic policy and support the agenda it created.

Qualitative research design is used while answering the research questions of the thesis. In order to reveal the JDP's instrumentalization of PRA for political pragmatism, a case study analysis of Friday sermons between 2016 and 2022 related to family, economy and the opening of Hagia Sophia was conducted. Friday sermons

were accessed from the publications on the PRA's own website. The reason for choosing the family category is that in both PRA's Friday Sermons and the JDP's discourses and practices, family and family unity is given serious emphasis, the theme is frequently repeated and maintaining the traditional family structure is overemphasized. On the other hand, the period of economic crisis we have been through is frequently the subject of sermons. Examining to what extent the economic crisis was addressed in the sermons, and what kind of connection it has in terms of the JDP's agenda regarding the economic crisis, is guiding in tracking the traces of pragmatic politics. Finally, the conversion of Hagia Sophia from an early Republican Museum into a JDP-period mosque is another case which is associated with the Islamization of Turkey, while I argue that the opening day sermon, opening day symbolism reveal more pragmatic politics than Islamization attempt. The political agenda parallel to the publication dates of the Friday sermons has been researched and the relationship of the agenda with the Friday sermons has been examined. While researching the agenda about the sermons, academic articles, newspapers, JDP election declaration and PRA publications were examined as secondary sources.

In the second chapter titled Secularism, Secularization and Post-Secularism, the difference between classical secularization theories and post-secularism debates is revealed and the period when the traditional link between religion and secularism was broken is explained. It states that the period of JDP government is an example of post-secularism and display an ambiguous space that can be assessed only by going beyond the binary of Islamization and secularization.

In my third chapter, what kind of role PRA plays in terms of religion-state relationship is revealed. While questioning the autonomy of PRA, it reveals the difference whether instrumentalization is carried out by the state or the government by utilizing the existing literature on the PRA and its place in relation to the political authority in line with whether it has autonomy from the political authority or not. My study, which argues that the PRA was instrumentalized during the JDP era, debates whether this instrumentalization was done through ideological-based Islamization or the pragmatic reasons of the government. At this point, it reveals the pragmatic reasons related to the government behind the religious services of the PRA.

In my analysis chapter titled the thematic analysis of Friday sermons, the sermons that deal with the themes of family, economy and the conversion of Hagia Sophia to a mosque between 2016 and 2022 are discussed. This chapter examines the various ways in which Friday sermons address the issues central to the JDP's current political agenda on issues, problems, and debates regarding society, economy and politics.

CHAPTER 2

SECULARISM, SECULARIZATION, POST-SECULARISM IN THEORY

According to early sociologists such as Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, secularization is a complementary condition of modernity and would spread all over the world with modernization (see Durkheim, 1915; Weber, 1968). Secularization refers to the projection that with the progress of modernization, religion would be reduced to the private sphere of individuals, and its influence on culture and public sphere would be lost. When religion evolved into a completely individual phenomenon, it would have lost its socially transformative power as well (Wilson, 1987: 87). Specifically, Emile Durkheim makes the distinction between “sacred” and “profane”, places them as opposed to each other. He argues that with modernity and therefore secularization societies gradually become distant to sacred, lose their interest towards the divine, and religious power and authority gradually weaken (Durkheim, 1915: 124). Modern pioneers of the classical secularization thesis, such as Bryan Wilson, also define secularization as a process in which the social effects of religious facts, institutions, orders and teachings on politics, education, public sphere diminishes and then would disappear (1987: 12). In other words, secularization stands for turning to non-religious dynamics instead of taking religion as a reference point to their daily problems. The decrease in the control and power of religion in non-religious areas of life, removing religious beliefs from being the source of the dominant culture and expression tool in society, and as a result, religion is imprisoned in the private sphere

of individuals (Luckmann, 1979: 19). However, despite these envisioning by classical and current proponents of secularization theory, contemporary, actually-existing modernization points out that religion has not been limited to the personal sphere today. Maciej Krzywosz, explains that “empirically confirmed revival of religious life in many parts of the world, including the very modernized ones falsified not only the belief at the end of religion but also forced some sociologists to develop a concept that would make a place for religion in the public sphere” (2017: 52). Religion, in fact, is not disappearing but actively appearing in public sphere, and a new conceptualization of the relation of religious and secular is necessary. This thesis, following the literature, utilizes the concept “post-secular” in examining the contemporary configurations of religious and secular in private and public spheres.

Secularization theory is not immune from criticism. As opposed to classical secularization thesis, contemporary scholars, namely Talal Asad, Jürgen Habermas, and Jose Casanova share the idea that the religion’s sphere of influence in the modern world is not decreasing, but rather increasing (see Habermas: 1994: Asad 2003; Casanova 2013). For instance, while questioning the secularization “myth,” Casanova emphasizes that as opposed the classical secularization theory, the existence of religion in the public sphere cannot be ignored and defines this process as a “post-secular.” He explains the current “post-secular” condition in the following way:

Religions throughout the world are entering the public sphere and the arena of political contestation not only to defend their traditional turf, as they have done in the past, but also participate in the very struggles to define and set the modern boundaries between private and public spheres, between system and life-world, between legality and morality,

between individuals and society, between family, civil society, and state, between nations, states civilizations, and world system (Casanova, 2011: 6).

Another scholar of post-secularism, Talal Asad, also points out that, contrary to the view of classical secularization theory, the public presence of religion is not disappearing with modernization and rationalization, its importance has never diminished; yet religious movements are increasing worldwide (2003: 34). He joins to the literature objecting the Durkheim's thesis that the sacred (religious) and profane (secular) are mutually exclusive spheres, since the profane things can become sacred, and the sacred things can become profane (Asad, 2003: 18). Adopting binary polarization of religion and the secular is a rigid approach that ignores their mutually constitutive interaction in the modern world (Asad, 2003: 22). Moreover, he argues that “the secular, is neither continuous with the religious that supposedly preceded it (that is, it is not the latest phase of a sacred origin) nor a simple break from it (that is, it is not the opposite, an essence that excludes the sacred)” (Asad, 2003: 25). By this way, Asad also problematizes the linear and progressive understanding of the relation between the religious and the secular.

Jürgen Habermas, José Casanova and Talal Asad have great influence on the development of post-secularism as critical evaluations of the classical secularization thesis. The most effective of these evaluations is the possibility of learning from religion by questioning the secular rather than arranging religion for secularism. I discuss the religion and secularism interaction under the title of post-secularism, which includes the revision of classical secularization theories by Casanova and Habermas

and Asad who exhibit an epistemological break between religion and secularism. In line with the recent thesis of secularization and the post-secularism debates, I explain how the interaction of “the sacred” and “the profane” can be explained in the context of contemporary Turkey. Considering Asad’s perspective, it can be argued that the sacred, which exists through transmutation at the core of secularism, is exploited and shaped in accordance with the ideologies or pragmatic interests of the government in Turkey. I argue that post-secular era we live in is giving place to the JDP government’s pragmatic political concerns rather than the Islamization project directly. Raising these arguments could lead to exploring the relevance of these debates on how the relationship between religion and secularism constitutes a complexly intertwined area to the context of Turkey.

1.1 Classical Secularism Theory vs Talal Asad’s Secularism Theory

Secularism is an ideology that embraces all dynamics of people’s life including the private sphere (Berger, 1999: 2). Secularism operates with a framework of scientific reason and rationality that contributes guidelines for determining appropriate forms of knowledge, practice, and values. The normative premise of secularism is the secularization of the world as a prerequisite for scientific, technological, and moral progress (Asad, 2003: 19).

The emergence of secularism is closely associated with the rise of the modern nation-state (Taylor, 2002: 8). Secularism in the modern nation-state context promises two conditions. The first is finding common ground between the teachings of conflicting

religious sects, and the second is introducing a notion of political ethics that is completely independent from religious conviction. As known, modern nation-states aim to homogenize different identities in terms of class, social, and religion around the concept of “citizenship” (Berger, 2008: 16). Through the concept of citizenship, individuals are called to the path of connecting to a common identity instead of focusing on their religious, economic, and social differences. In this way, gathering groups with different approaches, religious beliefs, and classes around a single concept would become possible. At this point, secularism could serve to overcome these differences and unite everyone to a common ground (Berger, 2008: 20).

As it turns out, the fact that religion has become part of politics even in the most secular countries shows that the relationship between secularism and religion needs to be reviewed again and from a new point of view. I examine the relationship between religion and secularism from Talal Asad's critical theoretical framework which represents epistemological break.

In *Formations of the Secular and Genealogies of Religion*, Talal Asad states that the modern state was the leading factor in the establishment and definition of the religious field. Religion is redefined through scientific methods and classifications, incorporating it into a domain so that the modern state can administer and keep it separate from science, law, economics, and education (Asad, 2003: 39).

One of the most striking elements of this analysis is that it does not present the realm of religion and secularism as two extreme and mutually exclusive areas. To establish and maintain its own secular identity, the nation-state needed to base the religious field

on legal and bureaucratic principles and redefine it on a secular basis. In this context, secularism is a political doctrine that does not simply mean the separation of religion from the state. “What is distinctive about "secularism" is that it presupposes new concepts of "religion," "ethics," and "policies," and new imperatives associated with them” (Asad, 2003: 2). The forms of classification and subjectivity produced by this administrative doctrine offer the state a form of governing where the state can govern its citizens by institutions, methods, and ways of thinking. Therefore, the techniques of the governing style develop regulation and management policies for the private sphere of the people, their way of life, and even the most micro-level practices including sexuality.

This perspective emphasizes that the relationship between the state and religion is uninterrupted, and that religion and its administration are not limited to the private sphere but have a reciprocal and continuous relationship with other fields. The secular system is built in the context of institutions, conceptual perspectives and subjectivities established by the nation-state. Yet, such secularism is not simply the suppression of religion by the nation-state either. It emerged as a productive rather than an oppressive model. The institutions and subjectivities that make up the system are religious as well as secular. In other words, the secular and religious spheres are in constant interaction. As a result of this interaction, it can be said that the two fields shape each other and accordingly their boundaries become ambiguous.

According to Talal Asad in the modern secular world, it is seen the patterns of religious and secular are produced and reproduced with the reflection of “myth, agency, pain,

cruelty, and torture” (2003: 28). He explains that religion and secular are not binary terms. Underlying the mutual relationship between the secular and religion leads the various connections and transmutation of the concepts of modes of behavior and organization in the modern world. He underlines that religious metaphor referred to the formation of the modern secular world order. Correspondingly, it is possible to interpret that Islam and secularism overlap and constitute a transmutation in some organizations and institutions. As the example of the PRA shows, the PRA is not an anti-secular institution but a secular institution on the religion in the modern Turkish nation-state that does not necessarily indicate the state’s oppression of the religious sphere or an increase in the religiosity in the state. On the contrary, the PRA is an institution indicating the complex relationship between religion and the state within the framework of “post secularism.”

1.2 Revealing Secularization and Religion relations in a post-secular era

While secularism is often presented as the separation of religion and state affairs, the concept of secularization indicates that religion has lost its power on the social level. That it can affect fewer people than in the past, and that it is gradually moving away from being a reference point for society (Kuru, 2007: 9). Secularization refers to the anticipation that the status of religion, religious phenomena, supernatural beliefs and teachings, and their influence and forming ability in daily practices will decrease on a social and individual basis after modernization (Berger, 1999: 3). Secularization is not an ideology, it is a concept that explains the relationship between religion and society in a certain time and space (Karakaş, 2007: 7). Secularism, on the other hand, is the

name of the ideology that affirms and defends a structure that is distant to religion for both the state and the public sphere (Ertit, 2014: 3).

The distinction between these two terms is important because while secular states may have non-secular societies, non-secular states may have societies with secular lifestyles (Asad, 2003: 18). For instance, while the United States was being established, its founding fathers separated religion and state affairs (Asad, 2003: 19). In the secular USA, the state takes neutral positions towards different religious beliefs but due to America's unique dynamics, the religious sensitivities of the society are quite high and the rate of going to churches is higher than other European countries with the same modernity (Casanova, 2007: 33).

That is, even though the state has a secular structure, the society may be even more religious. At this point, the fact that a state governed by a secular order will create a secular society like itself cannot be considered with certainty. On the other hand, the increase in the visibility of religious groups or the rise of religious discourses in the public sphere in a secular state does not mean that the secular system will deteriorate. Post-secularism debates clarify these phenomena.

1.2.1 Beyond the secularism vs religion dichotomy: post-secularism discussion

The thesis of secularization has exposed a lot of criticism since the 1970s. For instance, Jose Casanova argued that it would be wrong to assume that the privatization of religion is inevitable with modernization even if it is the fact that certain institutional

areas show functional differentiation in modern societies (1994: 28). Because religion still has significant global vitality, like Jürgen Habermas (2008), many theorists tend to reconsider religious communities and their actions in terms of political significance in a post-secular world. Jose Casanova argues that “the world may be becoming “post-secular,” characterized by the re-emergence of religion as a public issue in some societies” (2013: 1).

Discussions of post-secularism suggest that the classical theory of secularization needs to be revised and the phenomena of religion and secularization need to be reconsidered in terms of a new set of relations between the private and public spheres (Casanova, 2007: 4). While the discussions on post-secularism point to the existence and capacity of religious voices in the public sphere, it also draws attention to the increasing role and importance of religion in the politics followed by Western nation-states both within their borders and in the international arena (Habermas, 2008: 11). “The term “post-secular” firstly emerged to describe the Western societies where pluralism has been a vital concern for liberal democracy” (Konuralp, 2016: 1) because adoption of a universal understanding of secularization by the secular state coexisting with religiously diverse societies is contrary to secular liberal democracy. Besides, this situation is a concern not only in the Western world but also in non-Western societies. As stated by Sevgi Adak, “the debate on post-secularism, ... soon led to a broader reconsideration of the role of religion in various domains of domestic and international politics” beyond the Western context although it was originally a Western concern on settling discussion on citizenship, multiculturalism and minority rights (2020: 7).The

JDP, which has ruled the secular Turkish state in a Muslim-majority society since it came to power in 2002, contribute a vibrant example for the post-secularism analysis in a non-Western context.

Beforehand, the existence of religion in the public sphere was frequently discussed by sociologists and American social philosophy, and discussions on post-secularism began under the guidance of Jürgen Habermas. He emphasized that religion could never be absent from the public sphere and that the supporters of the Enlightenment had to face this reality (1994:17). In this way, social sciences have had to act to reposition religion and make room for it in modern nation-states. He characterized post-secular society with a paradox: “the continued existence of religious communities in an increasingly secularized environment” (Habermas 2009:63). The influence of religion is not actually weakened by secularization, and the secularization process is not interrupted by the increasing importance of religion. These two implications are a summary and fundamental outcome of a post-secular society. Yet, this does not mean ignoring the tension between religion and secularism. It can be concluded that post-secularism was formed as a result of the re-emergence of the influence of religion in both public and private spheres. Religion removes its dependence on secular, and they see each other as equal competitors, without accepting superiority over each other.

Even “the disenchantment of the world” (cf. Weber), the change in the functionality of religion and the state (cf. Durkheim), and the increasing industrialization (cf. Marx) have not been enough to eliminate the influence of religion. Current condition of religious revivalism indicates this point. To describe religious revivalism, Habermas

mentions the growing influence of major religions, the resurgence of fundamentalism, and the rise of religious violence (2009: 75). Yet, he also adds this re-gained power of religion does not abolish secularization completely. In addition, it does not cause "counter-secularization" or "desecularization." According to Habermas (1994: 38), there has been as much change in social and political conditions as the consciousness that expresses the post-secular society and forms its characteristic structure. According to him, the change in the consciousness of post-secular societies is the result of three different and important socio-political developments. The first of these developments is the perception that religion will never disappear. Its influence will not decrease with modernization, which has changed as a result of the conflicts arising due to religious reasons and the spread of these disagreements to the world through all media and communication tools (1994: 39). The second is that the influence of religion on the emergence of public and private moral understandings is getting stronger (1994: 42). The last one is the phenomenon of public religion, which is increasingly emphasized by immigrants who still traditionally live their values, especially within secular societies in Europe (1994: 42).

1.2.2 De-secularization or De-privatization?

According to classical secularization theories, "secularization" indicates the periods of reduction of the place of religion in society (Berger, 1999: 6). "De-secularization" indicates the periods when the power of the supernatural sphere's influence on the public and individual levels increases (Berger, 1999: 6). Both secularization and de-secularization theories are universalizing theories that predict a universal trajectory for

all societies, modernizing or not, in the form of secularizing or de-secularizing. However, these universalizing theories will not explain the underlying factors of the secularization or de-secularization processes in different societies that have different bonds with the supernatural (Ertit, 2019: 3). At this point, the unique conditions of societies should be taken into account. The fact that societies that are similar in the degree of modernization have gone through different secularization processes, and that the supernatural teachings and cultures of societies living in the same geography show diversity and discrepancy support this idea (Asad, 2003: 138). Furthermore, secularization and de-secularization processes are not linear, static, and progressive processes (Ertit, 2019: 5). This means that societies may experience the secularization process at certain times, while at another time they may experience the de-secularization process (Ertit, 2019: 5).

Furthermore, the classical secularization thesis argues for the reduction of the significance of religious beliefs for people. However, reduced influence of supernatural or religious beliefs in matters involving daily life (such as mate choice, vacation plans and eating and drinking culture) does not mean their influence completely invalid. What social scientists like Jürgen Habermas and Jose Casanova lately base their secularization process on is to what extent people's daily lives are shaped on the axis of religious or supernatural orders, rules, prohibitions, or recommendations. Secularization is about outward expression rather than questioning one's heart or inner belief. As societies become secular, their individual members'

beliefs do not have to disappear, and they can also perform their religious rituals and practices such as going to church or mosque and praying.

Jose Casanova argues that there is a paradoxical situation between religion and secularism as the boundaries between religion and secularism are quite fluid in the modern secular world (2012: 2). He explains the concept of “*de-privatization of religion*” which questions the role attributed by secularization theory to marginalize religious beliefs and traditions and push them into the private sphere (2011:5). Casanova uses the concept “*de-privatization of religion*” to refer to the penetration of religion from the boundaries of the private sphere into the public sphere. De-privatization as an alternative concept to de-secularization, and by claiming that de-privatization of religion is an inevitable experience of the post-secular world we live in (2011: 6). He states that the following:

The de-privatization of religion did not have to be interpreted necessarily as an anti-modern, anti-secular, or antidemocratic reaction The de-privatization of religion, as I have stressed throughout my work, is a two-way street. It implies not only religious actors bringing religious norms into the secular public sphere, but also secular norms inevitably entering and affecting the religious sphere (Casanova, 2009: 21).

This literature on post-secularism with the aforementioned debates on the relation among the religion, the state, and modernity is extremely relevant to the Turkish context. The mainstream academic literature in Turkey has a secular orientation considering “the Islamist” vs “the secular” polarization in Turkey, and it interprets the increased visibility of religion in politics and the public sphere in secular Turkey as a sign of Islamization (see Gözaydın, 2009; Yanarocak; 2015; Yılmaz & Barry, 2020).

This literature misses that the dynamics and dualities that emerge in the complexity created by the secular and religious fields cannot be defined or categorized as easily as they seem. In other words, the issue of what belongs to the secular realm and what belongs to the religious realm has become even more complex and ambiguous in the post-secular world. For example, Asad's works (1993, 2003) regarding religion and secularism argue that there is not a fixed line of demarcation between the two and there are no uniform relations between them across various contexts either. The view of the JDP period in Turkey, the increases in the visibility and influence of religion in society, public sphere, and politics as a manifestation of Islamization prevents us from looking deeper into the complexity between religion and the state. In other words, seeing that the foundations and ideologies of the secular state have changed during the JDP period, and that the secular state has taken on an Islamist structure may lead to overlooking the oscillations between religion and secularism in Turkey.

This thesis argues that when studying the secularization processes of a society, it is necessary to make a historical analysis by comparing different periods which have different dynamics. In this sense, the de-secularization process that is thought to take place in Turkey does not have to go parallel with Islamization. While the post-secular era we live in reflects the experience of de-privatization of religion, it can also make room for some experiences of de-secularization. Furthermore, the process of de-secularization does not mean a process that leads us to Islamization at the same time either. Thus, when analyzing the political process in Turkey, it is necessary to consider

and reveal the differences between post-secularism and Islamization, which this thesis attempts to do.

1.2.3 Secularism, Islamization, and Post-secularism in JDP Period

The tension between already existing secularism and the threat Islamisation is one of the central issues in the republican history. For instance, Recep Şentürk and his colleagues argue that sociological studies on the relations between religion and politics in Turkey mainly show that the phenomenon of religion is shaped and formed on the axis of the main tensions in Turkey (2020: 10). In the field of religion, these tensions, expressed as Sunni against non-Sunni and in political discourse, secular against non-secular or Islamist against secular, turn into binaries that refer to the main dynamics of the secularization process. Yet, the issue produced even more lively scholarly debates on how the state and the society relate under the JDP period. Various cases periodically unearth this debate. For instance, one recent case is the conversion of Hagia Sophia the republican period museum into a mosque. Hagia Sophia as I will discuss in the last chapter. This study reveals that these tensions keep religion alive and give an opportunity to reproduce and transform itself.

In the literature on the JDP in relation to Islam and secularism discussion scholars have various stances. For instance, Cohen Yanarocak states that since the JDP came to power, it has seen the public appearance of Islam increase, and the increase in resources and visibility of the Presidency of Religious Affairs is counted as a part of this agenda (2015: 9). However, other scholars question whether and to what extent

the situation is the Islamisation of a secular state under one government. For instance, Cihan Tuğal argues that it could be possible to see the JDP period and cases seemingly hinting Islamisation (2010: 30). In an alternative way, JDP period and cases as a strategic symbolic move in addressing the secular or non-secular, or Sunni or non-Sunni parts of the Turkish society and the international public as for Cihan Tuğal (2010: 32). This thesis affiliates with the second, alternative way of interpreting the religion and the state relation. Thus, rather than interpreting the JDP period as a mere Islamization, examining the strategic movements developed with the increasing visibility of the effects of Islam in the secular system. The relationship between secularism and Islam within the framework of the period's unique tensions and debates will reveal a more in-depth analysis. Moreover, distinguishing whether these ongoing debates and tensions are manifestations of Islamization or post secularism will be valuable for an in-depth analysis.

The Islamist references of the JDP period has been interpreted in the literature differently as well. For instance, on the one hand, according to Ahmet Kuru JDP promotes a culturally-based statements of Islamism similar to the other parties as who resisted modernization and had hidden Islamist agendas (2011: 64). According to culturalists, the agenda of the JDP aims to build a fully Islamic society in the long run.

On the other hand, according to Cihan Tuğal, the JDP era is an example of the reconciliation of Islam and secularism, religion, and democracy, and of East and West, as well as the suppression of radicals against the system (2010: 22). In the turbulent period after the disintegration of the Islamist parties, JDP leaders decided to remove

this ambivalence and tried to represent the party as a secular, state-friendly organization compatible with the West and the capitalist system. Cihan Tuğal interprets this process as a “passive revolution”, taking into account the uncertain movements and ongoing contradictions that have existed in Turkish Islamism throughout history (2010: 23). According to Cihan Tuğal, in JDP-style passive revolution, it is the adoption of Islamic strategies inconsistently and the mobilization of these strategies for non-Islamic purposes (2010: 24). However, it is seen that categories such as traditional-modern, religious-secular, East-West presented by culturalist explanations do not fully reflect the depth of cultural complexity. The history of Turkey clearly shows that religion and secularism, Islam and Westernization are intertwined and represent cultural compounds. This is what enables the JDP to survive in power: the coexistence of Islamic and secular values in the JDP's actions and symbols. The fact that JDP effectively and creatively forms an alternative modernity, rather than the Islamist identity that the party masks to preserve its power (Tuğal, 2010: 42). Yet, it turns out that this emerging Islamic modernity is a tool of hegemonic politics that produces and reproduces inequalities and domination (Tuğal, 2010: 45). JDP maintaining a policy that blends and fuses “Islam, tradition, supernaturalism, charisma and informality”; as well as “rationality, tolerance, market relations, professionalism and formal economy” (Tuğal, 2010: 54). Cihan Tuğal argues that the JDP does not maintain a politics against the secular state, on the contrary, it is related and sometimes even in cooperation with the attitudes and pressures of the state towards Islamism (2010: 35). This situation shows that the JDP government keeps

religion at a symbolic level. Thus, religion had lost its influence in organizing the masses and their life radically, but it was still an important political resource.

This thesis is built on the idea of post-secularism in examining the relation between the state and the religion and sees the place of religion under the JDP period as a post-secular one in line with Tugal's argument. The characteristics of post-secularism include rejecting the antagonistic understanding of the relationship between secularism and religion and including religious voices in the public sphere (Casanova, 2003: 9). The headscarf and the Alevi initiative that came to the fore during the JDP period can be cited as examples of post-secular experiences, but it should not be overlooked how the JDP carries out these processes in terms of freedom of religion and conscience (Aslan, 2018: 7). Post-secular experiences have clearly demonstrated its existence in the Turkish context, so it would be incomplete and superficial to describe this process as the Islamization of the secular state. Making sense of the dynamics and specialties of the JDP period in the deadlock created by the relationship between secularism and religion opens different doors. JDP whose main concern in its 19-year rule was not Islam or was not to transform the secular Republic of Turkey into an Islamist state structure (Konuralp, 2016: 10). JDP did not compromise on instrumentalizing religion in order to strengthen its hegemony and act in line with its interests by taking advantage of the fruits of the post-secular period (Konuralp, 2016: 10). Since, as can be seen, the intertwined space between secularism and religion outstandingly allows this.

Particularly two major issues under the JDP rule exemplifies such cases of post-secularism. If looking at the headscarf and Alevi issues, both dates back to the JDP

period. Although the period of power held by the JDP since 2002 is accepted as a post-secular process, important tensions in Turkey remain (Aslan, 2018: 4). In this period, as before, Sunni values and norms are tried to be dominated. In this sense, it can be said that the religious voice in the public sphere is limited to the Sunni ones. According to Berna Zengin Aslan, although the headscarf and Alevi issues represent freedom of religion and conscience, the JDP's attitude towards these two issues differed (2018: 6). The headscarf was associated with the demand of political Islam and the majority of conservatives supporting the JDP. This problem was solved by the liberal rhetoric used by the JDP. As a result, the demand of the Sunni majority has found a solution in the secular political arena.

The visibility of Sunni Islam in the public sphere during the JDP rule reminds us of the ambiguity of the boundaries between religion and secularism in a different way. While the JDP government carried out the post-secular experiences while resolving the headscarf issue within the framework of individual human rights, it failed to handle the Alevi issue with the same determination and framework (Konuralp, 2016: 9). When JDP, which tried to define Alevism rather than recognize it, realized that it could not establish its hegemony over the largest minority living in Turkey, so the Alevi issue was shelved (Aslan, 2018: 6). When the issue of Alevis, which contradicted the Sunni Islamic understanding, came to the fore, the liberal rhetoric or attitude adopted by the JDP was blocked at some point (Konuralp, 2016: 7). Konuralp explain this;

The JDP seems to refrain from recognizing legitimate demands of Alevis may be in order not to draw reaction of the privileged Sunni majority which composed its electoral base. These two issues also

revealed that the JDP has no objective understanding of freedom of religion; its discourse and attitude change between the two (Konuralp, 2016: 8).

At this point, it would not be wrong to mention that in this way, pragmatic politics gave direction to post-secular experiences in the JDP period.

Understanding the relation between the PRA and JDP government will also help to clarify the debate on the decline of secularism and the rise of Islamism in Turkey. At this point, it will be investigated to what extent the messages, titles, and content seen in the PRA's sermons provide information about the impact of the JDP not only on the PRA but also on the secular state. When the relationship of the JDP government with the PRA is examined, a complex relationship can be found, different from the conclusion mentioned in the literature, i.e., the ideology of Islamization. Thus, the next chapter examines how academic literature presents the relationship between the PRA and JDP before discussing Friday sermons in the last chapter.

CHAPTER 3

THE PLACE OF PRA IN THE FRAMEWORK OF SECULARISM AND POST-SECULARISM IN THE JDP PERIOD

The secular system in Turkey was established with the reforms and regulations carried out in the early Republican period. In this period, the main goal of establishing the central and secular institutional structure of the Turkish nation-state was to transform the institutional structure inherited from the Ottoman Empire (Öztürk, 2016: 9). One of these transformations was the abolition of the Ministry of Sharia and Evkaf and the establishment of the Presidency of Religious Affairs as an institution that will continue its religious duties by the Sunni majority under the Prime Ministry. The PRA begins to work by centralizing and homogenizing religious services and providing religious services in a modern/secular framework, through imams, and in harmony with the centralization policy of the state while carrying out all these (Aslan, 2012: 4). In this period, it is seen that religious views and practices that are outside the interpretation of Sunni Islam are tried to be weakened (Aslan, 2012: 5). In addition, to providing religious services, the PRA has a role in realizing this in the religious field by taking social enlightenment as a mission (Turner & Aslan, 2013: 5). In this context, PRA has emerged as an institution that has been shaped by adhering to the understanding of secular structures in the secular state system, where fields such as education, law, science, and religion are separated from each other, and their boundaries are drawn. Therefore, PRA became an indispensable institution in the administration of religion

rather than an exception for this newly established secular state (Turner & Aslan, 2013: 6).

PRA has been the most important intermediary institution used by the secular state to regulate and administer religion in Turkey since the day it was founded. PRA defined the "correct Islam" that it created by taking Sunni Islam as a reference and became an effective and comprehensive institution thanks to its strong institutional structure (Gözaydın, 2009; 49). The fact that the PRA is an intermediary for the secular state in the administration of religion facilitated and made possible the processes of centralizing, bureaucratizing, and integrating Sunni Islam with national identity (Turner & Aslan, 2013). Thus, this perspective emphasizes that secularism is not simply a clear-cut separation of religion and state, but rather a political doctrine based on the religious rule of the state. What these critics overlook is that secularism involves more than a political doctrine aimed at separating religion and state. It also comprises "religion-making" a process which the state polices the boundary between the religious and the secular by defining and regulating religion, deciding what counts as an acceptable form of religiosity, and privileging ways of being religious while marginalizing others (Asad, 2003: 12).

Turkey's great majority of the population comprises Sunni-Muslims. Moreover, the elites of the early Republican period which established the Presidency of Religious Affairs, were also Sunni-Muslims (Ulutaş, 2010; 389). According to them, Sunni-Islam is "high culture" as in Ernest Gellner's terms which means that it neglected folk Islam like Alevism and Sufism and prefer to reinforce the "high culture" via PRA

(Ulutaş, 2010; 389). Ufuk Ulutaş suggests that “this was primarily since, characterized by uniformity, simplicity, and scripturalism, 'high Islam' was easier for the state to control than folk Islam, which was not canonized, and had many different interpretations” (2010: 391). Therefore, both the early Republican government and also subsequent governments promoted Sunni Islam and took a stance opposite to folk Islam, especially Alevism. This situation is crucial to consider in terms of the audience targeted by the PRA and the political tensions it addresses in its Friday sermons. On the other hand, it also implies monopolization of religious field to legitimize hegemony of government and to control “others” of Turkey throughout the Turkey’s history.

Some scholars have emphasized that the PRA has not been a secular institution since it has adopted one versions of Islam since its establishment and excludes certain minorities such as the Alevis or Shiites while providing its services (Akalin, 2016: 6). In Adip Samuri and Peter Hopkins’ study, for instance, in the part of safeguarding integrity of Islam, by examining one hundred four sermons, it concludes that religious authorities use these sermons to label other religious communities or version as an enemy (2015: 35). By doing so, they present themselves as a defender or protector of the Islam from its enemies (Samuri & Hopkins, 2015: 36). In the light of these debates, contrary to what is implied in the general literature, it can be inferred that what Turkey has faced in recent years is not a direct struggle between secularism and Islamism, but the struggle of one version of religion with another.

As it is seen, the PRA plays a crucial role in shaping the field of religion and secularism in Turkey. It occupies a unique position in reorganizing and governing the realm of

religion. PRA has been one of the indispensable institutions of the secular nation-state in Turkey. In the sense that it continues to shape and manage the religious sphere under national unity and solidarity (Turner & Zengin Arslan, 2013: 12). Yet, the state's intervention and administration in the field of religion is not unique to Turkish secularism (Turner, 2013: 23). On the contrary, this situation can be considered as one of the basic and founding features of secularism (Asad, 2003: 12).

Others in the literature, such as Nilüfer Göle discusses secularism in the context of Turkey, secularism is not the most ideal and perfect model (2012: 2). She states that secularism is lacking in developing a comparative perspective by considering different ethnicities, historical events, cultural values and habits, and political structures. Nilüfer Göle points out that secularism has lost its power and hegemony over religion; thus, the separation of the secular realm and the religious realm is disrupted. (2012: 4) While this situation sometimes causes competition and conflicts between religion and secularism, it sometimes paves the way for new mergers. On the other hand, the boundaries between the secular and the religious are increasingly eroding. According to Zengin Arslan, the relationship between religion and secularism represents a paradigm that has been influencing each other since the beginning, whose borders have been eroded and intertwined (2018: 3). PRA is a prime example of this in Turkey context. This chapter attempts to incorporate discussions on the PRA and its place in Turkish secularism, or post-secularism in line with the debates such as the autonomy of the PRA from the state and the government.

2.1 Autonomy of PRA

The PRA's legally defined purpose is conducting the works related to the religious beliefs, worship, and moral principles of Islam, enlightening the society about Islam and managing the places of worship (Tas, 2005: 2). In understanding the place of the PRA in Turkey, the literature is conflicted. According to Iştar Gözaydın, Turkey's newly established secular state structure historically led to the formation of the PRA as a state apparatus representing the Kemalist doctrine and keeping religion under strict management and control (2009: 27). According to Niyazi Akyüz and his colleagues, it would be appropriate to consider the PRA as a secular and modern institution which is constructed in line with the social, cultural, political, and regional realities of the Turkish society (Akyüz, Gürsoy & Çapçioğlu, 2006: 16). It is also stated that the PRA's primary purpose was to be the protector of the secular state against any threat from religion (Öztürk, 2016: 3).

In this section, I will include discussions on the autonomy of the PRA. While some scholars see the PRA as an autonomous and independent institution, others interpret it as an apparatus dependent on the state or government. Those who argue that the PRA has no autonomy imply that, especially during the JDP period, the PRA turned into an institutional structure that contradicts secularism and strengthens Islamization.

The debates on the PRA's position in the state have been come to the fore in terms of the legitimacy of its existence, as well as its independent status. There are voices within PRA that attempt to downplay or deny political influence on the institution (Gözaydın 2009: 180). Mustafa Çağrıcı, the mufti of Istanbul, categorically claimed that the PRA

has never been used by politics and no politicians have ever dictated tasks to PRA. From his point of view, the PRA has ever attempted to determine political decisions. This view is supported by İzzet Er, who explains that the government is not in a position to formulate religious opinions, and cannot tell the PRA to give a certain sermon (Radikal, 2008). Even if they did, the Higher Council of Religious Affairs (the organ of PRA taking decisions on religious issues) would never accept it. They take their decisions according to the sources of Islam. The only way the government intervenes in PRA's affairs is through appointments. As they have the authority of taking the final decision, this is their normal right", he adds. İzzet Er also states that the governments sometimes have some preferences for people to be appointed in certain offices and they express their views in an acceptable manner (Radikal, 2008).

Necdet Subaşı also argues that the successive Turkish governments have always respected the presidents of PRA and left them relative freedom to manage their own affairs (2005: 120). The limited role of religion in state matters was made clear implicitly, but policy makers refrained from direct interference in PRA. Of course, this relative internal autonomy required that the state trusted the competence as well as the loyalty of PRA's presidents.

On the other hand, others see PRA as a dependent institution (see Gözaydın, 2008, Öztürk, 2016, Adak, 2020). At this point, a distinction is made whether PRA is instrumentalized for the state or for the government. The instrumentalization of PRA differs according to temporal and contextual factors.

According to some studies, the PRA has existed as a powerful ideological state apparatus since its establishment (Yılmaz & Barry, 2020; Okumuş, 2005). Ejder Okumuş argues that the PRA's official position and duty is to function primarily as a representative of the state in the religious field, or as an ideological apparatus of the state (2005: 48). Thus, the PRA can be instrumentalized by political authorities and the state. Also, according to Ihsan Yılmaz and James Barry, the PRA is an "ideological apparatus of the state that assists in manufacturing the consent of the people" for "promoting a state version of Turkish nationalist Islam" (2020:12). Moreover, the other function of the PRA is preserving the secularity of religion, in other words, supports it in line with national interests in the Turkish reading (Yılmaz & Barry, 2020: 34). Islamic religious activities that were not controlled by the state were considered as a crime and also considered as a threat to the Kemalist order (Yılmaz and Barry, 2020: 36). As a result, the fact that the Kemalist state controls religious activities from an institutional and constitutional aspect means that the state itself does not fall into separation with religion.

Since 2002, the PRA's number of central offices and departments have been increased as much as its share in the overall government budget to 45 percent (Adak, 2020: 87). These changes in the structure of PRA are seen as the JDP's project to establish a broader hegemony over Turkey (Öztürk, 2016: 622). At this point, the extensive development of the PRA and its ever-increasing sphere of influence during the JDP period led to questioning whether it still continues functioning as a state instrument or whether it has turned into a government instrument. Ahmet E. Öztürk mentions that

PRA which was the guardian of the state's secularism ideology in the early Republican period, has become an instrument of the Islamization ideology of the government during the JDP period (2016: 614). Moreover, İřtar Gözaydın mentions the government instrumentalizes the PRA to spread Islamist ideology and uses it for its own interests (2008: 58). Yet, the fact that how does the instrumentalization of PRA serve the government ideologies is complex issue. Examining JDP period will shed light on how and for what purposes government instrumentalizes PRA.

2.1.2 PRA under JDP Government

In the literature, the PRA and the JDP relations have been discussed in various ways. On the one hand, Ceren Lord states that the historical development of the PRA should be considered in relation to the conditions in different periods, yet the autonomy it has due to its undisputed authority in the field of religion should not be overlooked (2020: 6). The PRA can be considered not only as a tool used by political powers but also as a unique institution that adapts to the conditions it is in to implement its historical agenda, different from other state apparatuses (Lord, 2020: 10). Thus, the main argument is that the PRA's desire to expand and the wide area of influence it has gained in the 'new Turkey' should not be considered as a 'new' phenomenon only belonging to the JDP period (Lord, 2020: 11). Instead, it should be understood in a historical continuity (Lord, 2020: 11).

On the other hand, according to Rıdvan Akın, the policies of the JDP after 2007 are an indication that the party has become a state rather than a regular political party's

practices (2020: 125). The position of the PRA has an important place in terms of legitimizing the JDP government and consolidating its political power. The PRA gained power and became the most popular institution responsible for the religious policies of the political power while most of the state institutions lost power and regressed in this period, as stated by Rıdvan Akın (2020: 127). This situation, as seen, is contradictory to the laws of the secular state as well.

Similarly, according to Ahmet E. Öztürk, the development of the PRA, during the JDP period, made the government ideology part of their both domestic and international practices by adding this to its current responsibilities (2016: 618). Öztürk sates the following:

This period marks the transformation of the PRA from a functional ideological state apparatus to a very pliable and imposer one, which regulates and steers Turkey's society according to the political decision-makers' ideology and daily political strategies (Öztürk, 2016: 621).

Moreover, Ceren Lord implies that besides being a state apparatus, the PRA is also an important instrument in maintaining the existence of a Sunni religious segment and it acts together with the government, as it holds the opportunities arising from the common cause under Islamization (2018: 16).

2.2 Alternative Way to Position PRA in the Autonomy Discussion

The literature discussed above mainly implies or supports the Islamization process of Turkey based on the instrumentalization of PRA in line with government ideology and its reflection on the subject and content of the Friday sermons. Revealing to what

extent the JDPs discourse of Islamization feed into the structure of the state and society in practice is important.

Ayhan Kaya interpreted the Islamization of society and politics by examining the discourses, strategies, and policies of the JDP (2014: 44). Strategies point to the social and political alliances formed to increase the rate of votes given to JDP during the election processes. Examples of these alliances are the strategic and pragmatic ones established with the “European Union, Turkey's liberal democrats and the Gülen movement” (Kaya, 2014: 44). The discourses, on the other hand, indicate the ideologies and paradigms they follow to gain sympathy from the masses both inside and outside Turkey. Ayhan Kaya explains the relations of JDP’s ideology with Islam and JDP’s policies as follows;

To this end, the neo-conservatism, neoliberalism, Islamism, victimization, and anti-laicism of the JDP will be brought into focus in a way that complements the JDP's related attempts at lifting the headscarf ban, liberating the clergy schools (Imam Hatip), changing the elementary and secondary school structure, and revising the national curriculum in the educational sector (Ayhan Kaya, 2014: 48).

However, whether Turkey moves away from secularism to a more religious or Islamist direction remains a question mark. Rather, examining relations between PRA and JDP through political pragmatism will bring a new perspective to current literature. In the light of Ahmet Kaya's work, it would not be wrong to say that on the one hand, the JDP's strategies by establishing collaborations and partnerships with other groups to consolidate its electoral power. On the other hand, the discourses it generated to win the hearts of the masses at home and abroad represent an interest-oriented policy rather than an ideology of Islamization. According to Nicholas

Danforth, “a review of the pragmatic concerns that shaped Turkey’s international relations during key periods in its history will provide the background for the claim that pragmatic concerns have influenced the JDP much more than any Islamist ideology” (2008: 85). Also, if it is looked at how pragmatic concerns are reflected in domestic relations; Lorenzo Gonjito and Roberson Barbosa notice that “the JDP’s effort to relate the seemingly conflictual perspectives of modernity and religion is a pragmatic attitude that seeks to gain approval from both Islamists and secularists” (2020: 80). Thus, it can be mentioned that the religious political discourses contained in the sermons and interpreted as the essence of Islamization intrinsically stem from secular concerns. Also, the JDP’s Islamization ideology or political pragmatism to maintain and centralize its power may be seen in the sermons as well.

2.2.1 JDP Government’s engagement with PRA: Islamization or Political Pragmatism

The significant political visibility of the Presidency of Religious Affairs stems from the changes in the structure of the institution which has experienced during the JDP period. Analyses that explain the political effects caused by the change vary (Lord, 2018; Adak, 2020; Yılmaz & Barry, 2020; Öztürk & Sözeri 2018). Some studies emphasize that with the transition to multi-party politics in 1946, the PRA began to gradually grow, but it reached its golden age during the JDP period (Lord, 2018: 17). It is the only legitimate institution that provides religious guidance that adopts the version of Sunni Islam, is responsible for all mosques and the appointment of personnel, manages Quran courses and prepares the contents of Friday sermons (Adak,

2020: 22). Its institutional history also shows that the constant deepening of the PRA's position within the state is crucial to ignore.

The Presidency of Religious Affairs, is constituted by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1924, to take the religion under control and support officially approved opinions about religiosity, citizenship, and 'the others' of the Turkish Sunni Muslim national identity (Gözaydın, 2009: 63). According to Iştar Gözaydın to identify, represent and organize public forms of Islam, the PRA have been used as an ideological apparatus of the Kemalist state (2009: 65). Moreover, the other function of the PRA is preserving the secularity of religion, in other words, supporting a version in line with Turkish national interests (Yılmaz and Barry, 2020: 34). Islamic religious activities that were not controlled by the state were considered as a crime and also considered as a threat to the Kemalist order (Yılmaz and Barry, 2020: 36). As a result, the fact that the Kemalist state controls religious activities from an institutional and constitutional aspect means that the state itself does not fall into separation with religion.

Under the JDP government, there has been a tight increase and strengthening of the PRA's budget, personnel, and employment conditions (Mutluer, 2018: 2). Especially the increases in the budget allocated to the institution caused many controversies. Until the increase experienced before 2010, this situation was evaluated by some segments as a compensation for the budget cut after the 28 February military intervention (Mutluer, 2018: 3). The priority is given to strengthening financially and to increasing the cadre numbers: if looked at the change from 2002 to 2010, there is a five-fold increase in the institution's budget, and the number of staff was increased from 74

thousand to 117 thousand by an arrangement made in 2010. This arrangement became official in 2010, and, the Council of Ministers had the right to increase the capital of the 'Religious Publications Revolving Fund Enterprise' (*Dini Yayınlar Döner Sermaye İşletmesi*), which was created by this arrangement. The significant budget increase in 2010 and the promotion of the institution's position in the public administrative machinery hierarchy from 'general directorate' to 'undersecretariat' drew attention (Mutluer, 2014: 5). As a result of all these improvements, activities outside the mosque maintained by PRA and international services have expanded (Öztürk & Sözeri 2018: 82). In 2013, PRA founded Diyanet TV and Radio, and they started broadcasting. Thus, they put into use another source that they can address to the public. Nil Mutluer indicates that “PRA spiritual and ethical guidance activities started to encompass not only religious matters, but a wide range of other issues as well, and they expanded from health institutions to prisons, from youth detention centres to seniors’ residences” (2018: 4). Family, on the other hand, one of the main focus of these activities.

In this chapter, I examine to what extent these institutional arrangements and improvements made under the JDP government are related to the JDP's Islamization ideology. Alternatively, I intend to illuminate the intertwining relationship of the services and activities of the PRA with the pragmatic political interests of the government, rather than the idea that it represents the ideology of the government. Shedding light on to what extent and in what direction the changes taking place within the institution, will also allow us to understand the specific place of the institution in terms of Secularism vs. Islamization discussions.

2.2.1.1 PRA in Daily Life

The PRA has a comprehensive and effective bureaucratic structure within and outside the borders of Turkey. While the secular state defines Islam with private sphere, PRA has conducted activities that incorporate Islam into the functioning of daily life and the public and political sphere with the expansion of the bureaucratic structure (Zengin Arslan, 2015: 6). PRA develops these activities, with reference to the Islam which the institution itself represents and shapes (Zengin Arslan, 2015: 6).

The current position of the PRA can be interpreted as an effort to make religion a part of all segments of life, contrary to the principle that the religion should not go beyond an individual. This principle is the privatization of religion adopted by the classical secular understanding (Casanova, 1994: 4). Western secularism emerges out of the division between the state and the religion as stated in the literature: “The key proposition of secularism lies in the separation of the powerhouses of the mundane (politics/state) and the spiritual/otherworldly (religion/church) and in entrusting all worldly matters to the mundane one” (Öztürk, 2019:81). When this division is accepted, it can be assumed that Turkey has taken a more Islamist course. Yet, I interpret this situation as a sign of post secularism. According to Habermas, the process foreseen by the post-secularism discussion, “de-privatization of religion,” makes the boundaries of meaning between the mundane world and spiritual one even more incomprehensible (2008: 36). The process of “de-privatization of religion” blurs the boundaries of today's secular world even in the west (Casanova, 2012: 4). Accordingly, the earthly and otherworldly world, which began to form common points and move

together, sometimes has led to compromises, sometimes conflicts. Thus, it becomes complicated to determine the position of the PRA in the post-secular world where religion and politics are intertwined, and borders are eroded. Examining the reflections of the post-secular world in the context of Turkey in the JDP period, will clarify debates on whether Turkey moving away from secularism to a more religious or Islamist direction. Especially in the post-1980 period, the fact that the privatization of religion gradually reversed and took the form of “de-privatization” (Casanova, 1994: 126). Thus, the increasing visibility of religion in the public sphere may help to evaluate the evolution of the PRA during the JDP period.

According to Berna Zengin Arslan, during the JDP period, the PRA is not limited to religious services in the mosques, but tends to guide the individual's marriage, family and kinship relations (2015: 9). Issues such as the relationship between married persons, relationships with their children, the attitude they should show while raising a child and coping with depression have become the topics that the PRA frequently addresses. Thus, the PRA has started to directly deal with non-religious issues in its spheres of influence and activity and focuses on issues related to micro daily and private life practices. PRA aims to extend the mission of teaching religion and providing religious services in the mosque. By extending outside the mosque, it has aimed to put Islam based on the ways of organizing the lives of individuals (Arslan, 2015: 12). To reach its target audience, it has started to use methods that contain women and children more. In these methods, it has made use of modern education, medicine and psychology fields, and blended them with an Islamic perspective, so it

tries to reach its target audience in this way (Arslan, 2015: 16). Thus, the PRA has set a much more active and new mission to spread and endear Islam to large part of the society through its power of the financial budget, institutional structure and bureaucratic form of organization.

It is seen that the PRA aims to enlighten all segments of the society, especially women, about religious worship and to teach and spread the “true Islam” by organizing through the Family and Religious Bureaus (Arslan, 2015: 19). Even though PRA interacts with children and women outside of the mosque through education called Quran courses, it puts more effort into producing projects and using communication technologies to reach wider and targeted audiences (Yılmaz, 2014: 65). The program “*Camiyi seviyorum*” [“I love the mosque”] broadcasting by Diyanet TV and “*Camiler çocuk açacak*” [“mosques will blossom children”] campaign, can be cited as examples of projects aimed at supporting the spiritual development of children and encouraging them to go to the mosque (Yılmaz, 2014: 66).

According to Eric Edelman and his colloquies (2015: 23), when it comes to 2008, especially in the small towns of Anatolia, the closing of shops during Friday prayers, displaying an attitude against alcohol, encouraging fasting during the Ramadan period are reflections of spreading Islamization in a subtle way. Over time, the pressure on Islamic rhetoric and behavior also disappeared. They stated that since 2011, there has been an overt Islamization in Turkey and one of them is the reformation of the education field with Islamic themes. Also, they interpreted that the rise of the PRA in Turkish politics and society is proof of this Islamization process (Edelman et al., 2007:

26). Whether the religious attitudes observed in the small towns of Anatolia are unique to the JDP government is open to debate. The reason is that interpreting this as a sign of Islamization may mean overlooking the fact that religious people, institutions and groups, who were excluded under the influence of assertive secularism (Kuru, 2011: 89). Since the early Republican period, these segments gradually integrated into modernization and the visibility of them increased during JDP period.

Martin van Bruinessen mentions that the JDP was largely perceived as conservative Muslim parts of the society's emancipation movement that had been marginalized under Kemalist order (2018: 14). Imam Hatip schools are also one of the factors that help this process. "It appears that the old secularist elite have been largely replaced now by the counter-elite of Erdoğan and his circle with an assortment of pragmatic allies" (Bruinessen, 2018: 16). However, the change of governments did not significantly affect Turkey's understanding of secularism (Bruinessen, 2018: 18). On the other hand, the deterrent attitude of the JDP government towards alcohol consumption or its supportive attitude towards the headscarf issue is indisputable. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that the state has entered a period of serious structural change. "Religious thinkers, ulama and Sufi shaykhs have not been empowered, the Shariah is not accepted as a source of legislation, religious thought has no significant influence in the political process, the state retains its monopoly on religious education and outreach, and religious congregations are tightly controlled" (Bruinessen, 2018: 17). The PRA's budget and justification continue to grow, and its staff are reported to be close to the government in terms of social and religious background and conviction

(Karakas, 2021: 32). Although the greater increase in its involvement in the public and political sphere draws attention frequently, this situation has not given PRA a major influence in reforming policy and reconceptualizing relationship between Islam and state (Bruinessen, 2018: 18).

In this context, I intend to describe a political period where the relationship between PRA and JDP was processed into pragmatic patterns by attributing the greater penetration of religion and PRA into the public and political sphere to the dynamics of the post-secular era. In other words, I oppose to the idea that the state and society have become Islamized due to the Islamization ideology of JDP. Instead, I explain the steps taken and policies adopted by JDP to realize various political interests although they appear as manifestations of Islamization. In this sense, the relationship between the PRA and JDP will not exhibit an example of Islamization that took place in Turkey. Rather, it will demonstrate a government that takes advantage of the increasing power of religion in the post secular era for its own pragmatic political interests.

2.2.1.2 Family and Religious Guidance Bureau

During the JDP period, the definition of PRA has been reorganized in such a way as to expand the jurisdiction of its role in the state and society, as well as its fields of activity (Arslan, 2015: 6). Firstly, the number of female employees has increased significantly during this period (Tütüncü, 2010: 3). Projects targeting women began to emerge with the help of female employees. One of these projects is the establishment of the Family and Religious Guidance Bureau. Along with this project, it is aimed to

provide religious counseling and guidance to families who are experiencing problems, and to help them with issues such as starting a family, maintaining a healthy family and providing spiritual support to families who are experiencing problem. The main purpose of this project is to provide guidance and educational services to focus on family problems and solve these situations through women, rather than providing a religious service (Arslan, 2015: 35). These offices' operations reach 81 provinces and more than 100 countries nationwide. In addition, the offices continue helping these problems with face-to-face counseling interviews, as well as giving greater priority to programs and seminars for women (Karakas, 2021; 63).

Family and religious guidance offices are expressed as institutions that operate throughout Turkey and have a mission to explain the definition of family in religious ways by using moral knowledge under the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Karakas, 2021; 47). It aims to help families and individuals in solving threatening elements or problems and to bring spiritual support of religion together with segments of society engaged in social service (Karakas, 2021; 47). In short, the purpose of these offices is to provide Islamic-led solutions and methods of overcoming problems that women and children can experience in the family. In other words, they teach religion and their own truth by showing real-life examples and the problems that can arise from it.

According to Sevgi Adak, the PRA has a crucial role to regulate and consolidate family (2020: 81). The expansion of the PRA role towards forming the family and gender relations through religious services was the result of the critical changes that took place

within the JDP administration. Sevgi Adak interprets this change, the central role of the PRA, which has improved with its orientation towards family politics, contains dimensions specific to the JDP period, and it extends its capacity and public visibility as a result of assuming this role (2020: 75). The PRA's new attitudes and services on family and gender relations demonstrate to what extent the institutionally organized religious sphere participates and intervenes in the private sphere. This intervention in the private sphere is interpreted as a reflection of the de-secularization. Sevgi Adak (2020) and Chiara Maritato (2015) associate this type of de-secularization with the deepening efficiency of religious services and discourses in public policy, and the expansion of religious activities that address family and gender issues. Thus, Sevgi Adak argues that "these significant shifts, cannot be understood with reference to conventional analyses of Turkish secularism, but rather can be interpreted as manifestations of a process of de-secularization from above" (2020: 87).

The conceptual framework exists to describe this broad expansion of the institution in the literature focuses on Islamization and religionization. Sevgi Adak interprets the tendency of the PRA to grow and spread as an important transformation within the structure of institution (2020: 79). Besides, it is stated that this transformation could have serious and lasting effects in terms of the reforming of the state in time.

The opening of Family Bureaus by PRA has led discussions, which has been ongoing for many years and about the "institutional role of PRA" and "the role of Islam in governance", to larger impasse. Since its establishment in 1924, the PRA's authority has been limited to tasks such as building mosques, appointing Imams and preachers,

and publishing religious texts, defined only as “religious affairs”. Until, in 2003, the JDP started using PRA under the name “strengthening the family” (Kocamaner, 2019: 512). As a result, the fact that the PRA and religious authority extending their jurisdiction, through the PRA's Family Bureaus, came out of the scope of the “religious affairs” and headed towards the private lives of citizens is seen by secular groups as a bad sign. During this period, news, media, and academic literature were mostly about triggering secularist anxieties. For instance, according to the claim in an article entitled “An Imam May Barge in”, an imam would be appointed for each family and that they would go to people's homes without being invited and give unsolicited advice about problems at home (Karaca, 2011: 8). Although the service areas of family bureaus are limited only to those who call phone lines and visit their offices, such news is evidence of the concern raised by the fact that the jurisdiction of Islam is moving away from "religious issues" and turning to people's private lives. On the other hand, it is an enigma that this process causes an increase in religiosity at the social level or increases in parallel with religiosity.

“When it comes to JDP politicians’ religious discourses on gender and sexuality, as well as the government's attempt to regulate the family with the assistance of PRA, the international media and secularist circles in Turkey tend to explain away these trends as symptoms of a growing Islamization” (Kocamaner, 2019: 496). However, these explanations are hardly satisfactory (Kocamaner, 2019: 450). According to Hikmet Kocamaner, in many modern world societies, where the secular regime exists, it is acceptable that family politics is affected by religious discourses and rationales, also

by groups that come together with religious motivation (2019: 456). Even in countries like the United States, France and Russia, which are examples of the paradigm of secularism, religious leaders work together with their conservative politicians on policies that regulate intimacy (Cady and Fessenden, 2013: 256). Often, moral panic based on "family crisis" or "degradation of family values" sheds light on how religious norms and religiously motivated groups infiltrate politics. Moreover, the issue of regulating gender and sexuality is closely related to this concern. In addition, policies cover issues such as "marriage, assisted reproductive technologies, abortion, and LGBT parenting" to govern them (Cady & Fessenden 2013: 264). At some point, secular states support religiously motivated assessment about marriage, sexuality, and parenting through laws and policies (Kocamaner, 2019: 458). Thus, the fact that religion has a serious impact on family politics is the reason that ignites the fuse of public disagreements over the so-called separation of religion and politics.

Religious counseling and guidance, the first examples of which we saw emerging in Christian Western cultures, still continues its institutional activities in secular countries such as USA (Söylev, 2017: 52). One of these, and the most common, is the American Association of Pastoral Counselors AAPC. In Turkey, the establishment of these offices focused on providing religious / spiritual solutions to the family, social, and psychological problems of the society based on the decisions of the II. Religious Council in 1998. The offices, which were officially established in 2002, started small-scale applications in the provincial organizations since 2003. As of 2014, they continued to serve in 81 provinces and 253 district mufti offices (Söylev, 2017: 54). It

would not be wrong to state that these offices, which are aimed to be established with the decisions taken before the JDP rule, are not completely unique to the JDP period. On the other hand, the existence of similar practices carried out by institutions even in the most secular countries since the past will lead questioning the de-secularization thesis regarding Turkey. The existence of Family and Religious Counseling Offices will reveal a different perspective if read through the political pragmatism rather than being seen as an extension of an Islamization ideology or as a de-secularization effort.

Family and Religious Counseling Offices continue their efforts to protect the structure of the family and to ensure that the family has the expected and desired characteristics, with a particular focus on women. Moral support for reducing divorces, not delaying marriage, and having children, and the care of elderly parents in the family are the most important issues on the agenda of these offices (Karakas, 2021: 52). Since the women are seen as the main source of the “breeding” and "reproduction" process, they are enabled to discover the sacredness of motherhood so that whole process can continue (Bozaslan, 2018: 5). Using religious references, they present that motherhood is a place that adds holiness and glory to women. At this point, the presence of the child is important for the family to fulfill its duty and the mission assigned to it. The minimum number of children promoted by the government for a family is set at three.

The reasons for keeping family issues at the forefront, which the Religious and Family Guidance offices also prioritizes by supporting the government, are due to the pragmatic concerns. One of the main reasons behind the JDP government's demand for three children is the economic concerns that the young population should be

protected and not decrease (Karakas, 2021: 60). A young and dynamic population is of great importance in terms of the existence of the population actively participating in production and ensuring the growth model based on domestic demand. With the rejuvenation of the population, the increase in the population contributing to production and the revival of the labor market will be provided. In this way, having at least three children in each family will allow for an increase in the population and an increase in demand for a production model that depends on the domestic market.

The growing elderly population in Turkey is forcing legal adjustments to the basic needs of this population and the more intensive and active work of social services (Bozaslan, 2018: 16). This means that the government should allocate serious financial resources for these services. Since lack of nursing homes with sufficient capacity and equipment, new social institutions that can meet the needs of the elderly and their care activities should be opened (Bozaslan, 2018: 19). Because of this emerging institutional problem, elderly care is encouraged to take place at home by the government. As supported by the Family and Religious Counseling Offices, it is stated that the elderly wants to continue their lives with their families and especially their children, and this will make them happier individuals.

2.2.1.3 PRA in Abroad

During the JDP period, PRA has worked more actively abroad. Since 1971, imams and representatives are appointed to foreign countries to prevent Turkish immigrants from losing their religious and national identity and to be influenced by dangerous political

ideas (Gözaydın, 2009: 157). Although, PRA cadre have introduced themselves as neutral and non-political representatives of Islam in mosques abroad, they continued to be perceived as an institution representing the view of the Turkish state in Europe by Islamic groups (Arslan, 2015: 13). On the other hand, the effort of the PRA to present itself as neutral and non-political has played a strategic role in attracting other non-Turkish Muslims to their mosques abroad.

The study on mosques in France shows that the Turkish government used PRA as a foreign policy instrument (Çıtak, 2010: 65). Considering these, it is not unexpected for the PRA to increase relations with Muslim and non-Muslim communities with the help of its institutional capacity as a religious state instrument (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018: 625). The Quran was translated in 28 different languages and religious books were published and distributed abroad. Official Muslim representations in the Balkan Peninsula, Europe and Africa receive support with the financial assistance of the Turkish Religious Foundation (*Türk Diyanet Vakfı*). It is seen that the number of mosque constructions abroad increased gradually during the JDP period. In addition to these, “PRA also has been organizing official meetings such as Balkan Countries Islam Council, and Latin American Countries’ Muslim” (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018: 630) In this way, the PRA played an important role in creating a new understanding of Turkish foreign policy and religious identity.

In Turkey case, the East was associated with Islam, while the West was associated with democracy. “The geographic coincidence of being in both Europe and Asia has become fused with the historical circumstance of being both Muslim and democratic

or, alternatively, both Muslim and secular” (Danforth, 2008: 84). The existence of these joint identities has led to a discussion of Turkey's domestic and foreign policy in the scholarly community both inside and outside Turkey. With the JDP coming to power and the continuous controversy about its religious origins, labelling these identities as such has particularly confused recently. Nicholas Danforth, argues that “this confusion is apparent in the widespread belief that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s political disengagement from the Middle East was a product of his nationalist ideology and domestic commitment to Westernization, as well as the belief that the JDP’s more active Middle Eastern policy has been driven by its Islamic orientation” (2008: 84).

Erdi Öztürk and Semiha Sözeri, interpreted that manifestation of both rising JDP’s Islamization agenda and enrichment of PRA have been seen in the new Turkish foreign policy (2018: 623). “During the JDP period, the enlargement of Diyanet’s sphere of influence is one of the indicators that political elites have tried to spread the identity change of the state to the society both at home and abroad” (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018: 631). The authors conclude two additional arguments. Firstly, instrumentalization of PRA has put stabilization of the Turkish secularism project in danger by encouraging a multifaceted influence for the structure of its religious state apparatus. Secondly, with the excessive transnationalization of the PRA, it began to take its place among the Turkey’s international symbols, representing the new religious state identity.

In light of traditional principles such as adherence to law, Westernization, secularism and adherence to a stable international order, the Turkish foreign policy has shown a realistic orientation (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018: 635). Hakan Yavuz stated that “foreign

relations filtered down from the secular elite's self-ascribed European identity, which in turn was the basis of framing Turkish national interest" (1997: 23). Although Islam did not have the power to change the secular and Western-oriented identity of the state in the early seventies, it could challenge it (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018: 636). Even if a paradigm shifts which towards a more religion-oriented state, began between 1983 and 1993, when Turgut Ozal was prime minister and president, this shift was clearly seen during the JDP government (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018: 626). Ethno-religious rhetoric used in both domestic politics and the foreign policy agenda was the method of JDP elites whose ideological roots in National Outlook. Also, it is interpreted that this was clear in strategies of Ahmet Davutoglu, who introduced the doctrine of pan-Islamic foreign policy (Özkan 2014: 118). Yet, it is important to realize that "the JDP has pursued strategic depth through improved relations with explicitly Islamist regimes like Iran, but also by reaching out to non-Islamic countries and Islamic countries with non-Islamist governments" (Danforth, 2008: 94). The JDP was aware that its policy was not Islamist, but instead of placing its relations with the United States and NATO in a priority order, it tried to balance Turkey's strategic relations (Danforth, 2008: 95). By doing so, it made clear that it was continuing both with "Ozal's Neo-Ottomanism" and with the "non-alignment of Atatürk".

The history of Republic of Turkey in terms of its place in the international area often has been discussed. Particularly, relations between Turkey and West have been considered as critical issue. In general, there was a perception assumed that Turkey belonged to the international arena formed by the West and the United States. Yet, this

perception is inaccurate in many ways. “While it was a fact during the Atatürk era when Turkey chose to favor non-involvement and impartiality, it was also an issue during the post-Cold War era when Turkey was in search of new alliances after the dissolution of the USSR” (Tüfekçi, 2015:126). Thus, I am arguing that the international relations carried out during the JDP period can be interpreted as the continuity of the pragmatic understanding in Turkish foreign policy from past to present.

Existed literature where explains Turkish foreign policy in terms of ideological controversy between the Eastern and Western identities of the Turkey have often failed to consider the pragmatic motives which formalize policy decision. When systematizing their politics toward Europe and the Middle East, Turkish governments were rarely influenced by the ideologies that set their politics within the country (Danforth, 2008: 97). In this context, the pursuit of a distant policy towards the Middle East during the early republican period, and the establishment of closer relations with this region during the JDP period are a pragmatic response to strategic realities.

Ahmet Davutoğlu, who had significant role in directing Turkey's foreign policy during the JDP period, emphasized in his book *Strategic Depth* that if Turkey's unique Islamic and European identities were harmonizing with each other, relations with all neighbors of Turkey would be strengthened (2001: 37). He argued that it is essential to follow an active and versatile policy to take advantage of the opportunities in all neighboring countries of Turkey's geography, which is rich in terms of its geopolitical position.

Ahmet Davutoğlu considers the disengagement from the Islamic world in foreign policy as the efforts of the Kemalists to disengagement from the Islamic and Ottoman past (Danforth, 2008: 90). “Davutoğlu criticized this disengagement not from an Islamic perspective, though, but from a pragmatic one, pointing to the opportunities that Turkey supposedly missed because of the Kemalists’ ideological fixation on Europe” (Danforth, 2008: 91). This perspective led to reveal strategic importance of the Muslim world and efforts to reengage with this geography in pursuit of political and economic interests rather than a specific ideology. In addition, in his book, Ahmet Davutoğlu emphasized the importance of the relations maintained not only with the Islamic world, but also with its Christian neighbors, such as Greece and Bulgaria, which Turkey has important historical and geographical ties (Danforth, 2008; 92).

CHAPTER 4

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF FRIDAY SERMONS REGARDING THE ISLAM VS SECULARISM DEBATE

Existing studies on the PRA examine it in relation to the state and Turkish secularism by relying on a binary relation between secularism and religion. However, my thesis challenges the binary construction of religion (Islam) and secularism from the theoretical approach of post-secularism and by focusing on the PRA and specifically its Friday sermons. I argue that post-secular experience is revealed, and politics built on not the ideology, but pragmatic considerations are visible in the PRA when Friday sermons are examined. The PRA is neither an agent of Islamization for spreading Islam to the public sphere nor an agent of secularism for regulating and controlling Islam but a post-secular instrument that utilizes religious referents for making statements on public politics in line with the JDP's current political agenda. Therefore, the sermons are also markers of post-secularism: they are secular in their concern when making religious referents.

The pragmatic use of PRA's sermons for politics is not new; in the past, there have been similar experiences to some extent. Yet today, the PRA itself and its sermons are more intertwined with political power. Further, today, the instrumentalization of the PRA is more mundane and more responsive to current issues in every field of life. It functions as a communication channel affiliated with the government by responding to every current agenda in accordance with the political concerns of the government. Also, it instantly eliminates issues that the government considers a danger and threat,

and earths them with moral statements with reference to faith. This indicates that PRA acts as a tool that immediately responds to more worldly, social, and political developments. Therefore, this chapter examines Friday sermons that are closely related to the social, political, and economic agenda of their historical moment. The content of the Friday sermons, as I argue, indicates a post-secular configuration of Islam and secularism in line with the political pragmatism of the ruling party. Particularly I focus on Friday sermons on themes, namely family, Hagia Sophia and economy.

3.1 Family

One marker of the PRA's post-secularism is its sermons on family and issues surprisingly affiliated with family (such as social media and homosexuality). The PRA's and Friday sermons' focus on the family has been assumed as a part of the spread of Islamism and, therefore, as desecularization as discussed in the literature section. However, this section shows Friday sermons' references to family is not Islamization but instrumentalization of religion for political ends yet via making religious referents.

Family is an important component of JDP's political ideology which refers to Islamic collective morality. The "strong family structure", which the JDP defines as the basis of society is accepted as unique and superior, and the protection and strengthening of the family are placed at the center of the government's social policy (see 61. Government Plan, 2011: 3). In the strong family model defined by the JDP government, the individual's behavior, and emotional world is transformed and the

parents transfer the tradition and convey social values. Moral rules, religious knowledge, and rituals are taught, and it is claimed that the new generation can realize "good" and "evil" thanks to this family structure. The woman is also presented as the most important member of this family who is held responsible for domestic service and care and fulfills their duties within this area of responsibility in the home (Bozaslan, 2018: 120). Women are defined as "...the central element of both social life and the family that builds the future, our children and youth", and the role of women in raising the new generation comes to the fore (JDP Election Declaration, 2011). These roles and duties are presented with holy messages as seen in Friday sermons.

Family is also a central theme in the PRA'S Friday sermons that openly discuss family uses Islamic referents. The family has been a critical focus on the sermons since the beginning but during the JDP government, it became much more frequently referred to and in different forms. According to the reports of Religious Services, before 2010, sermons focus on topics such as "Social", "Worship", "Faith", "Morality" and "Other" while after 2010, a new topic of "Family", "Woman" and "Health" topics was added.

In the 2019 Religious Services Reports, the following is mentioned:

The family has a special importance as it is the institution most affected by the change and transformation that society is going through. In this context, the importance of being a family and staying family is emphasized in the sermons; weakening family ties, increasing domestic violence and divorces, etc. problems are frequently pointed out. (Religious Service Report, 2019: 2)

In JDP period Friday sermons, the importance of protecting family integrity is particularly emphasized as a resolve to many social issues such as `divorce` or

`domestic violence` as shown in above quote. Family is not only presented as a resolve to social problems; it is also the target of the social problems at the JDP-period sermons' perspective. For instance, brand new social problems, such as social media use and homosexuality are presented as targeting the family.

With the JDP period's focus on family, it is seen that Friday sermons cover social media and homosexuality as an overstated theme for the family structure. Homosexuality and social media issues are generally discussed in terms of the family in Friday sermons. Homosexuality and the intense and uncontrolled use of social media, which is seen as a "threat" for the family institution by the JDP government, are frequently the subject of Friday sermons in the name of protecting the family.

Under the JDP period PRA's Friday sermons' focus on family in general and related themes (e.g., newly invented social 'problems' for a such imagined family such as media or homosexuality) could be seen as an instance of desecularization and specifically Islamification of society. Yet, as I argue such focus on family with Islamic referents is not necessarily Islamization; it is political pragmatism.

First of all, the JDP itself refers to family even when with Islamic referents in pragmatic terms. Some of the literature relates the underlying reasons for the JDP's efforts to regulate the family to maintain its voter base and provide the workforce (Bozaslan, 2018; Toksöz, 2016; Koçak, 2015). Keeping the population alive and young by preserving the family structure has an important place in terms of the labor force and labor market (Bozaslan, 2018: 104). The President of Turkey, Tayyip Erdogan, repeated the rhetoric of "at least three children" many times. Erdogan started

a discussion with “Is another understanding of family possible? We need a young and dynamic population” and continued it with “Abortion is murder” (Bianet, 2012). He defined cesarean births as conspiracies to root out the nation (Son Dakika, 2020). By saying, “I want women to donate three children to the nation,” Erdoğan displayed an understanding that defines children as a commodity and sees children as the responsibility of women only (Kerestecioğlu, 2013: 17). On the other hand, aiming to keep the rate of the 15–65-year-old working population high which is defined as a “demographic opportunity” provides to keep the competition alive in the labor market (Kerestecioğlu, 2013: 17). Thus, one of the most effective ways of perpetuating the labor force is the heterosexual family, blessed with marriage bond.

I argue that like JDP’s concern with family is not simply for Islamisation the PRA’s use of referents to family in religious terms, yet it is a deprivitization of religion, and pragmatism. In this context, I interpret from a pragmatic point of view the fact that the family structure introduced in Friday sermons and the factors that threaten it overlap with the issues that are frequently on the agenda of JDP. The main purpose of keeping the family on the agenda and Friday sermons is to ensure that the family exists within certain patterns, and to prevent it from becoming an institution that is difficult to control and to go beyond the borders. For this reason, the Turkish family structure has long been integrated into the discourse of the JDP (Erol, 2011). Wanting to synthesize the Turkish family structure with Islamic and national values, JDP models the structure of the Turkish family with the stipulated values to ensure the reproductive role of the family (in the neo-liberal market and in terms of generations

(Sosyalistfeministmanifesto, nd.). The family is taken as the “main reference point in a wide range from the legitimation of the free market economy to the abolition of social policies” (Erol, 2011). In this case, the JDP, which tries to eliminate the factors that may threaten the family structure and that are outside the social norms attributed to it, in the name of pragmatic concerns, instrumentalizes its Friday sermons.

Furthermore, it is seen that the issues of social media and homosexuality, which are claimed to disrupt the family structure, are reflected in the sermons in parallel with the agenda and perspective of the government. The following sections discuss how sermons on social media and homosexuality are not simply for disseminating Islamist ideology and its standards on family or Islamization of the society in general. Sermons’ focus on social media in the name of protecting an idealized family is a strategic act of the JDP in instrumentalization of the PRA for political pragmatism.

3.1.1 Social Media

Social media and its relation to family is a new theme in the PRA’s Friday sermons which is seen under the JDP rule. The PRA warned families about social media in its Friday sermon consistently. For instance, the sermon was titled as “Being a Family with Values in the Digital World” states that these social media platforms disrupted the family structure:

Family is not a choice; It is an innate need... In today's world, where perceptions are victorious over reality and humanity is forced into *transformations against nature*, our duty is to take a stance based on our *national and moral values* in the face of the negativities of the digital world. To be *a family with our values* without breaking away

from the realities of the age we live in and without being a prisoner of digital media (Diyanet, 20 May 2022).

Similarly, in the sermon titled “Losing privacy is deprivation”:

The use of mass media and social media without borders and ignoring privacy brings with it many personal, family, and social problems. When the privacy of the family is violated and disclosed, great evil and corruption occur in the society. We need an education of compassion and privacy that will protect our families, our children, and our youth from all these evils (Diyanet, 20 May 2016).

The sermon given on February 4, 2022, is as follows:

Truthfulness establishes trust in the family, makes love and respect permanent. It is a lie that destroys homes built with a thousand and one effort. Unfortunately, today, social media is one of the places where lies spread the most and fastest (Diyanet, 4 February 2022).

As mentioned in these sermons, social media has negative effects on the individual, family, and society, moves away from the perception of privacy, and causes transformations against human nature. At this point, family is seen as a need attributed to the nature of humanity rather than a choice. It is also important that this family has national and moral values. In addition to these, it targets social media as the place where the lie spreads fastest, that the lie destroys the family, which may appear as an Islamist reflex in protecting the family.

Overall, however, why the contents of Friday sermons on social media seem to be in perfect harmony with JDP's ideal family understanding with Islamist references as mentioned above. These sermons on social media are the JDP's seeking for societal support for its attempts to initiate, enhance, and justify the JDP policies on regulation of social media in general and even banning some social media platforms. The argument that the PRA's stress on social media is pragmatic; it is not about protecting family in Islamist cosmology but about the JDP's public politics makes the sermons

an indicator of the PRA's manifestation of post-secular condition. This post-secular condition is seen specifically in JDP's instrumentalization of PRA can be seen in receiving support from the Friday sermons on the agendas related to JDP 's social media regulations or bans. JDP try to destroy issues that is not socially accepted or considered wrong for family structure (Bozaslan, 2018: 118) Yet these attempts to regulate in the name of protecting the family is used as an excuse for trying to regulate social media platforms that is normally outside the government's control. More tightly as Erdoğan stated that this regulation is a result of the "immorality and perversion" and "broken family order" created by platforms such as Youtube, Twitter and Netflix and that these platforms should be eliminated for a healthy society (Free Turkey Journalist, 2020). Direct support for this situation came from the Friday sermon on "Technology Addiction and Social Media Ethics": internet and social media, which take their place in all of our lives, should not be a stray, unprincipled and irresponsible field (Diyanet, 17 January 2020).

3.1.2 Homosexuality

Homosexuality and its relation to family is another recent theme in the PRA's Friday sermons under the JDP rule. The PRA presents that homosexuality attacks all the sacred values of society, especially because it has become a threat to the youth and the family institution (Sabah, 2020). The PRA's sermons directly refer to homosexuality with Islamist referents such as sin however by also adding secular elements such as the spread of diseases as stated in the sermon "Ramadan: patience and willpower training" as follows:

People! Islam considers adultery as one of the greatest harams. Allah condemns Lutism, Homosexuality. What is the merit of this? Bringing diseases and refuting the generation. Hundreds of thousands of people are exposed to the HIV virus, which is caused by this great haram, whose name in Islamic literature is adultery; illegitimate and unmarried life. Let's fight together to protect people from such evil (Diyanet, 24 April 2020).

Other sermons also present homosexuality with Islamic referents yet as a social issue targeting family. For instance, Friday Sermon was published in 05. 07. 2019,

Conservation of the Generation: A Virtuous Generation, a Peaceful Future:

Allah orders us to marry and establish a family, to raise faithful and healthy generations. It is the duty of all of us as faithful servants to preserve our generation and protect our future. All kinds of thoughts and behaviors that ignore the family and disrupt the family structure actually target social ties. In order for a society to look at its future with hope, first of all, the young generations who have reached the age of marriage should be encouraged to establish a home and legitimate unions... Let's take a lesson from the tribes that were destroyed because of their ruthlessness and transgression. Let's try to live a decent life in accordance with our nature. Hz. Lot's cry is described as follows: "We also sent Lot as a prophet. He said to his people: Are you doing the ugly thing that none of the people did before you? Indeed, you leave women and approach men with lust. Verily, you are a people who have gone astray (Diyanet, 5 July 2019).

The JDP government rhetoric and the Friday sermons about homosexuality have great similarities in terms of their content. The JDP sees homosexuality as a political identity and also opposes the gay movement. JDP defines homosexuals who suppress every criticism directed at them with fierce aggression and traps the society in the duality of "either you are from us or not", is doing this in the company of hostility to Islam (Sabah, 2020). In the statement of JDP Deputy Chairman Hamza Dağ against LGBT; "we are against actions and discourses that aim to impose values that do not belong to these lands on our society and try to legitimize this" (AA, 2020). He stated that we

must stand against the threat to our culture and life with all our being and we cannot surrender our values and our future to a social moral disorder.

The JDP government talks about how the gay movement has assumed a political identity that attacks all the sacred values of society, and how it has become a threat, especially for the youth and the family institution (Sabah, 2020). Erdogan said at the congress he held at the provincial party congress, "LGBT, there is no such thing. This country is national, spiritual and is walking towards the future with these values" (Bianet, 2021).

In parallel with the publication date of the first sermon above, in April and May 2020, issues related to LGBTI+ were discussed in 32 different newspapers (Engindeniz, 2020). During this period, the promotions of the series *Aşk 101*, one of Netflix's Turkish broadcasts, also found its place in the newspaper. The news titled "Netflix is brainwashing young people", the reason is that one of the characters is gay in the series. The government and PRA constantly state that gay movement and its supporters are trying to create an action plan to "normalize homosexuality" in Turkey in connection with the Netflix series (Engindeniz, 2020).

Thus, the most recent Friday sermons on homosexuality seems to use the Islamic framework in being against it, e.g. anti-luthism, however in its rejection, it incorporates secular concerns such as social order, family, future of the youth or the spread of diseases. It is neither religious nor secular but a post-secular stance. Further, this stance of the PRA on homosexuality is chronologically in parallel with the anti-homosexual

stance that also appears to be Islamizing but merely seeing homosexuality as a politically and socially challenging ideology and organizational form.

3.2 Hagia Sophia

Hagia Sophia's 86-year-old museum status ended, and it was reopened for worship after a Friday prayer on July 24, 2020. The opening sermon of Hagia Sophia, as the official platform to explain and justify the re-conversion of Hagia Sophia from a museum to mosque, is an act of symbolism. Yet, its symbolism seems to be contested. As the conversion itself, the sermon is seen as a desecularization and a sign of Islamization of Turkey while I see it as an event indicating post-secularism of not only the PRA but also the JDP itself. Further, it is an act of pragmatism for the pursuit of political ends.

The sermon was delivered after the Friday prayer at the opening of Hagia Sophia Mosque by President of Religious Affairs Ali Erbaş strikingly on the pulpit with a sword in his hand:

Today is the day when salawat resounds from the domes of Hagia Sophia and the call to prayer echoes from its minarets. Today is the day when believers stand up with tears of joy. Today is the day of honor and humility... Fatih Sultan Mehmet Khan dedicated this place to remain as a mosque until the end of the day. Anyone who violates what is dedicated is cursed... Hagia Sophia is the sign of the conquest (*fetih*) and the trust of Fatih, who dedicated it on the condition that it will be a mosque until the end of the day...The reopening of Hagia Sophia for worship is a holy place, now gaining its original character. The reopening of Hagia Sophia to worship is the hope of all the sad and oppressed mosques of the world, especially Masjid al-Aqsa. The opening of Hagia Sophia to worship is the continuation of our

civilization, whose foundation is oneness, whose brick is science, and whose mortar is virtue. (Diyanet, 24 July 2020).

The importance of opening the Hagia Sophia in the sermon draws attention with the reference to the discourses of Fatih Sultan Mehmet and the conquest. When looking at the discourses in the sermon, it means that beyond the emphasis on opening the mosque for worship and providing religious services, they have fulfilled a dream that has been desired for years, giving due to this entrusted building, and gaining its original qualification. It is stated that this event is not only pleasing for Turkey but also pleasing and hopeful for the entire Islamic world. The opening of Hagia Sophia to worship was considered as the rise of civilization which was defined on the basis of Islamic foundations.

The conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque in 2020 could be seen as an Islamization of the historical site which was originally an exceptionally critical site of Orthodox Christianity. It converted into a mosque after the conquest of Istanbul by Mehmet II and then into a museum in early periods of the Turkish Republic, and then to a mosque again under the JDP rule in 2020. The conversion of Hagia Sophia into a museum during the Early Republic period was important because it was a symbol of both the rejection of the Ottoman historical heritage and the construction of a secular identity (Bölükbaşı, 2020: 11). Today, its conversion into a mosque has been interpreted as an Islamist movement and opposition to the secular regime (Bölükbaşı, 2020: 20). Such discourses and the transformation of Hagia Sophia into a mosque during the JDP period, that the Kemalist regime decided to keep it as a museum, were interpreted as a conflict with a secular identity and an Islamist revival and

transformation by secular sects. For instance, Ziya Bölükbaşı (2021: 3) stated that the conversion of Hagia Sophia from a museum into a mosque shows that the regime tried to break its ties with the early Republican period and open a new era.

The public also tends to interpret the Hagia Sophia's conversion from a museum to a mosque as an instance of Islamization irrespective of whether they see such Islamization positively or negatively. For instance, in street interviews made on the day when Hagia Sophia was reopened for worship, the citizen made the following statement to the microphone extended to CNNTURK: "We are proud of our Turkishness, our nationalism, and our Islamism" (CNNTURK, 2020).

Furthermore, the change of heart is seen at the highest level of the JDP government. Before the 2019 local elections, Erdoğan silenced the slogans "Let the Hagia Sophia be opened" and said, fill in Sultanahmet first, we will not be deceived by such provocations (Yetkin Report, 2020). He was even more explicit when the question was asked a few days later on live stream on March 18, 2019. He said that it is not a problem to overcome such issues, but what would be the return and continued, for us, the coast would be much heavier. He added let's not forget that we currently have thousands of mosques in various countries around the world. Then he asked that "do those who say this think about what will happen to those mosques?" While Erdogan described those who brought up the issue of Hagia Sophia as not knowing the world and its interlocutors, he said that he was careful and sensitive about this issue and that he would not fall into this trap. Then, in 2000 President Erdoğan stated the historical meaning of Hagia Sophia as follows: "the conquest of Istanbul and the conversion of

Hagia Sophia into a mosque are among the most glorious pages of our entire history,” reflecting the view of Erdogan (Cumhuriyet, 2020). What happened in the short time that passed, contrary to these discourses, Hagia Sophia was opened to worship?

This thesis argues that the opening sermon, the opening ritual of Hagia Sophia as well as the act of converting Hagia Sophia into a mosque are the least about desecularization but post secularism they appear as religious acts but there are pragmatic reasons rather than an Islamist outlet. These pragmatic reasons for the conversion of Hagia Sophia are twofold: consolidation of the political power symbolically and practically by agenda manipulation and distracting the public from other issues. Such pragmatism is seen in the opening sermon and the ceremony by the PRA as well, which also make the discussions on the autonomy of the PRA relevant.

3.2.1 The JDP’s Consolidation of Power, the PRA’s Symbolism

The symbolism behind the opening of Hagia Sophia to worship has often been seen as an ideological move of Islamisation. It has been interpreted as a symbolic and strategic realization of the sleeping and suppressed dream. It is reflected as a success story under the name of "realizing an 86-year-old dream" and "breaking the chains" and this can be seen as critical in terms of consolidating the power of the government. However, as I argue, the symbolism of the opening of the Hagia Sophia indicates its instrumentalization for the consolidation of the JDP’s symbolic power rather than Islamisation.

The most important emphasis in President Erdoğan's speech is the historical meaning of Hagia Sophia. The statement "the conquest of Istanbul and the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque are among the most glorious pages of our entire history," reflects the view of Erdogan (Cumhuriyet, 2020). In the whole of Erdogan's speech, discourses such as "resurrection" and "revival" were used rather than a re-conquest. On the other hand, in the opening day, the President of Religious Affairs, Ali Erbaş, ascended to the pulpit with a sword, which is the visual of this reconquering understanding. Because in the newly conquered regions during the Ottoman period, any place of worship was turned into a mosque as a right of conquest, and the imam took the pulpit with a sword (Evrensel, 2020). In other words, it would mean that the place was conquered with the sword, however, the property of Hagia Sophia already belongs to the Republic of Turkey. Therefore, the reconquest message here can be interpreted through aim to reassign power of the government. While Hagia Sophia was a political pain and suppressed anger for the people with high religious and Ottoman sensitivity, with this strategic move of the JDP, it has become a hope for them to a return to the past (Özturanlı, 2020). This strategic move of the JDP, the speeches made on the opening day and the symbolic movements such as the Erbaş's ascent to the pulpit are aimed at power consolidation and are an attempt to keep its own electorate alive in times of political and social distress intense. It is worth noting that, contrary to the Islamization theses, this move does not carry practices that will take the system backward (Özturanlı, 2020). Rather, the JDP has embarked on a strategic hope-building by powerfully instrumentalizing the religious trump for those who expect and desire the opening of Hagia Sophia.

3.2.2 The JDP's Attempt for Distraction and the PRA's Agenda Manipulations

Between 2019 and 2020, the official and top-level opinion on the conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a mosque has changed and this thesis interprets this change as an issue of not furthering the JDP's Islamisation but its response to circumstances. In the intervening period, important changes have occurred in terms of political, economic, and social life for instance, despite the support of the NMP (Nationalist Movement Party), the JDP suffered a serious defeat in the Istanbul election on March 31 and especially the repetition of the election on June 23. Istanbul and Ankara mayors passed from the JDP to the RPP (Republic People's Party). Years later, the opposition party gained a large electorate. Thus, the JDP was deprived of the advantages of municipalities for the first time after a long time.

The JDP lost its members to three other political parties that emerged out of the JDP's political cadres. In addition to the Good Party, two parties participated in politics, with politicians coming directly from the JDP: the Future Party, led by Ahmet Davutoğlu, and the Democracy and Progress Party, led by Ali Babacan. In this context, every step that the JDP take in the upcoming period is aimed at reversing the decrease in the electorate in the base of the JDP, and of the alliance with the NMP (Cumhuriyet, 2020). From this perspective, Hagia Sophia may seem like a successful move, because the promise that Hagia Sophia will be opened to Islamic worship has been the most important propaganda tool for every right-wing party in Turkey in every election (Yetkin Report, 2020).

Furthermore, economically, the coronavirus outbreak worsened the already fragile economy at that time. Because of the descension in sectors such as tourism and transportation, the inflow of hot foreign currency is interrupted. According to the survey of the MetroPoll research company, the people, including the JDP members, do not believe the inflation and unemployment figures announced by TUIK (Yetkin Report, 2020). The government, which could not take serious improvement steps in the economy, placed the opening of Hagia Sophia in the middle of the agenda to change the hazy course of the agenda and people's focus.

Such changes in the social, political, and economic environment are interpreted in relation to the decision of converting Hagia Sophia into a mosque by others as well. For instance, Selçuk Özdağ mentioned that religious concepts are used for the interests of a political cadre, not for the religion itself in the JDP Period (Cumhuriyet, 2020). According to him, Hagia Sophia is one of the last victims of this pragmatic understanding of the JDP (Cumhuriyet, 2020). He added that the opening of Hagia Sophia cannot cover problems such as high cost, inflation, economic crisis, alienation from democracy, the politicization of the judiciary, terrorism, and separatism. Thus, I also interpret that the effort of the government is to overshadow all these problems of the period and to attract perceptions and attention to the opening of Hagia Sophia. Moreover, I argue that such distraction and manipulation of the agenda could become possible owing to the post-secular character of the state and the religion during the JDP government.

3.3 Economy

The high cost of living and poverty, which have deepened under the influence of the economic crisis with the effect of the pandemic (Eğilmez, 2022), have been the subject of Friday sermons prepared by the PRA, as a new content considering the sermons in the last two decades. In addition, PRA immediately stepped in during the times when the reactions in society and suicides increased due to economic problems and gave sermons aimed at normalizing the current period.

The main theme of the sermons emphasizes that difficult days are “a test from Allah” and the importance of being thankful and patient. In the sermons, the economic crisis was legitimized and normalized through religion. This situation shows that the PRA's focus on economy, as a non-religious subject normally deployed within the classical secularism understanding, in its sermons is an example of post-secularism. This situation can be interpreted as deprivatization of religion when religion is not limited to the individual field but manifests itself in a secular field such as the economy. On the other hand, the fact that the PRA issued sermons aimed at relieving people and reducing tension in this troubled economic environment is an indication that the government has instrumentalized the PRA for support while facing this crisis.

The JDP has shown that the reason for the failure to prevent the continuous rise in prices in products and foreign exchange is the attack of producers, markets and foreign powers rather than the failure to develop effective economic policies (Gürses, 2021). The government has tried to explain the crisis for religious reasons by throwing the

responsibility off itself (Gürses, 2021), so I examine the normalization of the economic crisis in the Friday sermons for a pragmatic reason.

3.3.1 Normalization of economic crisis

3.3.1.1 Not economic crisis but psychological problems

Although the ruling circles persistently try to deny, ignore, or attribute it to irrelevant reasons, the Turkish economy has been experiencing a severe economic crisis for a long time (Gürses, 2021). The number of unemployed, those who have financial difficulties, those who cannot pay their debts, and those who work for the fear of being unemployed are increasing day by day (Yücel, 2022: 25). Despite the optimistic statements of the JDP regarding the country's economy, the economic recession, increasing unemployment, and the deepening problem of the high cost of living have caused a significant increase in suicides and suicide attempts recently (Evrensel, 2020). The devastating effect of the economic crisis on daily life, and the increase in suicide cases due to financial difficulties prompted the PRA to publish a Friday sermon titled "Believer's Attitude Against Troubles" and is as follows:

In the course of life, it is destined for each of us to experience difficulties, ordeals and sorrows, material and spiritual troubles. Because this world is a world of testing... "Let's not turn our suffering into rebellion and persecution. Let's not forget that our firm attitude in the face of the difficulties we experience will herald many ease in the sight of Allah (Diyanet, 2019).

By stating that the sufferings are a part of the "testing in this world," the sermon try to normalize these problems which cause suicide. It advises that such troubles should

not turn to rebellion, and states that those who are patient in this world will be rewarded in the other world.

The normalization of economic crisis in the Friday Sermon is similarly seen in the managers of the JDP cadre. The suicide of Abdullah Ertem, the father of six children living in Mersin, due to economic problems was brought to the agenda in the city council (Diken, 2021). The mayor from the JDP stated in his statement that suicides can never be related to the economy as a cause and that they are related to the psychological problems of the person (Diken, 2021). He also added, “Does the poorest person commit suicide? Then half the country, the whole world, must commit suicide. Being in debt is not a reason for suicide.” Likewise, JDP Konya Deputy Ahmet Sorgun stated that suicides are not only economic, but they also include psychological factors and added that there are family problems, depression, but they say that they committed suicide for economic reasons (Sputniknews, 2021). He said that sometimes someone goes up on the bridge, on the roof but 90 percent of these suicides are related to family and spousal problems. He continued “trading sometimes makes a profit, sometimes a loss. There are ups and downs in life. We are always asked to rise higher. But life doesn't always go the way we want it to” (Sputniknews, 2021).

While suicides due to economic crisis are normalized in the sermon by presenting the worldly troubles that everyone experiences and these troubles as our test in this world, JDP representatives state that these suicides are caused by other personal problems and troubles that are not caused by economic crises. JDP members create an atmosphere of normalizing the situation with sentences that underestimate the economic crisis.

3.3.1.2 Divine Predestination and Gratitude through Economic Crisis

In the last few years, when the economic crisis has deepened, the themes of “divine grace”, “gratitude”, and “patience” are used in the contents of the sermons to explain the difficult period experienced stand out. After President Tayyip Erdoğan complained of “gratitude and dissatisfaction” while commenting on the economic crisis, the PRA's Friday sermon included a call for “gratitude” (Kırsadalga, 2022). The following excerpt comes from the sermon titled “Thank You, O Lord” (*Şükür Sana Ya Şekur*):

Knowing that all blessings come from Allah and consenting to even the smallest of blessings is gratitude. Let's not forget that what suits us is gratitude and that gratitude increases blessings. Let's take refuge in Allah from ungratefulness, lack of gratitude and disgrace (Diyamet, 6 May 2022).

The subject of Friday's sermon on February 26, 2021, is “Getting support from our spirituality in difficult times” and it states the following:

We encounter many troubles, sorrows and calamities throughout our lives. Whatever the consequences, every event that happens to us is a part of the test of the world. Allah says in a verse: We will certainly test you with a little fear and hunger, and loss of wealth, lives and fruits. "Give good news to those who are patient! Muslims must also consent to "tawakkul" and "divine predestination" in addition to reason and experience. They must act with submission and calmness, not with rebellion and fury. They must take refuge in the absolute will of their Lord by staying away from fear, anxiety and pessimism (Diyamet, 26 February 2021).

As seen in the sermons, the basis of difficulties and troubles comes from Allah, and we are asked to continue our lives by gratitude. A divine meaning is added to the difficulties we experience, and we are asked to act obediently and calmly in the face of these difficulties. It shows that sermons were prepared by associating the economic

crisis to God, to relieve the JDP government, which aims to remove the most important accusation that the people have directed against them. Moreover, rather than the aim of religious enlightenment, PRA also strengthens the back of the government with its comments that there are abuses in the market and black marketers step in and make the people victimized (Evrensel, 2022).

The result of the study shows that Friday sermons are instrumentalized to support the pragmatic policy of the JDP government, such as consolidation of political power, agenda manipulation, and distraction from other issues. Thus, the PRA organizes its Friday sermons reactively towards the JDP agenda and supports the JDP's pragmatic policy behind family, economy, and symbolic movements like Hagia Sophia. For this reason, the handling of non-religious issues in the content of Friday sermons is an example of deprivation of religion rather than desecularization; manifestation of religion in non-religious spheres. Therefore, this situation shows that Turkey is experiencing a post-secular period, contrary to the thesis that it is Islamized. The dynamics of the post-secular era are effectively used by the JDP for its own pragmatic purposes.

CONCLUSION

Secularism, which is defined as the separation of religion and state affairs, in other words, the state's determination and limitation of the religious sphere of action, entered a crisis and contrasted with the manifested classical secular understanding. In secular countries, and especially in Turkey, the classical thesis of secularism has received a significant defeat in terms of concept and scope (Tekin, 2022: 266). For instance, with the JDP government, religious movements and symbols have begun to become more visible in social and political life. Yet, worldwide, a new situation has emerged in which the strict understanding of secularism has been eroded and religious values and beliefs have been articulated in political and social life (Casanova, 2006: 14). This new social life, which has emerged in both Western and Middle Eastern societies and where religion is more visible now, can be understood as a post-secular society (Casanova, 2006: 14).

JDP which has been in power in Turkey since 2002, has used Islam as a reference. JDP government equipped Islam with more political content or paved the way for it to gain a political appearance (Tekin, 2022: 266). In general, this situation is not the de-secularization or does not mean "Islamization of Turkey", because of the fact that religion, which has never disappeared, is included and accepted in the social and political sphere with different forms and contents (Bulut, 2007: 182). That's why it's not Islamization; the fact is that the religion that neither went nowhere, nor has not come back (Habermas, 2001: 264) but religion has become more visible in line with the new conditions of the post-secular era. Religious sensitivities and identities can

transform under different conditions such as social, political, and economic, and they can be repositioned according to the direction and effect of change (Tekin, 2022: 260). Post secularism names this phenomenon as a de-privatization of religion, not a de-secularization.

This thesis opposed to the binary of secularism and religion and examined the reflections of post-secularism in Turkey practice. It discusses the political-religious environment in Turkey and the relationship between religion and the JDP government through the instrumentalization of the PRA. It examines the pragmatic concerns of the JDP government within the framework of post-secular experiences rather than seeing the JDP governments' action as a manifestation of the ideology. The occurrence of religion and the public sphere in the post-secular world has been used strategically by the JDP government. The PRA, on the other hand, as a religious institution of the secular state, played a supportive role in the pragmatic politics of the JDP government, which it blended with religious references. Another compelling factor in reaching this conclusion is how this religious institution, founded on the basis of secular ideology, changed and transformed during the JDP period.

The idea that separation of religion and state is propagated in Turkish secularism, however, to ensure a hegemonic project, religion has been controlled and used throughout Turkish Republican history (Öztürk, 2016: 626). Scholars accept the ideological role of the PRA as follows: "In this endeavor, the PRA is an ideological apparatus of the state that assists in manufacturing the consent of the people through promoting a state version of Turkish nationalist Islam" (Yılmaz and Barry, 2020:12).

As I discussed under the title of autonomy of PRA, since its establishment, the PRA has maintained its existence as a powerful ideological state apparatus. During the Early Republican Period, its primary role was to build a secular state hegemony in the field of religious activities and education and to ensure the justification and maintenance of Kemalist ideology. After 1980, its role expanded as part of an ideological project in Turkey's foreign policy (Öztürk, 2016: 610). During the JDP period, the PRA gained a more important status than ever before with significant changes occurring in the field of their duties and activities. However, the important point here is whether the reason behind the expansion and development of the PRA during the JDP period was an ideologically based situation, as it was before.

Throughout this thesis, the inference that the JDP is pursuing an Islamist ideology has been challenged. At this point, the binary of ideology and political pragmatism emerges. My argument stands on the dilemma of ideology vs pragmatism, whether the JDP instrumentalized the PRA for ideology-based or pragmatic reasons. The ideologies followed by governments may contain political pragmatism at certain points. However, as I mentioned in the previous chapters, the transformations of the PRA, which was founded in the Early Republican Period and started its duty as the defender of the secularism ideology, continued as not adhering to a particular ideology during the JDP period. The fact that the PRA does not follow a certain ideology is since the JDP does not remain loyal to one (Mardin, 2007: 28). As supported in the case analysis part, an argument has been evolved to contradict that JDP followed an Islamist ideology and instrumentalized the PRA for this purpose. Therefore, during the

JDP era, the PRA seems to serve political interests rather than, i.e., Islamist ideology. Instead of adopting a specific ideology, JDP acts in a flexible space where it can change its decisions according to conditions of time and existing events and exhibit pragmatic attitudes. The PRA, on the other hand, is a tool to legitimize JDP's mobility in this flexible space.

This study shows that the Presidency of Religious Affairs performs the task of creating a social and political mobilization by using religious references in line with the request of the JDP government. An important example showing the ambiguity of the relations between state, politics and religion and indicating the instrumentalization of the PRA for pragmatic reasons is the conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a “Mosque” on July 24, 2020, with political maneuvering and religious agitation. After this opening, which turned into a performance, Ali Erbaş went up to the pulpit with a sword and delivered a sermon. Such a performance with the sword cannot be called “Islamic traditions” alone, therefore this situation is reflected as a show of political power.

The fact that the PRA is so reactive towards Turkey's agenda and prepares its sermons within the framework of discourses that respond to the current political agenda, sheds light on its cooperation with the JDP government. It is seen that JDP instrumentalizes Friday sermons through PRA, mostly because of pragmatic concerns. In this sense, examining the Friday sermons published by the PRA, the religious state institution of the secular state, from a post-secular perspective weakens the thesis of “Turkey is going through Islamization”. As seen in the chapter I analyzed Friday sermons, Friday sermons dealt with both the religious (family) and non-religious (economy) subjects

which are categorized according to the secular system. Although this can be read as a manifestation of desecularization in terms of the understanding of religion pushed to the individual sphere in the classical secular system, I see this as a deprivatization of religion, experience of the post-secular era. In the context of Turkey, religion is not limited to the individual sphere, but has become more reactive towards non-religious issues such as economy and politics in the secular system.

One of the limitations of this thesis is of its shortage periodic comparison. Every government that has come to power in Turkey has its own unique agenda and political attitudes. In order to understand the transformation and evolution of PRA in more detail, a comparison could have been made by focusing on a larger period. Furthermore, even when the rule of the JDP government was divided on a period-by-period basis, the changes, and differences in the instrumentalization of the PRA could have been revealed more clearly. Another limitation is the lack of examining the relationship between post-secular experiences in Turkey and post-secular manifestations in other countries. Such study could have been supportive in enhancing the thesis' argument. Since there are limited studies on PRA in the literature and post-secularism in Turkey context, future studies may reveal this phenomenon.

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