Mobilizing Islam for National Populism in AKP's Turkey: Civilizationism in the Diyanet's Friday Sermons

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Abstract

During the AKP (Justice and Development Party) era since 2002, Turkey visibly transformed from a secular country to a more Islamist-prone one, where the goal of raising "a pious generation" was declared as part of a top-down Islamization project. This thesis examines the mobilizing power of religion for populist appeals in politics as part of the government's religious nation-building project. The AKP's attempts at transforming the Turkish public space and politics along religious lines have been widely studied. However, the transformation of religious discourse in Turkey since the 2016 military coup attempt—thought to be led by the Gülen Movement, an influential Islamic order, and a former ally of the government—has been relatively less investigated. Based on a qualitative content analysis of the post-2016 Friday sermons issued by the Diyanet (the Directorate of Religious Affairs), the centralized government institution that runs the affairs of Sunni Islam in the country, this thesis provides an in-depth account of the AKP and President Erdoğan's expansionist politics, which underpin the use of religion in a way that aligns with their national-populist rhetoric and ideals. The findings suggest that in differentiation from the populist register that was found in Diyanet's Friday sermons, the Diyanet's rhetoric actively mobilizes "civilizationism," which frames the Turkish nation primarily as a religious community that spearheads the Muslim civilization, understood as a "geography of the heart," against its internal and external enemies. Beyond Turkey, the case of the Diyanet and its direct relation to civilizationism affirms the need to study populism as a phenomenon that embodies not only particular nationalisms, but also broader, civilizational worldviews.

Introduction

On July 15, 2016, around 10 p.m., the Bosphorus Bridge and Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge, the two essential bridges connecting the European and Asian sides of Istanbul, were closed to vehicle traffic by tanks led by some members of the Gendarmerie General Command. Warplanes of the F-16 class began to fly low over the Turkish capital, bombing the Turkish Parliament and the Presidential Palace. These, and a series of other attacks that night, were the work of a faction with the Turkish Armed Forces to topple the government, and especially, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. During the clashes, a call to prayer was heard from mosques across the country, as well as a live television broadcast of President Erdoğan, both urging the people to take to the streets against the coup in an atmosphere reminiscent of war (Sabah, 2016). By the next morning, it became clear that the coup attempt would fail, as the armed forces loyal to the government prevailed over the putschists. These incidents illustrated that the call to prayer strengthened the leader's charisma and fueled people's religious-nationalist sentiments, which was effective enough to bring people out into the streets. During the fighting, over 300 people (mostly civilians) died, and thousands were injured.

In the aftermath of the incident, President Erdoğan addressed the public and called that night "the nation's victory" on July 15, and even a second war of independence for Turkey (TCCB, 2016). As one minister put it, from this date onwards, "nothing would be the same for Turkey" (Anadolu Ajansı, 2016). The government immediately blamed the Gülen Movement for the coup attempt and designated it as a terrorist organization to begin a wholesale crackdown across the country. In the two years that followed the failed coup, "Turkey has detained 160,000 people and dismissed nearly the same number of state employees," and "of that number, more than 50,000 have been formally charged and kept in jail during trial" (Reuters, 2018). It is precisely in this post-2016 period, according to many analysts, that the

strongly nationalist and populist tendencies of the President Erdoğan have entered a new phase, and Turkey began sliding fast into religious-nationalism (Rogenhofer, 2018; Gökariksel and Türem, 2019; Christofis, 2019). In this new phase, it is all the more important to understand how the AKP has incorporated religion as a central component of its national-populist rhetoric and strategies to underpin its illiberal and exclusionary politics, which has been recognized as a form of "Islamist/Islamic populism" in the literature, where the Diyanet played the primary role (Yılmaz, 2018, 2021; Yılmaz, Demir, and Morieson, 2021; Kalaycı, 2022; Kirdiş, 2021).

The establishment of the Diyanet dates back to the foundation of the Turkish Republic from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire in the early 1920s. Founded in March 1924, a few months after the proclamation of the Republic in October 1923, the aim of the Diyanet has been to bureaucratize and control religion in the new country, rather than a clear separation between state and religion (Gözaydın 2008; Davison 2003). In effect, such control over religion stems from a positivist outlook on Islam, viewed as an impediment to modernization in the Kemalist doctrine of Mustafa Kemal (hereafter referred to as Atatürk), the founder of the Republic of Turkey (Öztürk, 2018). The Turkish concept and practice of *laiklik* differs substantially from the Anglo-Saxon or French understandings of secularism or *laïcité* (Mutluer, 2018; Baser and Öztürk, 2022), because it is a system where "religion is controlled, regulated and utilized by the state" (Öztürk, 2019, p.81). As Yavuz and Öztürk (2019, p.2) argue, in the long run, the top-down imposition of secular policies has "helped transform Islam into an identity of resistance and a political ideology" among the masses—mostly rural, eastern parts of Turkey and/or people migrating to western metropoles.

Since the transition into multiparty politics in the 1950s, the marginalization of religion softened, and different manifestations of Islamic politics began to rise to the surface. Over the following decades, as the power of the Republican People's Party (CHP, founded in

1923 by Atatürk and led by him until his death in 1938) in the government began to decline, the Diyanet began to lose its secular position within the state apparatus. Particularly following the 1980 military coup, which predominantly targeted the rise of left-wing politics, the state actively encouraged the Islamization of Turkish society as a bulwark against socialism, and integrated various religious orders (such as the Gülen Movement, the Naqshbandi sect, etc.) into the bureaucracy as loyal, conservative partners (Lorasdağı, 2010). At the ideological level, Islam was "used to complement the formulation of Turkish national identity," known as the "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" to define the nation, and the Diyanet "expanded its tasks beyond the organisation of religious activities" to reconfigure "its institutional aims as the protection and preservation of Turkish national identity and confrontation with communist and atheistic ideologies among the youth" (Cengiz, 2020, p. 69-70). As an outcome, Islamic identity became more prominent both in society and in the state (Cornell, 2015).

Such ambitious attempts to transform the Turkish public sphere and politics along religious lines reached its zenith after the AKP came to power in 2002 (Altuntaş and Demirkanoğlu, 2017, Öztürk, 2019; Yıldız, 2007; Tee, 2021; Adak, 2020; Peker and Laxer, 2021; Mutluer, 2014). From this date onwards, as the literature suggests, the party's strength and legitimacy allowed religious orders, especially the Gülen movement, to become unofficial coalition partners of the government (Tee, 2021; Balcı, 2015; Tittensor, 2021; Uğur, 2021; Uğur, 2021; Cornell, 2015; Arslan, 2013). As the movement had its feet on the ground, it extended its activities abroad and functioned as an auxiliary arm of the AKP for a while (Ugur, 2021). This ensured the movement's involvement in a complex web of internationally operating schools and businesses, where its religious network and influence are difficult to categorize (Öktem and Akkoyunlu, 2016; Balcı, 2015; Ugur, 2019; Cornell, 2015). The alliance lasted until it collapsed in 2013, thereafter turning into a bitter intra-state power conflict between the AKP and the Gülenists, centered around the question, 'Who owns the

true religion?'. This conflict reached its violent climax with the 2016 coup attempt, after which the AKP's national-populist rhetoric and strategies sought to reassert control over Islam by using the Diyanet as a primary state institution. This is why, it is crucial to study the ways in which, as this thesis seeks to accomplish, the discourse of the Diyanet in this period to understand how religion became an active component of national-populist reconstruction**.**

Following the 2016 coup attempt, it has been observed that the AKP government has increasingly emphasized religious references aligned with its politics, and with the support of the Diyanet, the de-privatization of religion has reached new heights (Adak, 2020; Çitak, 2020). Karpov and Svensson (2020) define de-privatization as a process of counter-secularization that reinstates religion in the public sphere as a subsystem of society, politics, and culture. The novel wave of de-privatised religiosity that emerged after the Gülenist coup attempt provided a new opportunity for the AKP-led state, and created a fertile ground for merging nationalist, populist, and religious narratives to forge binary oppositions between "us" (the state, representing the real "people") and "them" (dissidents, terrorists, all people who oppose the ideology of the AKP). In this new era, Diyanet turned increasingly into an institution that Erdoğanists used "to transmit and instill the new values of the so-called 'new Turkey' to the society" (Mutluer, 2018). The content of Friday sermons, especially after 2016, has relatively intensified into a more Islamised and populist form of nationalism, strongly reflecting the AKP's ideology against the elites and outsiders. During this period, the AKP increasingly turned to religious references in order: (1) to bolster its regional and global influence, (2) to access regions or groups that are difficult to reach through traditional foreign policy tools, and (3) to alter domestic political balances or amass power (Öztürk, Baser 2022).

Based on what the literature has so far recognized about this post-2016 reality in Turkey, this thesis poses the following research questions with a view to furthering the empirical and theoretical knowledge in this area: 1) To what extent, if at all, does the Diyanet

seek to interpret and shape religion as part of a national-populist rhetoric in the post-2016 period? 2) In this process, what roles may be played by religion to underpin the various definitions of the "people" and the "nation" against the "elites" that are considered to be against the nation? 3) More broadly, how can the Turkish case of Diyanet help us advance the theoretical literature that study the various intersections of religion and national populism today?

By concentrating on the Friday sermons of the Diyanet in the 2016-2020 period, my research aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of religion's role in bolstering national-populist rhetoric and ideals. Speaking to the prevalent debates among scholars on populism, nationalism, and religion (De Cleen, 2017; De Cleen and Stavrakakis, 2017; Peker and Laxer, 2017; Hadiz, 2018; Rogenhofer, 2018; Brubaker, 2020; Sofos, 2021; Yılmaz et al., 2021; Haynes, 2021:2023), this thesis aims to contribute to the field through the exploration of the relatively new concept of "civilizationism," which is a relatively understudied component of the religion-nationalism-populism nexus (Verkhovskii and Pain, 2012; Bettiza, 2014; Petito, 2016; Brubaker, 2017; Kaya and Tecmen, 2019; Hale and Laruelle, 2020:2021; Yılmaz et al., 2021; Aktürk, 2022; Yılmaz and Morieson, 2022; Bacik and Seker, 2023). Indeed, the qualitative content analysis of Diyanet's Friday sermons, which will be explored in detail in the rest of this thesis, finds limited evidence of rhetoric that explicitly targets the "elites" in a populist manner. In fact, many of Diyanet's sermons are not explicitly political—greater emphasis is found on micro-level and meso-level discourses, which I characterize as "personal-moralistic" and "social-regulatory" matters, respectively. Yet at the macro-level, where "national-civilizational" themes are discussed and politics and group identity are involved, Diyanet's rhetoric primarily takes on a "civilizational" (rather than populist) tone, portraying the Turkish nation as a leading and unifying force within the Muslim civilization. This theme taps into the collective memory by invoking a type of nostalgia for the former

Ottoman lands and power, framing the political cause as both national and supranational. These findings propose to advance existing works suggesting that the post-2016 period marks an intensification of an alarmist discourse in Diyanet that emphasizes internal and external challenges (Yılmaz and Barry, 2020). Offering a closer look at the roles that Islam plays in national-populist-civilizationist mobilization, this thesis seeks to contribute to the larger theoretical debate on the complex relationship between religion and politics.

In what follows, Chapter 1 provides a detailed historical background on the state-religion relations in the Ottoman and Empire and the Republic of Turkey. Chapter 2 shifts the attention to theory to examine how populism, nationalism, and civilizationism have been discussed in the social scientific scholarship, with examples from Turkey and beyond. After laying out the methodological approach of the thesis in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 presents a detailed qualitative content analysis of Diyanet's post-2016 sermons that discuss micro-, meso-, and macro-level issues, with particular emphasis on the last category. The conclusion section reiterates the findings of the thesis and discusses its contributions to the literature in Turkey as well as the broader scholarship that examines populism, nationalism, and religion.

Chapter 1. Historical Background

1.1 Putting Diyanet in Historical Context

In examining the concept of "religion" in modern Turkey, it is important to consider it within the ideological framework of Kemalist nationalism and secularism. Because these two foundational principles not only define the contours of contemporary Turkish statehood, but also serve as the crucible in which the essence of religiosity intertwines with the complex narratives of nationhood. Examining Diyanet will be the pathway for exploring the politics, nationalism, civilizationism and the sociology of religion in Turkey, as this institution lies at the heart of the construction and deconstruction of Turkish modernity, state, and religion (Gözaydın, 2020). With over 140,000 personnel (Diyanet Strateji Geliştirme Başkanlığı, 2020), Diyanet, as one of the most well-funded state institutions, plays a pivotal role in conducting religious services both domestically and internationally, solidifying its status as a key public institution in Turkey.

Over the years, this institution has evolved in response to Turkey's social, political, and religious dynamics, leading to many situations where its reputation has sometimes been lost and sometimes regained. This evolution reflects the broader context of contemporary Turkish politics, which is shaped both by the legacy and memory of the Ottoman Empire and by the strong secularizing trends of the early 20th century (Guida, 2008; Yılmaz and Barry, 2018; Yılmaz, Demir, and Morieson, 2021). This blend has been significantly shaped under the Erdoğan administration, where religious affairs have come under state influence, accompanied by a steadily increasing budget (Akgönül, 2018; Şar, 2019; Gözaydın, 2008; Korkut, 2016; Çitak, 2020; Peker and Laxer, 2021). The politicization of religion is

particularly evident in the state's oversight of religious matters through institutions like the Diyanet (Peker and Laxer, 2021; Zuquette, 2017).

From both historical and practical standpoints, the Turkish concept of "laiklik" diverges significantly from the interpretations of secularism or *laïcité* found in Anglo-Saxon or French contexts, as it operates under the unique premise of state involvement, regulation, and utilization of religion (Billion, 2011; Öztürk, 2019; Baser and Ozturk, 2022; Mutluer, 2018; Akgönül, 2022). Considering the secularization/laïcité debates, French secularism is based on separation as a political strategy, English secularism is founded on partial separation with an emphasis on preserving freedom of belief, and Turkish secularism is characterized by strict regulation of religion (Peker, 2016), with the state exercising close control over religious affairs (Billion, 2011). Religion is primarily confined to the personal and individual sphere rather than the public sphere (Şen, 2019), with state intervention considered necessary only when religious matters intersect within the social order (Gözaydın, 2008). This results in a distinct form of "Turkish *laiklik*," which has no equivalent elsewhere and is characterized by administrative control of religion and efforts to minimize Islam's visibility in the public sphere (Fox 2004; Kaya and Tecmen, 2019; Peker, 2020).

The foundation for state control over religion in Turkey is rooted in the ideology of the secularist republican founding elite of the early 20th century, often referred to as the "positivist-nationalist generation" (Mardin, 1990). This group perceived Islam as an impediment to the modernization and the promotion of Turkish nationalism (Kili, 1980). The religious schools (or madrasahs) were viewed by the secular elite as hubs of the *ulema* (Islamic scholars) and religious orders—which they saw as impediment to achieving a more rational interpretation of Islam (Karpat, 2001). This viewpoint was later enshrined in the Kemalist doctrine espoused by Mustafa Kemal, later known as Atatürk, the visionary behind the establishment of the Turkish Republic (Öztürk, 2018). As Yilmaz (2009) mentions,

Atatürk sought to break away from the Ottoman practice of integrating religion into public discourse and instead by building a new Turkish *laiklik* aimed to redefine Turkish society by drawing clear distinctions between the enlightened and the reactionary, the progressive and the conservative, the modern and the traditional.

Although the Diyanet was established as one of the first institutions of the Republic in 1924, its historical roots trace back to the Ottoman era. The 17th century often seen as a turning point for the Ottoman Empire, a period when it began to lose its prestigious global standing (Lewis, 1969) while the Western bloc made undeniable strides in development and progress (Berkes, 1973). The decline of the Ottoman Empire has been partly attributed to the concentration of political power in the hands of the Sultan, —a form of governance known as patrimonialism or sultanism—, and the increasing emphasis on Islamic doctrine, resulting in the division of society along religious lines (Mardin, 1983; Curtis, 2009). Based on this premise, the Ottoman Empire sought to establish bridges between social groups through Islam, positioning certain segments as "servants" to the sultan (Berkes, 1973), within a system where their rights, freedoms, and entire existence were largely devoted to the will of the sovereign (Lewis, 1969; Curtis, 2009).

Failed modernization attempts within the Ottoman Empire led to the disengagement of certain fractions of the *reâyâ*[1] (Berkes, 1973). As a result, the concept of Bid'at[2] gained prominence, and the scope of human will, referred to as *irade-i cuz'iye*, became increasingly constricted (Mardin, 1990; Karpat, 2009), which allowed the *ulema* to expand their influence. As the *ulema*'s influence expanded, there was an increasing belief that the decline of the Ottoman Empire was not due to neglect of worldly affairs but rather to a neglect of religious

[1] The tax-paying, lower classes of the Empire, constituting roughly 90% of the population.
[2] Bid'at refers to innovation in religious matters, linguistically, the term means innovation, novelty, heretical doctrine, heresy (TDV Islam Ansiklopedisi, 1992).

obligations (Türkislamoğlu, 2019). This belief reinforced the authority wielded by these religious scholars over the population. Meanwhile, a new atmosphere of modern thought and debate began to emerge in Empire's capital, Istanbul[3], and other coastal metropolitan areas, not only among the ruling class but also among the commoners who had ceased to be *reâyâ* (Berkes, 1973). These influences intensified the longstanding challenges faced by the empire and popularized the notion of amalgamating religion and state as a necessity for revival, presenting it as a potential remedy to the burgeoning rebellions (Berkes, 1973; Lewis, 1980:1995; Karpat, 2001; Smiley, 2022). This situation heightened public unrest, precipitated by the exchange of ideologies with Europe, and acted as a catalyst for religious controversies (Lewis, 1969; Berkes, 1973; Yakut, 2005; Parlak, 2020).

During the 19th century, the Ottoman entity underwent a profound transformation spurred by radical shifts in its policies. The challenge of modernization evolved beyond a mere focus on military revival to encompass a broader rethinking of society and politics through comprehensive reforms. The initial steps towards this transformation became evident with the emergence of the concepts of "citizen" and "nation," supplanting the traditional notions of "servant" and "ummah" (Berkes, 1973; Aydemir, 2004). It was not until the Tanzimat period, between 1839 and 1878, that these efforts at societal transformation, aimed at forging an overarching Ottoman identity, reached their zenith. This culmination manifested in the adoption of the first Ottoman Constitution through the 1856 edict (Imperial Decree of Hatt-ı Hümayun), which followed the Tanzimat decree of 1839 and brought about three pivotal shifts within the Empire: centralization, westernization, and the principle of equality among subjects (Akgönül, 2022). Thus it evolved into transformation of the autocratic Empire into a bicameral constitutional monarchy, which included representation for non-Muslims and

[3] Istanbul was the capital of the Ottoman Empire between 15th century to the 20th century.

embraced the idea of multilingual, multi-faith Ottoman "nation"—a development that was met with resistance from conservative circles (Berkes, 1973; Karpat, 2006).

1.2 Institutionalization of Religion in Ottoman Empire

Most, if not all, reform initiatives of the 19th century encountered staunch resistance from the *ulema*. The *ulema,* as powerful custodians of a multifaceted institutional network, was spearheaded by the figure of the *Şeyhülislam*, who wielded the highest authority over religious affairs (Kara, 2005). The office of the *Şeyhülislam*, or *Şeyhülislamlık*, represented an institution that intricately amalgamated the functions of various ministries within the Ottoman Empire, covering fields of education, foundation, and what would later become the Diyanet, then known as the Presidency of *Meşihat* (Bozan, 2007; Korkut, 2016). Such an arrangement stands as a noteworthy exemplar of the intricate interplay between the sacred and the political spheres within the Ottoman Empire. According to some scholars (Yakut, 2005; Berber and Karataş, 2022), *Şeyhülislamlık* signifies an institutional embodiment of the concept of limited power because it involved appointing a prestigious official responsible for evaluating all state actions and transactions in accordance with the law, including the decrees of the sultan. This hierarchical structure established the *Şeyhülislam* as an eminent figure within the Ottoman Empire, firmly positioned as the head of the *ilmiye* scholars, or *ulema*. These scholars were esteemed as authorities on interpreting Islamic doctrine, morality, and legal principles, further defining the distinct echelons within the empire's spiritual framework (Berber and Karataş, 2022). Under the concept of patrimonialism, the real pinnacle of religious administration would be assumed not by the *Şeyhülislamlık*, but rather retained by the sultan himself. The *Şeyhülislam*, as the head of the institution, diligently managed religious affairs on behalf of the sultan (Berkes, 1973). In the Ottoman state organization, the *Şeyhülislams* were interpreters of Islamic religion and law, exercising their authority through *fatwas* that declared

something unlawful or lawful. These *fatwas* at least theoretically, could control and limit the sultan as the highest and official authority of the *ulema* (Berber and Karataş, 2022).

In classical religious literature, as explained by former President of the Diyanet, Ali Bardakoğlu (2008), the term 'Diyanet' is understood as the antonym of "*kaza*," representing the spiritual and moral dimensions of life. In comparison, "*kaza*" represents the judiciary and the regulation of legal, political, and administrative relations through material institutions and sanctions. The fact that the meaning of these terms has evolved over time highlights the importance of understanding the intertwined history of Diyanet and Islam in both the Ottoman Empire and its successor, the Republic of Turkey. Notably, the Diyanet developed a distinct structure and mechanism compared to its predecessors in the Ottoman Empire, being primarily secular, or *laik*. *Laiklik* constituted the main distinction between the Diyanet and the *Şeyhülislamlık* (Berkes, 1973; Parlak, 2020; Berber and Karataş, 2022).

In the Ottoman Empire, the *ulema* occupied a hierarchical position that was comparable to the military. However, imams and preachers, who held lower ranks within this stratification, played crucial roles as representative figures for their respective neighborhoods due to their direct interactions with the public (Lewis, 1969; Berkes, 1973). The centrality of mosques within settlements showed that the *ulema* often pioneered public spaces (Alada, 2008), as neighborhoods determined the social and economic relations through which the state connected with its subjects (Parlak, 2022). Social stratification in neighborhood-scale settlements was at least partially based on religious privilege rather than class distinction alone (Duben and Behar, 2002). In a typical Ottoman neighborhood, fundamental public spaces comprised mosques, bazaars, and residences (Işın, 1995). The evolution of mosques into micro-power structures, where the imam in the pulpit held a concrete position of neighborhood authority on behalf of the Empire, underscored their pivotal role in the public sphere and highlighted their integral status within the prevailing social order and the

institutional framework of the state (Parlak, 2020). In this context, mosques served not only as places of worship but also as venues that brought people together and reinforced a shared identity. The mosque was at the hub of a broader set of religious social facilities such as foundations, schools, fountains, and baths around it. Understanding this dynamic through Durkheim's framework (1915), these characteristics functioned as mechanisms for social cohesion, establishing moral guidelines, facilitating social control, and offering individuals a sense of collective purpose and meaning in life.

In Ottoman lands, the interaction between the public sphere and the state primarily relied on fatwas and sermons issued by the *Şeyhülislamlık*, which aligned with the Sultan's discourse (Mardin, 1991; Ari, 2013). These fatwas were categorized as either private, responding to public inquiries about sharia, or general, addressing the Islamization of laws at the request of sultans and "Vezir-i azams[4]" (Parlak, 2020). As a result of their important role, the *ulema* held a highly respected position within the state apparatus, described by Gibb and Bowen (1950) as an 'aristocracy of mullahs'. When sultans enacted various laws and regulations, they ensured these were in accordance with Islamic law and secured fatwas from the *Şeyhülislam*, making Islamic law and religious rulings central sources of reference and legitimization which helped prevent dissent. The alignment of the Turkish President's rhetoric with the sermons of the Diyanet operates differently, because Diyanet, as a secularized institution, lacks the authority to issue legal judgments, yet remains significantly influential in the interaction between state officials and the public sphere.

In the Ottoman case, sermons were viewed not only as a symbol of the sultan's sovereignty and unique authority (Baktır, 1998) but also as a means of "socio-political communication and dialogue between the rulers and the ruled" (Akın, 2016, p.190). They

[4]In the Ottoman Empire, the highest ranking statesman who administered state affairs on behalf of the sultan (Kaşıkçı, 2015).

were generally utilized to connect with the public and adapt to changing times, often being placed on the public agenda to address a wide range of topics and undergoing transformations in content, form, and language (Topal, 2021). This strategic use of sermons aimed to remain relevant and responsive to the needs and expectations of the Sunni majority within the dynamic socio-political environment of the Ottoman Empire (Özdalga, 2005). Therefore, these sermons did not solely serve as state propaganda; they also provided a platform for expressing local concerns (Topal, 2021).

This perspective challenges the notion that religious standardization during the Ottoman era was exclusively a top-down, state-driven process where locals were merely passive recipients. Ottoman Sunnism, which evolved from the symbiotic relationship between religion and state throughout history under the principle of *"din-wa-dawlah"* (religion of the state), eventually became a comprehensive state ideology supported by the *ulema*, who were aligned with the state (Yakut, 2005; Mardin, 1991). This fusion, particularly evident during critical junctures in Ottoman history, helps explain the foundation of Diyanet as a modernized bastion of Sunnism in the Republic of Turkey.

Throughout the modernization efforts, the Ottoman state sought to maintain a lasting relationship with its subjects, even as these efforts sometimes conflicted with the interests of the religious scholar class, *ulema* (Yakut, 2005). As the state pursued its aspiration to regulate within the religious domain (Topal, 2021), the strained dynamic between the *ulema* and the state gradually led to the ulema's struggle to integrate into the broader modernization process. This became a catalyst for the subsequent politicization of Islam, used as a reactionary force. This shift had significant long-term consequences over the 19th century and beyond, which significantly eroded the traditional role of the *ulema* and, in the view of some conservatives, propelled them to the forefront as a 'victimized community' within Turkish political discourse.

Many scholars (Mardin, 1991; Ortaylı, 2016; Massicard, 2018; Yakut, 2005; Berkes, 1973) provide compelling evidence suggesting that religion's pivotal role within the social, political, and cultural fabric of the Ottoman Empire was not merely a passive response, but a conscious and deliberate strategy aimed at safeguarding its own existence. The Ottoman Empire acknowledged the role of religion in maintaining social order, political legitimacy, and social cohesion, actively nurturing and safeguarding religious institutions to mitigate the threat of religious decline and harness the unifying power of religion to ensure its long-term survival. During the modernization period, the Ottoman Empire increasingly relied on its Islamic identity to establish the state's legitimacy on new grounds, particularly in the late 19th century, as it lost many non-Muslim subjects due to military defeats and territorial losses (Deringil, 1991). From a secularization perspective (Gözaydın, 2008; Turner and Arslan, 2013; Peker, 2016; Parlak, 2020), it is evident that the objective of modernization attempts was not to suppress religion or to separate the spiritual from the temporal. Instead, the state seized the seat of power occupied by religion and transferred it to the state, with the goal of fostering a "national" identity (Şar, 2019). Nevertheless, the utilization of traditional mechanisms such as sermons in a secularized context ushered in a complex and contradictory reality for Turkish modernization (Korkut, 2016). Although the process of Westernization had begun nearly two centuries before the establishment of the Republic, radical transformation only became possible with the advent of the Republican Revolution of the 1920s, as the next section will elaborate.

1.3 Building of the Turkish Nation

In contrast to other Muslim societies where religious reactions to the collapse of traditional institutions gained prominence, each stride towards secularization in Turkey relegated religion to the background and liberated the state from dependence on religious principles through the disestablishment of Islam (Berkes, 1973; Gözaydın, 2006; Cizre, 2008; Peker, 2020). This

rapid transformation was prompted by a faction of the Ottoman elite that advocated for sweeping reforms aimed at building a new nation-state modeled on Western ideals, legal frameworks, secular nationalism and modernization (Küçükcan, 2010; Zürcher, 2010). Sweeping secularizing reforms were adopted by this faction against the entrenched traditional order, especially as religion emerged as the "last bastion of tradition" during the Ottoman Empire's decline amidst gradual moves toward modernity (Türkislamoğlu, 2019, p. 365).

Following the Ottoman Empire's defeat in World War I and the subsequent occupation of Istanbul and various regions of the country, a national struggle emerged in Anatolia, leading to the dissolution of the Ottoman Parliamentary Assembly and the establishment of a new parliament in Ankara on April 23, 1920, under the leadership of Atatürk (Lewis, 1969; Zürcher, 2010). In what followed, numerous legislative changes were implemented, leading to the separation of the Şeyhülislamlık and its responsibilities from the state (Korkut, 2016; Yakut, 2005). The Ministry of Şeriye ve Evkaf was then established to take over the responsibilities of the office of the Şeyhülislamlık (İpşirli, 2010). This new ministry combined two pivotal domains—religious institutions, including the fatwa institution, and foundations—into a single entity; however, this ministry would ultimately have a short-lived existence.

In 1924, the Diyanet was established to replace the Ministry of Şeriye ve Evkaf, and to regulate and supervise Islam and religious affairs. This new institution selectively incorporated certain leading and lower-ranking late Ottoman ulema into the republic to shape its own ethos and organizational culture—a process that evolved over time (Gürpınar and Kenar, 2016). Alongside these efforts towards Westernization, the official history and language of the country were reworked, glorifying pre-Islamic Turkic civilizations instead of the more recent Ottoman past (Taşpınar, 2014). By 1924, the newly established Turkish administration had swiftly adopted Westernized legal codes from Germany, Italy, and

Switzerland (Akgönül, 2022; Yılmaz, 2009), marking a significant departure from the previous practice of maintaining separate legal codes for different religious communities (Gözaydın, 2006).

As Turkey's founding and decision-making elite focused on establishing a strictly secular state, they consciously avoided incorporating religious affairs within cabinet, which led to the breakthrough that created an autonomous entity, the General Directorate of Foundations (Gözaydın, 2006). With the formation of this state branch, many foundations supported by *vakıfs* (charitable endowments) witnessed a decline in financial backing, which weakened the existing clientelist networks over time (Korkut, 2016). This gradual consolidation of state control over Sunni Islam diminished the influence and sacred significance of the old *ulema* within the state and led to the prohibition of all forms of religious propaganda, clothing, and orders within the state apparatus (Çitak, 2020).

Over time, the secular policies meticulously instituted during the early stages of the Republic have precipitated a profound transformation in the allocation of religious responsibilities, effectuating a pronounced transfer from religious institutions to the purview of the state apparatus (Yakut, 2005; Parlak, 2020). Islam, once a pervasive societal force, has been notably circumscribed, relegated primarily to the precincts of the private sphere (Gürpınar and Kenar, 2015). Paradoxically, in consonance with the overarching principles of an Islamic *weltanschauung*, the Republic maintained deeply rooted in Islamic precepts in secularized forms, such as advocating deference to authority, accentuating allegiance to the nation-state, and venerating the esteemed heritage of Turkish culture (Gürpınar and Kenar, 2015; Parlak, 2020).

1.4 Bargaining Between Islam and Kemalism

As discussed earlier, Ottoman history reflects the control of political power over religious authority. As a continuum of this tradition, the Republic of Turkey enacted Law no.429 in 1924, which established the Diyanet as part of the Kemalist doctrine of the Republic. Its purpose was to oversee "all provisions concerning faith and worship aspects of the religion of Islam, and the administration of religious institutions". The Diyanet symbolized the paradox of creating a significant religious apparatus to uphold the constitutional principle of secularism (Billion, 2011). This institutionalization aimed to govern religious matters and contribute to maintaining public order, a task seemingly at odds with secularization efforts.

Nevertheless, this endeavor echoed classical Islamic political theory, wherein rulers were entrusted with the duty to avert disorder or *fitna* (Gözaydın, 2008, p. 218). *Fitna*, denoting any form of societal disruption or challenge to legitimate authority, epitomizes a formidable threat to the stability of social order, encompassing civil unrest, political strife and religious turmoil. As Ayyubi (1992) articulates, it represents a grave menace to the social fabric. This concern materialized in the concerted secularization endeavors of the period and coincided with a nation-building process that aimed to forge a collective Turkish national identity primarily based on the Sunni Muslim element (Yavuz, 2003; Zürcher, 2010).

As elucidated by Şar (2019), the nation-building process inevitably requires establishing and disseminating a shared 'national' identity to unite all citizens. However, in Turkey, the ambivalent notion of unity between religion and nation did not fully satisfy all segments of society. Despite the Republic of Turkey being established under the banner of secularism and effectively marginalized Islam's public and political presence, the significant role of Islam in shaping the identity and portrayal of the Turkish nation has remained unchanged (Şen, 2010; Şar, 2019). Consequently, the Republic's sustained adherence to the

concept of the ummah (Mardin, 1983) potentially catalyzed the emergence of diverse factions within society vying to define the concept of "us" as a nation (Alaranta, 2015). In this respect, as Gürpınar and Kenar (2015, p. 64) aptly note, "the coining of its name as Diyanet (piety) rather than din (religion) was no coincidence … because it implied that this new institution would regulate and monitor not the religion itself, but rather only matters of belief and worship".

The Diyanet and its sermons have played a major role in both fostering the nation-building efforts that the modern state needed, and in permeating society with the regulations required by the secularization process (Gürpınar and Kenar, 2015; Peker, 2016; Parlak, 2022). With the advent of the Republic, sermons became a fundamental component of the centralized modern state, symbolizing the secularization endeavor while also influencing and perpetuating all societal power dynamics. Nevertheless, the comprehensive efforts to modernize and Turkify Islam during the 1930s, such as promoting the use of Turkish in Qur'anic readings, calls to prayer, sermons, and worship (Peker, 2020), gradually began to undermine the once-dominant sermons and the Diyanet as an institution (Gözaydın, 2008; 2020). Ironically, while these attempts aimed to depoliticize Islam, they not only shaped a unique, individualized interpretation of Islam but also led to a gradual yet profound politicization of the Diyanet (Gürpınar and Kenar, 2015).

The gradual institutionalization of the Diyanet's structure became evident with the reconfiguration of its administrative framework at both central and provincial levels, as outlined by Budget Law No. 1452, enacted on June 30, 1929. At that time, the standardization and harmonization of civil servants' remuneration within the Diyanet coincided with a noticeable slowdown in the establishment of new mosques. Subsequently, in 1931, Law No. 1827 prompted a significant shift in administrative responsibilities, transferring substantial authority previously held by the Diyanet to the Directorate of Pious Foundations. This transfer

resulted in a notable diminishment of the Diyanet's jurisdiction. In response to these changes, Law No. 2800 on the Organization and Duties of the Diyanet was enacted on June 22, 1935, marking the first organizational law governing the structure and functions of the Diyanet.

The 1940s marked a turning point for Turkish democracy, with the establishment of multi-party politics in 1946 ushered in greater freedom of expression for various ideologies and movements, including religious ones (Göle, 2005; Gözaydın, 2008; Şar, 2019; Korkut, 2016; Peker, 2016, 2020). During this period, a discernable shift in the educational landscape, which facilitated the establishment of imam training schools to meet the growing demand for trained religious clergy (Kara, 2005). This development occurred against the backdrop of the government's comprehensive oversight of religion and its concurrent endeavor to reinvigorate Islam under centralized state guidance while simultaneously pursuing a path of secularization (Gözaydın, 2006; Korkut, 2016; Peker, 2020). Nonetheless, the ambitious project of radical modernization envisioned for the new Turkey (Göle, 2005) remained a constant source of apprehension for Islamic groups. Confronted with mounting insecurities, these groups strategically sought to consolidate their societal standing through a calculated pursuit of power. This strategic endeavor culminated in the formation of a clientelist network, forging intricate ties between Islamic factions and right-wing political entities, thereby setting in motion an unpredictable trajectory characterized by the burgeoning influence of Islam within the public sphere in Turkey. Consequently, right-wing political parties garnered increased electoral support by aligning with previously prohibited religious orders, establishing diverse connections that broadened their sphere of influence in exchange for promised bloc votes (Çitak, 2020).

During the 7th Congress of the Republican People's Party (CHP) in November 1947, comprehensive debates unfolded concerning the conventional *laiklik* policies that had marginalized Islam throughout the single-party era (1923-1946). This period marked "an

attempt at reconciliation with Islam" (Gözaydın, 2008, p. 222), with proposals to soften these policies and suggestions that religion, which had been placed in the background, could potentially serve as a unifying force in society (TBMM CHP 7. Olağanüstü Kongresi, 1947). Ultimately, for some scholars (Berkes, 1973; Adak, 2020), this process permitted independent religious expression and contributed to society's eventual de-secularization and re-Islamization, highlighting a perceived fragility of Turkish *laiklik*. Between 1946 and 1950, religion and the policies of *laiklik* appeared to evolve into tools of electioneering, largely influenced by the emergence of political Islamism (Roy, 2005). This situation continued to persist in the following decades, characterized by Islamic mobilization against "assertive secularism" and resulting in societal divisions and the adoption of a more permissive, "passive" form of secularism (Kuru, 2009).

Kuru distinguishes between "assertive" and "passive" secularism based on the state's stance towards religion, which depends on the specific relations and perceptions of political elites during the nation-state formation process (Kuru, 2009; Kuru et al., 2013). This predicament highlights the complexity of the relationship between religion and the state within the framework of Turkish *laiklik*. This evolving political climate ultimately played a pivotal role in the downfall of the single-party government. The change in government facilitated the swift reforms by the new interim government under President Şemsettin Günaltay (16 January 1949 – 22 May 1950), which restructured the Diyanet through Act No. 5634 on April 29, 1950.

The gradual evolution of the Diyanet continued with legal enactments that replaced the old Ottoman term *Reislik* with the modern Turkish *Başkanlık*. This change was accompanied by the creation of new organizational units within the Diyanet and the restoration of the management of mosques, worship places, and mosque personnel to the Diyanet, which had previously been transferred to the Presidency General for Foundations by the 1931 Budget

Act (DİB kurumsal tarihçe, 2013). Diyanet was initially incorporated into the state apparatus as a constitutional institution in the 1961 Constitution; however, its specific functions were not specified until the 1982 Constitution. The process, which began with the CHP's loss of power, continued with the rise of political Islam in Turkey. The enactment of Law No. 633 on the Establishment and Duties of the Presidency of Religious Affairs on August 15, 1965[5], heralded the footsteps of the establishment of a structure radically opposed to the mentality of the founding elite. Most of these regulations foresaw the duties of the Diyanet as "carrying out affairs related to the beliefs, worship, and moral foundations of Islam, enlightening Turkish society about religion, and managing places of worship".

This process was followed by the establishment of the General Directorate of Education Services, which is responsible for creating sermons and mandatory school textbooks on religion, as well as staffing mosques and Quran courses through the Diyanet (Fabbe, 2015). In 1976, a legislative process was initiated with the aim of significantly restructuring the existing system of religious affairs by the parliament. In this legislation, No. 1982 of 1976, a proposal was made to include the phrase "the Presidency consists of a central organization, a provincial organization, and an overseas organization" under Law No. 633. However, this amendment was deemed procedurally inappropriate by then-President Korutürk and was subsequently annulled by the Constitutional Court, delaying its effect until 2010.

Especially, notable absence of a centralized clergy or a legally defined Muslim community in Turkey has officially justified the state's intervention in religion matters (Gözaydın, 2008). This lack of an ordained clergy in Islam necessitates state management of religious affairs, thereby legitimizing the state's supervisory role in providing religious services through both public and private entities, which aligns with the principle of *laiklik*

[5] This act is a reflection of the altering politics of religion in Turkey over 40 years, starting with attempts to "reform Islam" and came to grips with it.

(Şar, 2019). This standpoint of the Republic of Turkey allowed the administrative apparatus to conceptualize tasks such as the "management of places of worship" and the "provision of accurate publications of the Qur'an" as public services aimed at addressing a collective need to disseminate and inculcate the official view on religion and Islam. Consequently, duties like "enlightening society on religion" and "religious education" became explicitly part of official policy.

Considering this, the varying policies of administrations over time —ranging from strict positivism to a somewhat religious stance —provide compelling evidence that the politics of religion and the sociology of religion in Turkey are not distinct entities. As societies become more complex through demographic, economic and social changes, the boundaries between religious and public spheres become increasingly differentiated (Davison, 1998). Although the Republic assimilated the Empire's "Islamic authority in refurbished national institutions, it used this power for the opposite objective of deemphasizing Islam, which went on until the end of the CHP rule in 1950" (Peker, 2020, p. 321). Religion and the Diyanet, once actively downplayed as a unifying force during one-party rule, began to regain strength with the implementation of what would later be known as the Turkish-Islamic synthesis. Islam, in its desire to return to the past and its quest to embrace modernization with a renewed conservative identity, found new opportunities as an oppositional ideology.

1.5 Maturing of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis in the 1980s

The ideological gap between nationalist secularism and the Turkish-Islamic synthesis manifests itself in contemporary Turkish political and social life, particularly in the deep division between secular urban and conservative rural areas. As society transitioned to a multi-party system, Yavuz (2020) argues that the main line of political division has been between those who embraced Kemalism and its secularizing reforms and those who resisted

these reforms due to their adherence to traditional values and Islamic principles (Demiralp, 2012). The Democrat Party's victory over the CHP in 1950 exemplified this dynamic as a winner-takes-all scenario, consolidating the DP as a pro-Islamist populist party that, to some extent, embraced liberalism (Lord, 2018). This shift gave rise to a structure wherein traditional bonds of solidarity were recontextualized into a modern setting —a fundamental characteristic of political Islam (Roy, 2005). As Yavuz and Öztürk (2019) argue, the aggressive, top-down imposition of secular policies transformed Islam into a symbol of resistance and a shared ideology among the marginalized groups or peripheries. Several scholars have noted that secularism and modernity were embedded in elite ideology, while Islamism was associated with the periphery (Öztürk and Yavuz, 2019; Filiz and Uluç, 2006; Yıldız, 2010; Kurt, 2021; Mardin, 1973). This dynamic is particularly evident among those migrating from rural areas to major urban centers like Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir, where they integrate into the cultural and religious life of these cities. These new migrants brought with them their own interpretations of Islam, which could be characterized as "folk Islam" or "folk culture".

Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1968), a prominent Turkish Islamic intellectual, argued for the representation of peripheral cultures by presenting Islam as a "hard ideological system through which to construct a new society, a new morality, and a new type of man" (Çınar and Duran, 2008, p.28). As Çınar and Duran (2008) mention, Kısakürek often imbued nationalism with Islamic overtones and values, attributing this to the significant influence of nationalism on Turkish Islamism and the idea that nationalism functioned as both a "shield and a vehicle" for expressing Islamist demands. This approach, which directly challenged Kemalism, was perceived as compatible with the prevailing political trends of the Cold War era, as it sought to establish an alternative ideological framework that shaped a national identity based on ethnicity and religion. This stance aimed to counter the growing influence of left-wing

movements (Yavuz, 2003; Zürcher, 2010) and resonated with individuals who felt marginalized due to Islam's limited presence in the public sphere.

This perspective emerged as a response to the Kemalist principle of *laiklik,* which glorified pre-Islamic Turkic civilizations. With the rise of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis and waves of rural-urban migration in Turkey, Islamists began to abandon their traditional ways of living, adapting instead to the values of modern city life (Roy, 2005). This representation of *Volkskultur* later became the dominant ideological construct of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which fused elements of "Turkification, Islamization and Modernization" to forge a new national identity that has endured to the present day (Lorasdağı, 2010; Kurt, 2021).

These three distinct elements (Turkification, Islamization and Modernization) integrated one segment of society into the system while automatically excluding another (Kurt, 2021). This ideological foothold significantly influenced political parties beginning in the 1960s (Şen, 2019). From this date onwards, Turkey experienced four military interventions: in 1960 and 1980, ruling governments were overthrown, whereas, in 1971 and 1997, the military forced governments to step down. These interventions were frequently construed as 'repressive measures' by contemporary conservatives and marked critical junctures in Turkish history. One of the rationales behind these interventions stemmed from the apprehension that Islamist governments were perceived as threats to Turkish secularism, thereby instilling a constant fear among Islamists of potential military intervention. Consequently, the political landscape in Turkey underwent irreversible changes due to these "repressive measures" following the events of the 1960s. After the military intervention that overthrew the conservative DP, the National Order Party (MNP) (1970-1971), Turkey's first party with Islamic roots under Necmettin Erbakan, emerged in the political arena. However, its existence was short-lived, as it could not sustain its activities following the 1971 military memorandum, which claimed it was "acting against *laiklik*" due to reasons such as Erbakan's

radical speeches on re-opening Hagia Sophia as a mosque (Taşdemir, 2023). Nevertheless, the resurgence of the movement did not take long, as it made a second attempt through the National Salvation Party (MSP) (1972-1981). By utilizing its conservative peripheral base, this party had mainly addressed socioeconomic problems by using Islamic language and presenting an Islamic ethos as a panacea. However, like all other conservative political parties, it was also defuncted by the 1980 military coup (Çınar and Duran, 2008).

MNP marked the initiation of what would later be termed the "National Outlook Movement" or "Erbakancılık," founded by Necmettin Erbakan (Çaha and Baykal, 2017), and found its theoretical roots in a mainstream Islamist movement named "Independents Movement," which emerged in 1969. It mostly compromised the theoretical debates such as Kısakürek's (1968) concept of Islamism and Kafesoğlu's (1985) ideological manifesto of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, developed by the group known as the 'Hearth of the Intellectuals' (Aydınlar Ocağı). This ideological manifesto historically posited that the pre-Islamic religious beliefs of the Turkic civilizations inherently encompassed elements of Islamic faith (Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı Yayını, 2010). Furthermore, the synthesis framed Turkey as the chosen and most powerful nation within the Islamic world, boasting its military, scientific, and theological superiority while suggesting an imaginary and symbolic identification of "the Turk is united in Islam and Islam in the Turk" (Dursun, 2006). Starting with 1970s, the alignment of Islam with nationalism provided Turkish Islamists with a platform to express Islamist demands. Ultimately, the repeated closure of Islamist parties by the Turkish Constitutional Court, due to their perceived role as centers of anti-Kemalist and reactionary activities, transformed this alignment into "a shield and a vehicle" for Islamists (Usul, 2007).

Particularly after 1980, when the military intervened, the coup plotters justified their actions by claiming the country was on the brink of civil war, attributing this threat to

“reactionary and other deviant ideologies that have replaced Kemalism” (Kabakçı, 2016, p. 63). According to Guida (2005), following the coup of September 12, 1980, Kemalism was no longer solely the ideology of the state elite but had reverted to its original conception as a broader mentality. This shift is evident in Article 24 of the 1982 Constitution, which mandates “instruction in religious culture and moral education shall be compulsory in the curricula of primary and secondary schools”. This mandate illustrates how religion became an unofficial foundation for the reconstruction of the state and society, representing an effort to redefine the logic of unification of education within the public sphere. Additionally, the expansion of state-run religious services and the increased role of the Diyanet gained momentum, transforming it into a major transnational player (Çitak, 2012; Öztürk, 2018) for the “promotion of national solidarity and unity”. This development not only led to a nationalization of Islam but also to an Islamization of the nation (Karakaş, 2007; Gözaydın, 2008).

While all these events were unfolding, the groundwork was being laid for the establishment of the Welfare Party (RP) (1983–1996), the third party to emerge from the National Outlook. Unlike its predecessors, the RP adopted a relatively secular stance by addressing everyday issues and expanding its support base beyond the confines of mosques. Drawing from dominant intellectual currents in the West, the party employed post-colonial, communitarian, and post-modern arguments to critique Kemalism, positivism, and modernity (Çınar and Kadıoğlu, 1999).

The integration of religion into state affairs intensified after the 1980s, as religion became a central tool in the hands of the state and military for comprehensive social engineering within the framework of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis (Kaya, 2012; Şar, 2019). Roy (2005) describes this process as “Resocialization,” entailing a societal reinterpretation of Islam to align with prevailing values, employing a language of moral elevation and solidarity

that particularly emphasized the marginalized, oppressed, impoverished, and downtrodden, highlighting their victimization.

This gradual transition away from secularism became evident on June 20, 1986, when the Atatürk Culture, Language, and History Society, endorsed the "Hearth of the Intellectuals" ideas, officially recognizing a report that portrayed Turkish culture as a synthesis of Islamic and steppe civilizations (Elhan, 2016; Tittensor, 2021). After the military junta was dismissed on November 6, 1983, conditions were favorable for the formation of the first civilian government, led by Turgut Özal of the Motherland Party (ANAP) (Şen, 2010). Özal, who believed that the country's challenges were rooted in its identity crises, encouraged a synthesis of Western and Islamic values (Yılmaz, 2009; Marcou, 2004). Following the acceptance of this ideology, the newly elected Prime Minister Özal, who had a religious background, implemented minor amendments to the Turkish Penal Code that eased restrictions on Islamic activities, creating a more permissive environment for Islamic movements (Akyeşilmen and Özcan, 2014).

Consequently, there was an increase in the budget for Diyanet, accompanied by the expansion of its services transnationally, particularly in Germany, which has a significant Turkish immigrant population, under the umbrella of the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DİTİB) (Öztürk, 2018; Öztürk and Sözeri, 2018). This development transformed Diyanet from "an agent of the nationalization of religion and society" to "an agent of interfaith dialogue" (Yılmaz and Albayrak, 2022, p. 80). This period is also recognized for Turkey's efforts to establish a comprehensive system of neoliberal, political, and social democracy (Karpat, 2002) blending nationalism with the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (Elhan, 2016) under the guise of "Conservative modernism" (Gülalp, 2003). During this process, Özal spoke of 'a Turkic world stretching from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China' as a metaphor for the expansive cultural identity-building process (Ekşi, 2016).

After the era of Turgut Özal in Turkey, conservative perspectives heavily influenced by Naqshbandi-Khalidi order began to shape the country's political landscape, fostering numerous connections between the state and religious orders (Cornell, 2015). Karakaş (2007) notes that during this period, religious orders and brotherhoods that went underground began to re-enchant the public sphere. They established Quranic schools and social institutions, and gained influence in media, financial, and industrial sectors, leveraging the economic prosperity generated during the Özal era, which enriched the Islamic middle class and the Anatolian bourgeoisie. This economic prosperity subsequently catalyzed the momentum that has bolstered the political ascendancy of Turkey's current ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) (Yılmaz, 2009; Marcou, 2004; Çaha and Baykal, 2017).

Despite restrictions on Islamic activities following the coup on September 12, 1980, such as the headscarf ban which excluded many women from education and employment, these restrictions were not fully applied to Diyanet (Mutluer, 2018). This exception was due to the pivotal role played by Diyanet in promoting a concept of "National Ummah," somewhat distinct from the broader Muslim Ummah (Saçmalı, 2013), and efforts to meld religious identity with nationalism under military tutelage (Altınay and Bora, 2002). The National Security Council exercised strict control over Diyanet, leading it to the adopt a militaristic and nationalistic tone in its sermons. These were aimed at addressing both potential Islamist threat (Mutluer, 2018) and separatist Kurdish nationalism, upholding the twin pillars of the Kemalist state ideology; *laiklik* and nationalism during the 1990s (Uğur, 2019). This period was also characterized by a deep reverence for the glorious past of the Ottoman Empire and a zenith in appreciation for the Turkish-Islamic culture and the arts (Çetinsaya, 1999; Elhan, 2016).

1.6 De-secularization and Re-Islamization of Turkey

The resurgence of appreciation for Turkish-Islamic culture provided a platform for religious-centered parties to re-enter the political arena. This materialized when the National Outlook Movement's Welfare Party (RP) entered an already rigid political landscape under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan during the 1989 municipal elections, and later formed an alliance with the nationalist far-right in the 1991 parliamentary elections (Marcou, 2004). Claiming to represent the voice of the oppressed (Yılmaz, 2021) and emphasizing the everyday concerns of the populace through intimate connections (White, 2014), the RP aimed to champion the demands and interests of the emerging Anatolian bourgeoisie and Muslim middle class. Following the death of President Özal in 1993, this strategic approach resulted in electoral triumphs for the RP in 1994 and 1995. The RP's success in municipal and parliamentary elections, respectively, secured major cities like Ankara and Istanbul, positioning it as the leading party in Turkey. This triumph reasserted "the secular-religious divide at the forefront of Turkish politics" (Turam, 2012, p. 198) and led to the Islamization of the public sphere and the politicization of religion (Karakaş, 2007). Although criticized for its soft rhetoric by its hardliner Islamist supporters, the RP shifted towards a more radical and populist discourse on a vaguely Islamic platform to attract a broader base (Kamrava, 1998; White, 2014; Lord, 2018; Yılmaz, 2021) and oriented Turkey towards the Muslim world (Yılmaz, 2021), shifting focus from socio-economic to cultural issues. In 1997, the RP raised the issue of "building a mosque in Taksim Square" and "transforming Hagia Sophia into a mosque," which initially appeared as a local concern pertaining to Istanbul, particularly advocated by the city's mayor, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. These discussions later evolved into a national debate concerning the future of *laiklik* in Turkey (Gülalp, 2003).

The military, widely acknowledged as the custodian of Kemalism, was prepared to intervene should a democratic election resulted in an Islamist victory (Gellner, 1987; Bacik,

2010). Initially, the RP reacted cautiously to the military's stance. However, as events unfolded nationwide and the military began framing these tensions as threats to *laiklik*, a decisive moment came during the National Security Council meeting on February 28, 1997. This meeting resulted in an ultimatum that led to the dissolution of the RP in 1998 by the Constitutional Court, which declared it a "center of activities contrary to the principle of secularism"[6] (Kabakçı, 2016). This event, known as the February 28 process in 1997, was dubbed "a balance adjustment to democracy" (Evrensel, 2012) and marked a variation of the 1980 coup. Unlike a traditional military coup, this intervention was termed a "post-modern coup" (Dinçşahin (2012; Yılmaz and Bashirov, 2018; Turam, 2012; Cizre and Çınar, 2003; Aydınlı, 2011), where the military exerted influence not through overt force but through systemic pressure on Islamic activities at all societal levels. Following this, the new government began to enact legislation and implement measures as advised by the military (Gülalp, 2003).

As Kramer (2000) argues, the architects of the February 28 process adhered to a purist interpretation of Kemalism. During this period, rigorous policies implemented, including modifications to primary and secondary school curricula to reinforce the secularist ideals and counter political Islam. This rationalization extended to all levels of education, where Kemalism became a central theme in courses, and notable changes included in the closure of school of imams and preachers (*imam-hatip*) and introduced an eight-year mandatory schooling system (Cizre, 2008). Religious matters began to be seen as a matter of national security and a threat to the Republic's stability, prompting military institutions and personnel to play an active role in educational reforms. In March 1998, as part of the February 28 process, a law redefining the role of the Diyanet was enacted, centralizing the preparation and delivery of Friday sermons (Kara, 2000; Saçmalı, 2013; Gürpınar and Kenar, 2016; Lord,

[6] for decision of constitutional court https://siyasipartikararlar.anayasa.gov.tr/SP/1998/1/1

2018). This period also saw extended restrictions on state control over mosques, with the Diyanet tasked with supervising mosque operations, though no budget was allocated for mosque construction or maintenance. These centralized measures caused discomfort among conservatives, who viewed them as an excessive state intrusion. The Constitutional Court's dissolution of the RP in 1998, followed by the short-lived existence of its replacement, the Virtue Party (FP), which served as a transitional party during this process, thrived on the concept of 'conservative democracy' and eventually led to a division within the movement, setting the stage for the emergence of the ruling AKP (Marcou, 2004).

1.7 Rebirth of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis: Towards a "New Turkey"

The events of 1997-1998 significantly affected the conservative factions in Turkey. Following the dissolution of the RP by the Constitutional Court in 1998, various private companies associated with 'Islamic Capital' faced scrutiny, and numerous Quranic courses operated by religious foundations were shut down. Moreover, the issue of wearing the Islamic headscarf became emblematic of what was termed *irtica*, or "the desire to turn back the clock" (Gülalp, 2003; Akgönül, 2022). In response to these radical political restrictions, conservatives founded the short-lived Virtue Party (FP), which acted as a bridge to a new phase of "conservative democracy" but also led to internal fragmentation within the movement (Marcou, 2004).

During this period, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the former mayor of Istanbul and then a new MP candidate for the FP from Siirt, delivered a speech that resulted in his ten-month imprisonment in 1999, positioning him as a victim of the February 28 process (Dağı, 2013). This oppressive atmosphere led Islamists to adopt a more cautious and defensive stance to safeguard their political interests. As they reached the pinnacle of their influence, this

environment facilitated a transition from Islamism to Post-Islamism (Karakaş, 2007; Dağı, 2013), paving the way for the emergence of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

The AKP, distinct from its predecessors, underwent significant revisions in its political image, discourse, and affiliations—transforming both rhetorically and practically (Yildiz, 2008; Kirdiş, 2021). Navigating through these restrictive times, the new conservatives learned from past challenges, aiming to regain trust across Turkish society, including the secular bureaucratic elite, notwithstanding their previous associations with the RP and FP. Hence, promising to foster a more democratic, open, and pluralistic society, the AKP emerged as a "post-Islamist party carrying a passive secularist vision in a post-secular society" (Çitak, 2020, p.168). The party found an opportunity to prosper with a younger generation of Islamic-conservative activists who realized that toning down the Islamist message (Yavuz, 2009) and intensifying grassroots activism could potentially help them escape the secular military oversight of the period. This group, known as the 'innovators' within the AKP, including Abdullah Gül (who would later be the president of Turkey), and the former mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (the embodiment of victimization due to imprisonment), and young reformists from the NOM, shared a commitment to learning from the past, and emphasized consensus-seeking and dialogue-building processes, and moderate political discourse (Cizre and Çınar, 2003; Gülalp, 2003; Dağı, 2013) firmly distancing themselves from the old-school Islamism of the NOM (Yildiz, 2008; Kirdiş, 2019, 2021).

The contradictory spirit of the period has prompted scholars to frequently debate the tension between freedom of conscience and religion on one hand, and *laiklik*, a defining quality of the Republic, on the other (Gözaydın, 2006; Turam, 2012; Özyürek, 2012; Kabakçı, 2016; Mutluer, 2018). The earlier state alignment with the Turkish-Islamic synthesis significantly contributed to the rise of Islam as a political force, coupled with regime shifts, sparking mass mobilization in favor of radical right-wing ideologies and including radical

Islamist figures such as Erbakan and Erdoğan in mainstream politics (Tuğal, 2002; White, 2014). Erdoğan, who hails from Kasimpaşa, a poor district of Istanbul, has prospered as 'one of the have-nots' and has garnered the sympathy of many voters, effectively mobilizing support around the themes of Islam and nationalism. Lord (2018) explains that political Islam can serve as an ideology of protest against secular states in religious societies, driven by bottom-up mobilization that can potentially facilitate democratization. Positioned as an alternative to the status-quo, the AKP framed Turkey's economic challenges as rooted in elitism, proposing the vision of a "New Turkey" where the military and judiciary would take a backseat and religion would be more publicly visible (Keyman 2014).

In its early years, the AKP shifted its discourse from the previous assertion "that Turkey was not religious enough" to a new assertion "that Turkey was not democratic enough" (Mecham, 2004, p. 346). This shift initially prompted the party to initially postpone addressing the immediate concerns of its hardliner supporters (Çitak, 2020) and to focus instead on promoting religious freedom in Turkey. Adopting this liberal-sounding rhetoric, the AKP garnered sympathy from a wider range of societal segments to foster a new form of Islamism that was subtly veiled under the rhetoric of 'human rights' and 'freedom of conscience' (Akgönül, 2022), and eventually claimed to represent a 'conservative democracy'. As noted by Bulaç (2003), this concept of 'conservative democracy' was characterized by a focus on service-based rather than identity-based politics, which provided a strong foundation of support among many voters. Ultimately, this period heralded a significant increase in the visibility and influence of religious institutions like the Diyanet, religious schools (Imam-Hatips), and non-state religious actors catering to Islamic elites (Kirdiş, 2021). The integration of non-state religious actors into politics has been a prominent aspect of Turkish political Islam since the Özal period, with the state's implicit relationship

with religion gradually achieving coherence within the Turkish political tradition (Lorasdağı, 2010; Subaşı, 2017).

As the AKP solidified its authority, it found a primary political ally in the Gülenist movement, led by the religious cleric Fettullah Gülen, known for its extensive network of domestic and international connections (Tittensor, 2021). The movement adopted the term "hizmet," meaning "service," to encapsulate Gülen's vision of a better world and to signify its commitment to interfaith/intercultural dialogue activism in the public sphere (Uğur, 2019). In alignment with AKP's policies, the Gülen movement broadened and secularized its discourse, focusing on its missionary objective of 'engineering' an educated yet pious 'golden generation' of Muslims dedicated to bottom-up development, and obviously contrasted with Kemalist top-down secularism (Tittensor, 2021; Uğur, 2021; Tee, 2021).

The Gülen movement reached its zenith in influence during this period through its close ties with the government and many governmental institutions (Balcı, 2015). This network was instrumental in supporting the AKP, utilizing its positions within the police and judiciary to launch several legal actions against secular opponents within the state from 2007 onwards, significantly bolstering the AKP's hold on power (Fabbe, 2015). Eventually, Gülen's Hizmet movement, known for its intricate network of globally operating schools and businesses, has increasingly been perceived as a hybrid entity, combining elements of a relatively benign religious community with those of a covert Islamist movement aiming to seize power in Turkey (Öktem and Akkoyunlu, 2016; Balcı, 2015; Uğur, 2019; Cornell, 2015).

As the AKP expanded its influence, it sought not only to reduce the hold of the military but also decentralize the Diyanet. In 2006, oversight of sermons transitioned from central control to localized sermon committees in each city, under the provincial mufti offices.

These committees convened weekly to decide on sermon topics and finalize content (Gibbon, 2009). The AKP's endeavours to dismantle secular military tutelage through gradual changes in social dynamics, aimed at fostering a "pious" society, was termed by the party as a "silent revolution" (AKP, 2023). Nonetheless, the AKP's increasing presence in the religious sphere and these gradual changes unsettled Turkish military officials, leading to public statements that voiced concerns over the potential rise of regressive Islamic tendencies. They assured the public that the Turkish Armed Forces would closely monitor any such developments with utmost diligence (Aydınlı, 2011). Tensions between the military and civilian leaderships reached a climax in spring 2007, as the AKP-led parliament prepared to elect a new president, with widespread expectations that the nominee would have an Islamist orientation, potentially someone like Abdullah Gül or Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Aydınlı, 2011; Aknur, 2013).

On April 14, 2007, the Atatürkist Thought Association (Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği) and the Association in Support of Contemporary Life (Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği) organized a massive demonstration in Ankara's Tandoğan Square to counter the escalating religious influence within secular Turkey. Utilizing slogans like 'Türkiye laiktir, laik kalacak' (Turkey is a secular state and will remain so), 'Orduya uzanan eller kırılsın' (Down with the hands that encroach on the army) and 'Her şey vatan için' (Everything is for the nation) (DW, 14 April 2007; Reuters, 29 April 2007; Evrensel, 6 May 2007), they aimed to safeguard secular-Republican values and express opposition to what they saw as an Islamist-leaning presidential candidate, perceived as a symbol of religious unrest. This event led to the release of controversial statements on the website of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces, referred to as the E-coup or E-memorandum, echoing the events of February 28, 1997. The E-coup conveyed a forceful message and perceived threat (Yılmaz, 2021), allowing the government to portray itself as a victim of military interference (Aydınlı, 2011), which precipitated calls for elections amid concerns about the erosion of secularism (Aknur, 2013).

This was followed by a series of government-led initiatives between 2007 and 2010, which involved the arrest of many military officials and figures known for their staunch secularist and nationalist views. These government-led initiatives have intensified in waves involving higher-ranking figures, particularly after 2008 and named as Ergenekon trials (BBC, 6 January 2012). Initially, these trials were seen as an opportunity to hold the perpetrators of extrajudicial killings, torture, and other human rights violations (Sinclair-Webb, 2013), and to assert civilian control over the military (Aydinli, 2011; Heper, 2011). However, they swiftly evolved into politicized and polarizing proceedings (Taş, 2018). Many individuals were charged with offenses including 'membership in an armed terrorist organization,' 'attempting to overthrow the government of the Turkish Republic by use of violence and coercion,' 'inciting people to armed rebellion against the government of the Turkish Republic,' 'encouraging military insubordination,' and 'inciting people to hatred and enmity' (ALJAZEERA, 5 August 2013).

These trials gradually evolved into a "witch-hunt against the opponents of the AKP and the Gülen movement" (Uğur, 2019 p.14). After these trials, the Turkish military struggled to regain its former political influence. The question of whether these attempts aimed at fostering democratization in Turkey or were merely strategies to consolidate the AKP's power while limiting military influence remains unsettled (Gürdoğan, 2010). The end of military tutelage under secularist control marked a critical juncture in Turkish political history, leading to an era where "conservatism, rooted in Sunni Islamic principles and aligned with authoritarianism, and dogmatism, became a prominent aspect of Turkish society and politics" (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu, 2009, p. 149). Furthermore, after 2010, President Erdoğan expressed his desire to raise a 'pious generation' (Sol Haber, February 04, 2012; Diken,

February 27, 2016) by initiating reforms such as restructuring the education system along religious lines and strengthening Imam-Hatip schools[7].

After these events, significant changes followed for the Diyanet. In July 2010, there was a significant expansion of the Diyanet's areas of authority through the enactment of a new law[8]. This legislation empowered the Diyanet to expand its existing departments with additional units and areas of responsibility. This expansion facilitated the reestablishment of its second permanent committee, the Presidency of the Board of Review and Interpretation of Mushafs, tasked with providing guidance to those seeking to publish the Holy Quran. In addition to this, two new departments were established. The first, the General Directorate of Management Services, is tasked with developing projects related to service buildings, Quran courses, Training Center buildings, as well as mosque projects to ensure high-quality materials and services for the Diyanet. The second, the Press and Public Relations Consultancy, enabled the Diyanet to launch its radio and television channel, utilizing national radio and TV frequencies provided free of charge by the National Radio and Television Agency (RTÜK). Moreover, permission was granted for the establishment of a Religious Higher Education Center to provide specialized professional training, enhancing the employment benefits for Diyanet personnel. Additionally, the mandate for providing religious services was expanded to encompass settings beyond mosques, such as prisons, juvenile correction facilities, hospitals, and senior care facilities (Yıldırım, 2011). Figure 1 below offers a visual representation of the Diyanet's enlarged institutional structure, illustrating these changes and additions:

[7] Traditionally, they served as vocational institutions aimed at preparing individuals for roles withing state-run religious establishments

[8] Law no. 6002 On the Establishment and Duties of the Presidency of Religious Affairs amending Law No. 633

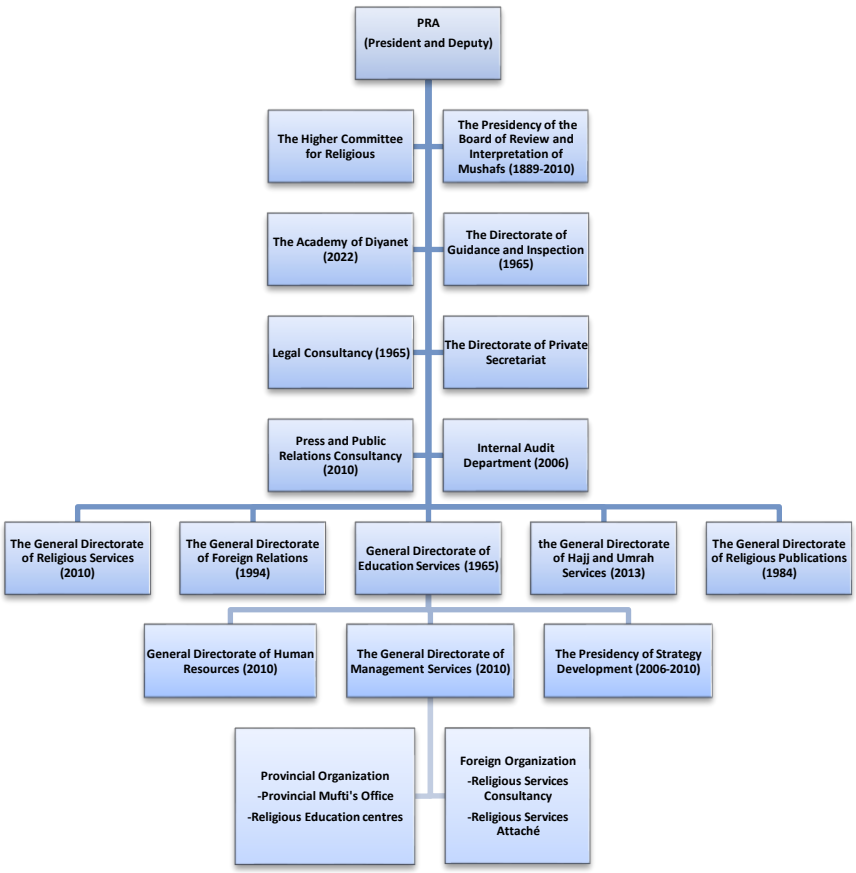

Figure 1.Diyanet's Organizational Structure

As a massive organization endowed with a broad mandate, a significant budget, and considerable influence, the Diyanet began to assert control and establish an extensive network within the public sphere. Article 2 of the new law solidified its Organizational structure within the state system, declaring the central, provincial, and overseas organizations as the three pillars of the presidency. Over time, the Diyanet has expanded the scope of its activities and introduced new missions to its organizational structure. The expansion of religious influence led to growing frictions between the government and its previously closest ally, the Gülenist Movement. In response to the AKP's promotion of an Islamic *weltanschauung* against secularism, coupled with rising complaints of authoritarianism, one of the largest social mobilizations in modern Turkish history occurred, known as the Gezi Park protests of 2013 (Gürcan and Peker, 2014; Rogenhofer, 2018). These protests resulted in Islam being attributed with a nationalist character in the definition of 'the people', rather than serving as a unifying

element across ethnic and sectarian lines (Yabancı, 2022) and the adoption of populist strategy that fuelled polarization (Rogenhofer, 2018).

Weakened by the Gezi protests, the AKP's existing tensions with the Gülenist movement intensified in 2014. These tensions reached a climax with the 2016 coup attempt attributed to the movement, subsequently labeled as the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) by the government (Gözaydın, 2020). The failed military coup catalyzed a transition to a presidential system, prompted by the preceding internal divisions within the AKP. This transition consolidated power in the hands of President Erdoğan and ushered in a new political paradigm characterized by the leader's cultivation of emotional bonds with the populace, epitomized by the dichotomy of 'with us or against us' (Tekdemir, 2023).

The coup attempt is now reframed within a narrative of Turkish-Islamic martyrdom, aimed at shaping collective memory. This narrative has been prominently showcased on placards along highways and in city squares (Öktem and Akkoyunlu, 2016), fostering a sentiment of animosity directed towards perceived 'enemies' of the state. Scholars suggest (Öktem and Akkoyunlu, 2016; Ergin and Karakaya, 2017; Taş, 2018; Yılmaz, 2022; Hristov, 2019) that the utilization of emotions such as fear, anger, a readiness to sacrifice oneself for the homeland, and nostalgia—reviving a deep sense of restorative melancholy for a glorious past, notably the Ottoman Empire—serves as the foundational moment of President Erdoğan's 'New Turkey'.

The aspiration to forge a 'New Turkey', characterized by "Islamic values and a Muslim identity," has become integrated into the nationalist and statist loyalties of the youth (Yabancı, 2021, p. 485), "supporting the political ambitions of the AKP and engineering a new citizenry for the regime" (Yılmaz and Albayrak, 2022, p. 112). Simultaneously, the perception of identity and civilization, as conceptualized by former Minister of Foreign

Affairs and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, has begun to underpin the ideological axis of the AKP. Particularly in the post-Cold War era, there has been a significant reimagining of collective consciousness and a perception of unity that transcends nation-state boundaries (Özkan, 2014). Territories now recognized as part of the Islamic cultural region, due to their historical ties to the Ottoman Empire, have engendered shared identities deeply entrenched in religious, cultural, tribal, and national affiliations, fostering an alternative collective imperial identity (Tümertekin and Özgüç, 2002). This emerging identity challenges the dominant Kemalist ideology because, within the exclusive framework of nation-states, younger generations are negatively affected by 'dehistoricization' and 'false-self' shaping their thought worlds and presuming a more inclusive and adaptive civilizational identity (Davutoğlu, 1997). In contrast to the model proposed by Huntington (1996), which emphasizes clashes between civilizations, Davutoğlu's concept promotes ideas such as the 'alliance of civilizations' and 'inter-civilizational dialogue', providing a legitimizing ground for nationalist conservatism that redefines identity, particularly bolstered by Islamism as championed by the AKP. This ideological stance garners legitimacy from widespread popular support across diverse societal segments, commonly referred to as Islamism (Aktürk, 2013). Although geographical identities with deep historical roots have fragmented since the emergence of nation-states in the nineteenth century, those identities transcending national boundaries continue to maintain functional significance, echoing their historical roles (Bölükbaşı, 2021). Today, the civilizational discourse of nationalist-conservative and Islamist politics seeks to construct a system that transcends traditional nation-state reflexes, particularly post-2016, by envisioning a broader geography perceived as linked to Turkey through religious and/or ethnic ties, or as remnants of imperial glory.

1.8 Conclusion: The AKP and the Diyanet Today

The AKP promotes the concept of the "New Turkey" to its diaspora through Diyanet and its extensive network of over 2,000 overseas mosques, complemented by a global digital outreach strategy (Öztürk, 2018). This effort has been described by The New York Times as a "latest front in Turkey's cultural wars," where the AKP is seen as "gradually incorporating religious elements into public life," aiming to reshape both Turkish society and its global community (Yeginsu, 2014). This religious agenda, previously suppressed by secularist policies, is purported to facilitate a resurgence of traditions that modernization has challenged (Bozdoğan, 1997). With the transition to a presidential system, Diyanet, now under direct presidential oversight, has refocused its efforts on administering religious affairs as a "religious service," thereby becoming a primary decision-maker on religious matters. Following the enactment of Law No. 633, Diyanet has delineated its strategic objectives, encompassing the production of qualified religious knowledge, enhancing the capabilities of religious officials, and ensuring the provision of religious services to all segments of society, including citizens residing abroad. In this international context, Diyanet has committed to preserving their identity and facilitating their integration into their host country, while also actively addressing social problems such as honor killings, domestic violence, substance abuse, and religious discrimination (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Stratejik Planı, 2009:2013). After being elevated by the president from the level of a general directorate to an undersecretariat in 2018, through Law No. 703, Diyanet has undergone significant reforms in its legal framework, duties, responsibilities, hierarchical structure, and management personnel (Gözaydın, 2020). Despite its expanded budget and organizational network, Diyanet's framework remains exclusive to Sunni Islam, which has attracted criticism for neglecting religious and political diversity (Gözaydın, 2020). Additionally, the Diyanet has portrayed activities that oppose national unity and religious integrity as a singular threat, denying any

role in the nation's unity and identity to groups other than Sunni Muslim Turks, which it regards as the predominant identity (Yıldırım, 2014). While its policies may sometimes seem benign, there are instances where they might not fully align with international human rights standards (Yıldırım, 2011; 2014), particularly in terms of accommodating diverse religious beliefs.

This Islamic orientation, as Göle (1997) suggests, fosters a religiously 'imagined political community,' uniting individuals through shared aspirations and spiritual ties. More recently, by leveraging civilizational discourse, the reframing of religion assumes the role of a galvanizing belief transcending the nation, seeking to stir popular support from the Islamic 'ummah' within the nation as a transboundary mobilizer against the 'other', while also promoting the creation of a more broadly imagined community or nostalgic homeland (Theodorou, 2022; Yavuz, 2020; Ergin and Karakaya, 2017; Yabancı, 2022). Positioned "at a different level of cultural and political space" than mere national discourse (Brubaker 2017, p. 1211), this strategy illustrates how the AKP has incorporated religion as a central component of its national-populist rhetoric and strategies bolstered by Diyanet, recognized in the literature as a form of "Islamist/Islamic populism" or "Civilizationist Populism" (Öktem and Akkoyunlu, 2016; Yilmaz, 2018, 2021; Yilmaz, Demir, and Morieson, 2021; Kirdiş, 2021; Kalaycı, 2022, Brubaker, 2017).

As the AKP sidelined its "elite" contenders in the military and the judiciary (Yılmaz et al., 2021) and consolidated its reach within the state, it began to perceive threats to its rule, labeling opposition parties as potential adversaries (Al Jazeera, 2017), employing judicial mechanisms against detractors (Rodrik and Meyersson, 2014), and periodically restricting access to social media platforms (Freedom House 2021). This incremental control across various domains set the stage for the AKP to influence public "common sense" and everyday culture, leading to the "Islamic takeover" of urban spaces characterized by both neoliberal and

neo-Ottomanist elements (Karaman 2013, Lovering and Türkmen, 2011, p.81). This shift from moderate Islam to a more radical Islam with civilizational undertones became evident after the 2016 coup-attempt, a central theme of this thesis analyzed through the Diyanet's sermons.

During this period, it has been noted that the mobilization of Diyanet in support of populist politics, and the fusion of nationalism with religion to further civilizational expansionism, were framed as a symbolic victory against the Western civilization, epitomized by the re-opening ceremony of the Hagia Sophia in 2020. This event marked a shift from political Islam to what is now referred to as 'Erdoğanism'. Today, 'Erdoğanism' has become an umbrella term highly attributed to Sunni Muslims who support President Erdoğan as a symbol of the nation's survival. However, this facet of 'Erdoğanism' now incorporates religious civilizational populism in its rhetoric (Brubaker, 2017), supported by the Diyanet as national and transnational entity through its increased budget and extensive organizational network. This dynamic is further explored in this thesis through weekly Friday Sermons, where a national-civilizational 'us' is constructed in opposition to both internal and external 'others' to consolidate and sustain popular support.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

With accelerating momentum behind the project aimed at raising a religious and nationalist generation in Turkey, conjunctural shifts have precipitated an extensive and profound civilizationist and populist discourse in the post-2016 era. As discussed within the context of historical dynamics, the susceptibility of Turkish society to populist tendencies (Kamrava, 1998; White, 2014) is believed to be entrenched in the formation of the new nation by educated, Westernized military, and bureaucratic elites, thereby engendering a persistent rift between 'the elite' and 'the people'. In this sense, the purported enduring division between 'the people', characterized as staunch advocates of unrestricted popular will, and 'the elites', concerned about potential excesses of this unassailable popular mandate (Massicard, 2018), has provided a robust platform for populism (Yılmaz et al., 2021). Moreover, these efforts have taken on not just a populist tone but also a distinct civilizational aspect. Following Turkey's democratic transitions, "the exclusion of non-Muslims from the Turkish nation was maintained" (Gürpınar and Kenar, 2015, p. 61), with conservatives perceiving Republican elites as collaborating with potentially dangerous individuals who forge alliance with other civilizations, thus posing a clear threat to the homogeneity and authentic self of the civilization and way of life of the pure people (Morieson, 2023). Muslimness has traditionally delineated the boundaries of Turkishness and determined who is included or excluded from the nation (Gürpınar and Kenar, 2015), essentially shaping the geographical imagination of a civilization. Consequently, this inseparable connection between Muslimness and Turkishness began to be associated with conservative-nationalist ideas as a sociopolitical phenomenon in Turkey (Haynes, 2021; Tekdemir, 2023) and became a reality of the country.

As part of this phenomenon, the AKP has skillfully combined its appeals to national identity, religious tropes, and emotional rhetoric, which are mapped in the collective memory of the nation (Yabancı, 2022), positioning itself as an alternative to the perceived crisis within

Kemalist ideology. This initiative has thrived as an attempt to resolve the distress (Tekdemir, 2023) that resonated strongly with broad segments of Turkish society (Yabancı, 2022). It forms part of a broader mobilization characterized by a clearly populist narrative, in which the "people," depicted as virtuous, underprivileged, and homogeneous, were pitted against the corrupt, self-interested, and powerful "elite" (Peker and Laxer, 2021). In response to prevailing circumstances, particularly after 2016, the AKP sought to forge an even larger identity by amalgamating religious, nationalist, and transnational elements, articulating civilizational discourse intended to unify diverse segments of the population and specific geographical regions (Yılmaz and Morieson, 2021; Yılmaz et al., 2021; Bölükbaşı, 2021).

To achieve this goal and to instill these imaginative constructs, the AKP concurrently perpetuated the inherited institutional culture from the Diyanet while adeptly reinventing it to align with its neo-Islamist agenda and proclivities towards transnational identity. Consequently, the process of building a transnational identity, influenced by national heritage, imperial legacy, and the diverse geography of Islam, has fostered a collective geographical consciousness within Islamist and nationalist conservative memory, giving rise to a shared notion referred to as the 'geography of the heart' or 'geography of Islam', which will be discussed in the findings section of this thesis. Therefore, a nuanced understanding of the concepts of civilizationism, populism, nationalism, and religion—and their intersections—will be necessary to assess the extent of their implementation in Diyanet's Friday sermons.

2.1 Populism and Nationalism

Populism has gained notable traction within Turkish politics, attracting substantial scholarly attention (Dinçşahin, 2012; Rogenhofer, 2018; Rogenhofer and Panievsky, 2020; Kirdiş, 2021; Peker and Laxer, 2021; Yılmaz et al., 2021:2022; Theodorou, 2022; Kalaycı, 2022). However, its manifestation in the Diyanet's Friday sermons has been less investigated, with

some scholars suggesting that these sermons may incorporate populist narratives (Yılmaz et al., 2021; Yılmaz and Albayrak, 2022; Yılmaz and Morieson, 2022). Populism is understood as a set of "common sense" ideologies and discourses that forge distinct "heartlands" (Hawkins et al. 2019; Taggart, 2004; Mudde, 2017) and is seen as a strategy for mass mobilization (Jansen, 2011; Weyland, 2001) and an affective performance that uses emotional rhetoric to draw the public's attention (Ostiguy, 2017; Moffitt, 2016). Populists often aim to seize power by invoking a sense of crisis and fear among their supporters, as well as feelings of anger, nostalgia for a past "golden age," and hope for a better future (Elgenius and Rydgren, 2022; Yılmaz and Morieson, 2023).

Most agree, however, that populism involves an anti-elite rhetoric in the name of a variously defined "people". For instance, De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017), describe populism as a vertical construct between the pure "people" at the bottom and the elites on the top, while nationalism intersects with populism as a horizontal rhetoric resting on an insider-outsider antagonism. However, Brubaker (2020) argues that rather than viewing populism and nationalism as entirely separate, it is possible to speak of 'national-populism' as a unified political phenomenon and proposes to consider populism in a two-dimensional space that is simultaneously a space of (vertical) inequality (economic, political, and/or cultural) and a space of (horizontal) difference (culture, values, and ways of life). Concisely, vertical opposition in populism is often directed at those at the top and often at those at the bottom (such as minorities, immigrants, etc.), while horizontal opposition is directed at those considered to be outside of the nation (Brubaker, 2020).

Analyzing populism in a two-dimensional space goes beyond limiting it to a top/down phenomenon, as one-dimensional definitions overlook the constitutive relationship between vertical and horizontal oppositions, particularly between populism and nationalism. Müller (2016) characterizes populism as a Manichean 'moralistic imagination of politics,' depicting a

morally pure and authentically unified people against perceived corrupt elites. The so-called moral concept becomes particularly important when national populism merges with predominantly transnational religion, thereby shifting the discussion from national to civilizational terms (Brubaker, 2017). This partial shift from nationalism to "civilizationism" has been driven by a striking convergence in the last fifteen years around the notion of civilization-level threats. The growing tendencies in the transnational concept between the hybrid concepts of 'religious nationalism', which facilitates the formation of a collective identity and sense of belonging expressed through shared culture (Haynes, 2021) and 'national populism,' have enabled political parties to engage with civilization pragmatically, incorporating it as both a form of political persuasion and a strategic component of identity building projects within their agendas (Bacik and Seker, 2023). Petito (2016, p.81) suggests that previously defined notions of civilizations in a "culturalist-religious sense" are being re-imagined as "strategic frames of reference," rather than as direct actors in international politics. This highlights the increasing public invocations among political actors regarding the importance of values and identities, alongside the prevalent discourses concerning the dangers of clashes or the imperative of dialogues among civilizations (Bettiza, 2014).

2.2 Merging the National with the Civilizational

Brubaker (2017) realized that right-wing populist parties in Europe are mostly incubating a populistic jargon on international relations which is usually done by proposing an ideational (non-material) causal chain where culture, identity, and values are introduced as a different causal perspective into domestic politics by simply blurring the boundary between the domestic and the international. As Hale and Laurelle (2020) mention in their research, this transnational presence of civilizations is largely socially constructed, encouraging a sense of solidarity within their respective civilizations while often fueling hostility towards others.

Thus, any macro-level event, such as migration or a regional conflict, starts to be reframed as various forms of civilizational conflict, creating vertical divisions as seen in populism (Hale and Laurelle, 2020). Despite their similarities, civilizationism is not inherently ingrained in populism; rather, the concept of civilizationism can exist independently and is constructed upon pre-existing opinions (Bacik and Seker, 2023).

Civilizationism represents a long-standing phenomenon (Yurdusev, 2003) due to its culturalist and essentialist roots (Verkhovskii and Pain, 2012), predominantly propagated through historical experiences and social memory (Yılmaz et al., 2022). The influential introduction of the term emerged in the realm of social sciences with Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' thesis, which established an academic perspective viewing civilizations as appropriate units for analyzing international politics (Bettiza, 2014). In the Huntingtonian perspective of the "Civilization," the term primarily focuses on religious differences, presenting Christianity as a cultural rather than solely a religious entity, and positing ideological conflicts between civilizational values or cultures, ultimately leading to an era of clashing civilizations (Huntington, 1996). As evidenced by various scholars (Brubaker, 2017; Joppke, 2018; Haynes, 2021), this concept primarily revolved around the conflict between the West and Islam, which led to a narrative that often-favored right-wing populists in both Europe and the United States, which, alongside the politicization of religion, engenders its "culturalization" (Joppke, 2018). However, the endeavor to safeguard individuals against threats to their economic, cultural, and physical security, amidst a crisis of public knowledge, has encountered numerous criticisms from scholars due to its essentialist nature (Kaya and Tecmen, 2019). Thus, the prevailing discussion on the 'clash of civilizations' between the West and Islam (Waever, 2006) extended beyond the notion of Western political superiority (Roussinos, 2020), and has prompted scholarship to acknowledge the "pluralism and plurality" inherent in civilizational identity (Hale and Laruelle, 2020). This has led to a

resistance to the Huntingtonian baggage and has been grounded in recent nonprimordial theories on "civilizationism" or "civilizational identity" (Verkhovskii and Pain, 2012; Brubaker, 2017; Katzenstein et al., 2017; Hale and Laruelle, 2020; Kaya and Tecmen, 2019; Morieson, 2023; Barton et al., 2021; Verpoest, 2022; Ceronne, 2023; Bettiza et al. 2023; Yılmaz and Morieson, 2023).

A new wave of scholars have adopted a constructivist stance, perceiving civilizations not as "distinct things" that might "clash," but rather as social constructs that are changeable, heterogeneous, interactive, pluralistic and flexible (Katzenstein, 2010; Hale and Laruelle, 2021), considering them as supranational "imagined communities" shaped by political actors to create intersubjective realities (Anderson 2006; Brubaker 2017; Hale and Laruelle 2021; Ceronne, 2023). Taking this into account, it becomes crucial to differentiate between Huntingtonian 'civilization' and 'civilizationism': while a Huntingtonian 'civilization' is delineated as the 'highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of social identity' (Huntington 1996, p.43), civilizationism, as a discourse emphasizing civilizational differences in global and/or domestic politics over other factors (Yılmaz and Morieson, 2023), is accountable for reshaping "the nation" with civilizational identity (Brubaker, 2017), attributing it to a particular culture or religion that constitutes its supranational belonging, constructed by political actors (Hale and Laurelle, 2021). The concept of supranational belonging is widely used by the elite to consolidate society on the basis of concepts of a common historical and cultural essence and to counterpose special and unique panorama of the nation (Verkhovskii and Pain, 2012). Contrary to the commonly held view that such dynamics are always associated with Western civilization, this strategic utilization of civilizationism by state elites can be observed in the positioning of Islamic civilization against Judeo-Christian Western civilization (Roy, 2016; Brubaker, 2017; Kaya and Tecmen, 2019; Morieson, 2021). In this context, to foster belonging, states position their civilization as a

resistant force on a global scale rather than as one of inferiority. Eventually, this positionality can lead to right-wing Islamist nationalists to adopt the use of culture as a foundational support for their policies within their own countries, identifying 'the people' based on a shared identity and values, either nationally or transnationally, as a victimized minority (Yılmaz et al., 2021). However, these ties may not necessarily rely on religious belief or practice, as religion is often perceived as a facet of civilizational identity—a sense of belonging rather than mere belief (Brubaker, 2017). Religion, as one of the most effective tools in defining civilizational ideology and promoting a distinction between 'us' and 'them', transcends the simple dichotomy between the elites and the people. It can be strategically exploited by populists or proponents of civilizationism to develop exclusionary identity politics (Marzouki et al., 2016) and can create a region of influence and leadership (Çınar, 2018).

In Turkey, the focus on "inter-civilizational dialogue" has illuminated a particular phenomenon, inspired by the notion of a civilizational alliance championed by former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu (2016). Davutoğlu posited that Turkey's increasing influence in the Middle East would enhance its bargaining power against other global powers, thereby elevating the AKP's international profile (Çınar, 2018). This kind of emphasis on civilizational dialogue has provided Muslims a normative role in international society, enabling them to reject both Huntington's cultural pessimism and radical Islamist fundamentalism (Kayaoğlu, 2012). It has even led some scholars to characterize Huntington's thesis as a 'political myth' (Bottici and Challand, 2013) and to criticize it as essentialist and reductionist, reducing individuals to a singular civilizational tradition (Ahmad, 1995; Sen, 2006; Chakrabarty, 2009). This discourse has sparked new debates on how ethnicity or religion may not always serve as reliable indicators for civilizational identity, emphasizing the

thin-centered nature of civilizationism that may not consistently encompass specific values or ideologies (Hale and Laruelle, 2020).

Today, there are numerous instances where nationalism intersects with religion; however, cases where populism and civilizationism intersect with religion and nationalism are relatively recent (Haynes, 2021), and observed in cases where nationalism and religion coexist simultaneously with populism and civilizationism, sometimes existing separately (Silvius, 2015; Blackburn, 2021:2022). As posited by various scholars (Hale and Laruelle, 2021; Morieson, 2023; Ceronne, 2023), civilizationism is perceived as a pragmatic discursive strategy intertwined or overlapping with transnational or supranational collective identities, such as national, subnational, ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities, aimed at fostering a broader sense of civilization (Ceronne, 2023).

This 'civilizational discourse' can encompass the initiatives of Western actors in the wider Islamic world (Brubaker, 2017), and can also transform into a culturalist and essentialist critique of Western civilization by Muslim political elites (Bacik and Seker, 2023). These elites strategically leverage Islam and Muslim civilizational identity to delineate both vertical and horizontal divides that is inherent in populism (Barton et al. 2021, p. 397). Such divisions echo the classic populist struggle between 'the people' and 'the elites' and emerge as a core component of a broader religious conflict between devout Muslims and those external to Islam (Hadiz, 2018:2016; Barton et al., 2021). The opposite is true in the West, where the expression of opposition to Islam constructs a European "us" in contrast to a Muslim "them" (Zúquete 2017; Brubaker 2017; Ganesh and Froio, 2020), often reducing Islam to a set of negative, seemingly monolithic attributes. Such re-enchantment within the cultural sphere catalyzes a generic 'return of religion' in both the public and private spheres (Haynes, 2023), sacralizing the will of the people to garner support (Canovan, 1999). This is achieved through religious affiliation, leading to a perpetual antagonism between Islam and

its counterpart, the Judeo-Christian West, stemming from perceived threat and fear (Yılmaz et al., 2021). The fear rooted in the distinction between the Judeo-Christian West and Islam manifests at times across developmental timelines, discursively within political and cultural realms, as well as geographically in perceived and lived spaces. This empirical relevance between lived and perceived space arises as a spatial perception created by nation-states. The former refers to a vision of place where belonging is determined by everyday values and pursuits, while the latter refers to a vision of space that is "both a more imaginary and a more conceptualized formalization" as part of a "mental map of civilization" (Di Méo, 1994; Guermond, 2006). Thus, it is mapped onto a series of normatively charged oppositions: between liberal and illiberal, individualist and collectivist, democratic and authoritarian, West and East, modern and backward, and secular and religious (Brubaker, 2017)

Civilizationism serves as a prominent frame of reference and boundary-making device (Ganesh and Froio, 2020). It not only produces a demonized civilizational foe, but also justifies aggression against this adversary, particularly by relying on historical examples of violence between Christians and Muslims (Cerrone, 2023). Here, identity differentiates itself from the other by reference to a shared civilizational heritage with a view to expanding global influence (Hale and Laruelle, 2020). Civilization is regarded as an influential factor shaping nationalism and national identity, transcending it to encompass diverse cultural or civilizational regions reflecting multiple modernities (Aktürk, 2022). Also, as a macro-level identity category, civilization manifests in two distinct forms: one wherein individual personally and directly identify with a civilization, and the other mediated through identity categories such as "nation," "ethnic group," "state," or "country," which are perceived as belonging to a particular civilization (Hale and Laruelle, 2020). The diverse types and levels of interaction between religion and nationalism, analyzed from both broad cultural and individual perspectives, play a role in shaping unique forms of modernity in various geo-

cultural regions (Aktürk, 2022). Consequently, state elites strategically maneuver to redefine identity at a collective level, evoking "contingency-specific sentiments of shared perceptions" (Hale and Laruelle, 2020, p.591).

Considering that civilization is contiguous with the nation and may undergo similar processes, location within a civilizational framework becomes crucial, potentially fostering either destructive tendencies leading to enmity, or constructive outcomes by facilitating mutually beneficial interactions, shared practices, and a sense of cultural dialogue (Hale, 2014). To effectively render this concept of location tangible in the context of civilization building—akin to nation building—it is imperative to recognize that perceptions of the world and conceptualizations of a nation are heavily influenced by geography. Typically, the first image that comes to mind when considering a country's geography is a map, "which serves as the primary tool for shaping national perception and imagination, thereby concretizing its existence" (Adadağ, 2020, p.283). The demarcated land visualized on maps establishes "a geographical unity that overlooks regional differences and envisions a homogeneous society devoid of political, economic, and cultural differences" (Adadağ, 2020, p.294). The importance of this geographical unity is undeniable, given that leaders using civilizationist rhetoric often urge their followers to defend their ethnic and cultural composition (Orban, 2015), stand against threats and enemies (Putin, 2012), or protect civilizational values outside the moral compass of their own religion and civilization (Erdoğan, 2017). Consequently, the widely documented significance of nation-building efforts in shaping identity (Brubaker, 1996; Gellner, 2008), it is reasonable to anticipate that individuals' senses of civilizational belonging are strongly influenced by their exposure to various official state narratives, both historically and presently (Hale, 2014). Hence, "maps, as part of rendering this identity visible and delineating "us" from "them,"" play an important role in shaping and rooting the sense of

belonging to the nation and of course its common past (Adadağ, 2020, p.294), thereby establishing an undeniable connection with civilization.

2.3 Civilizationism and Populism

Civilizationism and populism, while seemingly distinct and without direct correlations, significantly influence each other within a larger structural system (Brubaker, 2017; Yılmaz et al., 2021). In the case of Turkey, rather than maintaining a clear distinction, it would be more accurate to perceive these concepts as inherently linked, serving as components of a singular nationalist conservative imagination. This imagination allows populists to ambiguously merge the meanings of 'the people' as an ethnocultural group (ethnos), socioeconomic underdog (plebs), or politically sovereign community (demos), thereby forging diverse overlaps with the "nation" (Brubaker, 2020; Peker and Laxer, 2021; Jansen, 2011). Particularly in today's Turkey, the term 'people' refers to the ethno-religious majority, encompassing Sunni Muslims with Turkish values. In contrast, the 'elite' often includes secularly oriented groups and parties, such as the CHP, which are perceived by the ruling party as having betrayed 'the people' by abandoning the religion, moral values, and culture central to their civilization, with 'others' primarily comprising minorities (Kurds, Alevi Muslims, and Turks of Armenian and Greek origins).

The top-down mobilization initiated by the ruling party AKP engendered a transnational dimension of religious identity that became aligned with nationalism, particularly after 2015 (Tekdemir, 2023), with Western powers perceived as both outsiders and threats plotting against the Turkish nation and Islam (Destradi et al., 2022). Thus, civilizationism lended legitimacy through a return to the ancestral lands of the Ottoman Empire rather than adhering strictly to nation-state principles, which Pain (2016) refers to as the 'imperial syndrome'. Pain (2016) delineates three characteristics of this 'syndrome',

where civilizational forces serve as a driving force in fostering an official nationality by *imperial order*, revitalizing a representative map outlining the *imperial body* of civilization, and thereby cultivating the development of *imperial consciousness* in people's minds that fosters the growing phobia against the west. Once these three main pillars are established, traditionalism is reconstructed and combined with the relatively stable particularities of the country's geography (Pain, 2016). By intertwining these concepts from civilizationism and populism, President Erdoğan thus sacralizes 'the people' against both internal and external adversaries, exemplifying a manifestation of the politicization of the sacred (Peker and Laxer, 2021; see Zuquette, 2017) through the explicit and direct utilization of traditional religions in political discourse, performance, and strategic affiliations, distinguishing it from "sacralizing the political," which entails the more covert and implicit use of religion.

To understand the use of religion to build transnational identity, Bacik and Seker (2023) unveil a Manichean conception of nation and civilization in Turkey, which portrays Western civilization as morally rootless, prosaic, hubristic, and ambitious—a perspective echoed in conservative critiques of the Turkish modernization project. This idea presents a perceived common threat culturally tied to religion, expressing concern that the West could overshadow their existing worldviews (Yabancı, 2022). Critiques of the West are often manifested in President Erdoğan's statements, where he often accuses the West of "plotting against Turkey or obstructing its glorious rise" (Hürriyet, 2017), portraying 'them' as an evil front hostile to 'us' in order to foster further civilizational division. The coinciding elements in nationalism, populism and civilizationism underscore the assertion of a singular 'true religion', contributing to a shared vision of solidarity against culturally distinct groups perceived as the 'enemies of the people'. This solidarity is reinforced by loyalty to the nation and patriotism as a moral duty, labeling 'elites' and minority groups outside the "shared identity" as enemies (Hoelzl, 2020)— not just of the nation and Islam but of the broader

civilizational bloc of Muslim community known as the ummah (Yılmaz and Morieson, 2023). In many cases, the incorporation of discourses such as nationalism prioritizes the culture and interests of the nation and promises to give voice to the people who feel neglected or even despised by distant and often corrupt elites (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018). Such attempts explicitly construct broader cultural and civilizational identities, employing religious imagery to mobilize populist support on an Islamic scale, and incite religious fervor among their populations, thus giving political actors greater autonomy in denouncing the civilizational 'other' (Bradley, 2018), and this fosters a sense of belonging to an in-group and 'heartland' (Yılmaz and Morieson, 2023).

The abstraction of shared heritage within transnational communities creates a narrative of common culture within the framework of a nation or a civilization, demarcating boundaries between "us" and "others" (Ceronne, 2023). According to some scholars (De la Torre, 2019; Yılmaz and Morieson, 2021:2022:2023), populism's lack of substantive content renders it a thin centered ideology, necessitating its combination with ideas such as nationalism and religion to mobilize "pious generations" against "elites" and "others," both nationally and transnationally (Brubaker 2017). In contrast, Yilmaz and Morieson (2022) have identified civilizationism as another thick ideology to which populism attaches itself. However, civilizationism is considered by another school of thought as a thin-centered ideology supporting transnational characteristics with specific beliefs, values, and practices, allowing for multiple legitimate interpretations (Brubaker, 2017; Hale and Laurelle, 2020; Cerrone, 2023). At this juncture, it becomes necessary to acknowledge that civilizationism, despite sharing many similarities with populism, should not be considered as a "thick ideology" that can be seamlessly integrated into populism; conversely, it functions similarly to populism and requires a thick ideology due to its inherently thin-centered nature. Therefore, contextually, civilizationism might exist solely or intersect with populism, or vice versa, highlighting the

necessity of distinguishing between the two to avoid confusion. As the notion of viewing the nation as the origin and protector of civilization becomes widely utilized (Cerrone, 2023), and as linking civilization to specific nationalist elements enhances the complementarity between nationalism and civilizations, it becomes more likely for 'the people' to identify with a supranational, civilizational identity (Brubaker, 2017; Hale and Laruelle, 2021). Thus, the distinction between 'us' and 'them' within civilizational identity may become blurry, and historical references and political strategies start to help "make sense" of civilization by discursively constructing them (Ceronne, 2023).

The use of emotion is another crucial aspect for both populists and civilizationists. Populists often exploit "repressed shame that transforms fear and insecurity into anger, resentment, and hatred against perceived 'enemies' of the precarious self" (Salmela and von Scheve, 2018, p. 434). Religion, as a thick ideology, channels this anger towards the perceived 'enemies' of the precarious self, intersecting with nationalism to exploit emotions such as fear, the desire to sacrifice for one's homeland, and nostalgia—evoking deep restorative melancholy for the glorious past, as exemplified by Turkey's Ottoman nostalgia. It also constructs an opposition between 'self' and 'other' not only in nationalist but also in civilizational terms (Brubaker, 2017), thus reimagining one's reality as a battle between the Western 'other' and the Islamic 'self'. When employed for civilizational objectives, this form of nostalgia can manifest in two distinct ways: defensively, by underscoring the imperative to safeguard the nation through measures such as border closures for immigrants, and expansively and aggressively, by advocating for the assimilation of co-ethnics residing in other countries into their own territory—a pursuit akin to "trying to win back lost territories" (Elgenius and Rydgren, 2022, p. 1232). As civilizational narratives mobilize through the macro-foundations (Haynes, 2023), which comprise the patterns and trends of global history, they facilitate connection with the broader public. These narratives are shaped by emotions,

culture, identity, and religion—elements that people can relatively easily comprehend and cherish (Bacik and Seker, 2023). In this context, the concept of the "people" and their inherent moralism or cultural behavior transcends that of the "elites" and "others" and extends transnationally beyond their specific culture, encompassing for example the Muslim 'ummah' within the civilization (Yilmaz and Morieson, 2023).

Over two decades, the AKP integrated various ideologies into the Turkish politics, blending Islamism, nationalism, populism (Taş, 2020), and more recently civilizationism (Yılmaz and Morieson, 2022). This approach has positioned President Erdoğan as the advocate for the deprived "real people" and as an adversary of the "elites," embodying a conservative victimhood narrative (Yılmaz, 2018). This circumstance in Turkey, as the polarization has become a defining feature of populism, yet on a transnational scale, it reveals how deeply religion and nationalism can merge with populism and civilizationism to challenge democratic norms. Ultimately, this scenario facilitates the re-enchantment of the secular world with civilizationist conceptions (Brubaker, 2017). As Zuquete (2017) argues, some populist actors engage in the sacralization of politics and the politicization of the sacred, examining aspects of the politics-religion nexus—particularly in religious nationalisms (Peker and Laxer, 2021)—and eventually instrumentalize faith by exploiting the emotions of the 'pure people' (Yılmaz and Morieson, 2019).

To conclude, the multi-layered use of religion can reinforce the intertwining of populist discourses with culturalized civilizationist narratives. In fact, culturalized religion emerges as a countertrend, with majoritarian and publicly visible religions becoming part of the cultural core (Joppke, 2018), sanctifying 'the people' against their enemies (DeHanas and Shterin, 2018). Drawing from this theoretical scholarship, it is anticipated that the Diyanet uses religion and nationalism to shape the discursive and ideological construction that supports and mobilizes collective identities around the concepts of the 'people', 'nation', and

‘civilization’. It is clear that President Erdoğan primarily employs populism in his speeches (Rogenhofer, 2018; Yilmaz et al., 2021). However, the case of the Diyanet is somewhat distinct, though still instrumental in giving religious legitimacy to the leader’s discourse, due to its claim of representing Islamic civilization. Considering the role of the Diyanet, the extent to which its sermons rely on populism or civilizationism, and whether they are sacralized for political purposes or politicized by the sacred, will be explored in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3. Methodology and Data Collection

In this thesis, the discourse of the Diyanet will be analyzed over the four-year period between the coup attempt on 15 July 2016 and the conversion of Hagia Sophia—a Byzantine cathedral in Istanbul dating to the 4th century—into a mosque on 24 July 2020. This conversion was framed as the civilizational victory of the Islamic ummah over Western civilization. The re-opening of Hagia Sophia serves as the natural endpoint for this analysis, as it represents the culmination of the AKP's religiously colored civilizationist and populist politics in the post-2016 period (Dreßler, 2021). Hagia Sophia served as a mosque for about five centuries after the Ottoman capture of the city in 1453, before being turned into a museum by Atatürk's secular CHP government in 1932. For decades, the site's appropriation in the name of Islam has been a recurring mobilization tool for Islamist politics. The 2020 conversion thus marked the pinnacle of President Erdoğan's populist/civilizationist tendencies and the civilizational will of the people, "based on the use of emotionally saturated space for theatrical victories over 'enemies' to restore 'injustices' and create a sense of momentary vindication" (Sofos, 2021, p. 1). The analysis of the Diyanet's Friday sermons will provide a deeper insight into the phenomenon of civilizationism intersecting with the extreme politicization of Islam in Turkey (Peker and Laxer, 2016). Finally, the culturalization of religion (Joppke, 2018) will shed light on the civilizational dimension of the sermons, which play a crucial role in supporting the AKP's Islamist populist campaign.

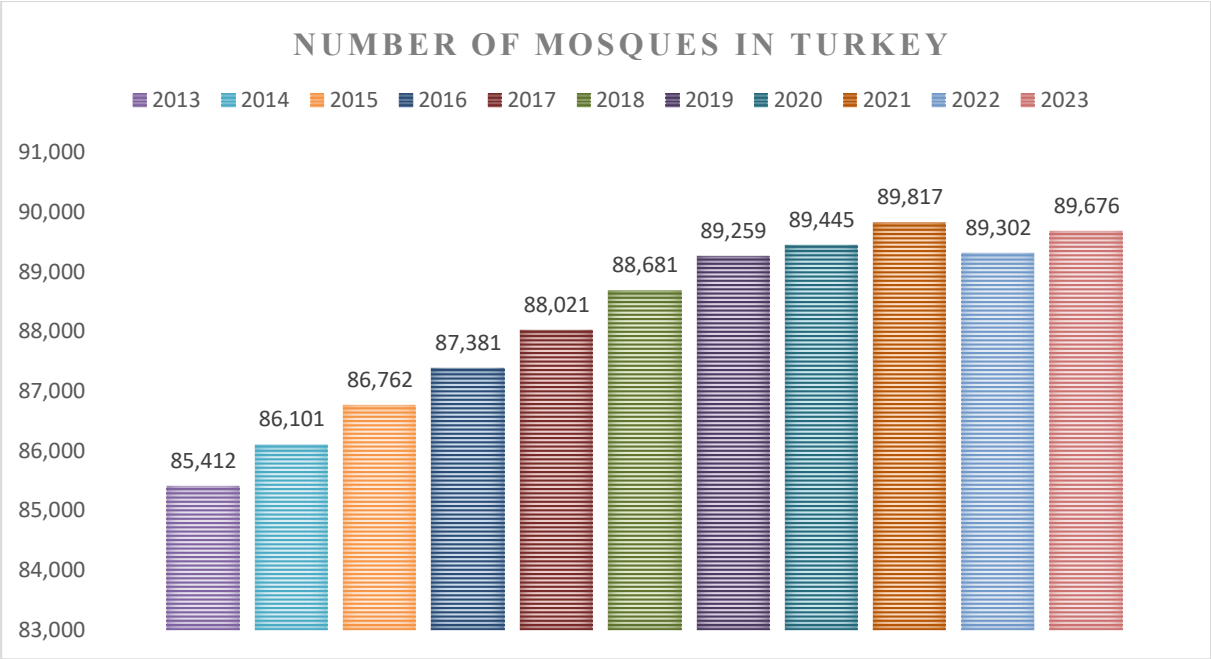

Figure 2. Number of Mosques in Turkey (2022)

According to the Diyanet Annual Report (2022), as of 2022, Turkey had 89,302 mosques serving as locations for Friday Sermons, for which Diyanet produces 54 sermon texts annually, comprising fifty-two weekly sermons and two religious holiday sermons. Sermons, as a form of exhortation, are a long-standing part of social life in Islamic countries, carrying both narrative and discursive content through traditional religious rhetoric delivered to a broad audience (Bortchwik, 1967). Sermons serve the dual function of narrative storytelling and conveying specific interpretations of the world, imbued with religious textures, meanings, and symbols (Özdalga, 2022). While recognizing the significance of these sermons, it would be misleading to assert that they consistently feature in the media or political discourse; nevertheless, religion remains a perpetually relevant topic due to its public presence, including occasional discussions on sermons. In Turkey, the institutionalization of religion, initially intended to foster secularization, has evolved into what might be termed the 'engine of religion'. The state's financial support for the Diyanet, the continuous construction of new mosques despite an already sufficient number, the operation of television and radio

channels, state incentives extending beyond mosque subsidies, and various other elements collectively underscore a religion that fundamentally supports the state's objectives within the framework of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis.

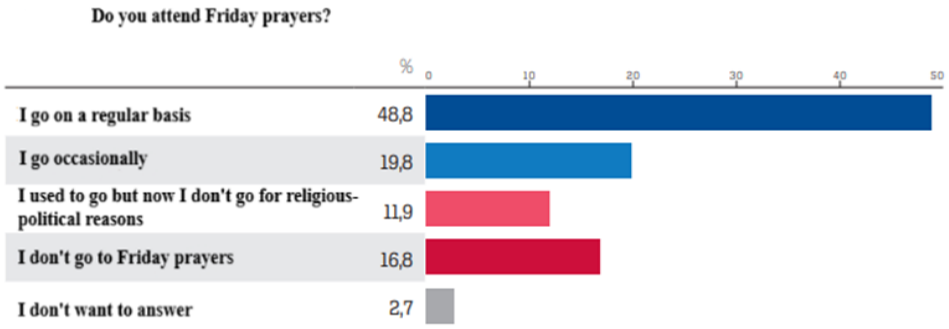

Figure 3. Perception of Religiosity Survey in Turkey (2023)

When examining the influence of these sermons, it is important to consider public perception alongside their systemic dissemination. According to Ete and Yargı's "Perception of Religiosity" survey in Turkey, a significant segment of the Muslim population perceives these sermons as overly political, with 11.9% of respondents choosing not to attend Friday prayers as a result. This sentiment coincides with a period of intensified religious schism, particularly evident in 2016, when the struggle within the religious domain prompted the pivotal question: "Who owns the true religion?". This question underscored the theological debates of the period and became a tangible reality for many. The Diyanet played a central role as the state's supporter in formulating and disseminating sermons in line with the government's discourse on the so-called 'survival of the state'. Thus, the Diyanet became the key collaborator and supporter in systematically sending these sermons to mosques across Turkey to be recited from the pulpit every Friday.

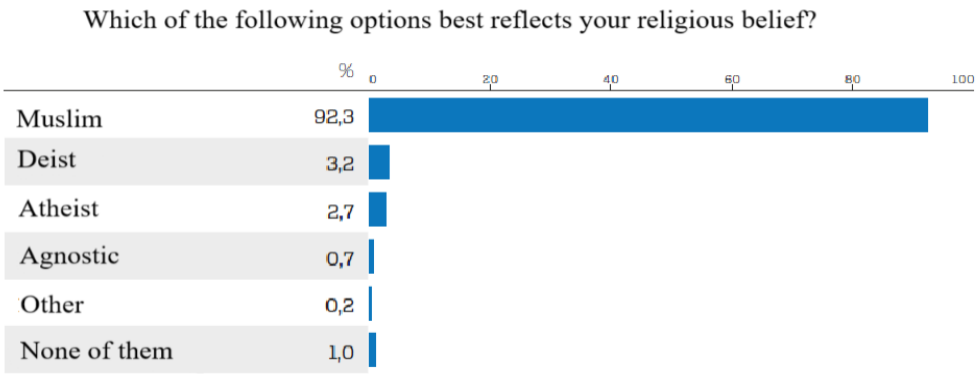

Figure 4. Perception of Religiosity Survey in Turkey (2023)

The outreach of these sermons is significant, as evidenced by Ete and Yargı's 2023 survey, which reveals that 92.3% of the Turkish population identifies as Muslim, with 48.8% attending Friday prayers on a regular basis. This significant attendance rate indicates a widespread exposure to the sermons, given their weekly delivery. These sermons are prepared through the organizational network of the Diyanet, under the General Directorate of Religious Services, and sent to all mosques in Turkey to be delivered. Sometimes, district mufti offices accept sermons submitted by personnel, following the guidelines provided in the sermon evaluation forms issued by the Diyanet[9]. The process for selecting sermons, as outlined on Diyanet's website, involves several steps to ensure quality and adherence to standards. Initially, sermons scoring above 55 points, according to specified evaluation criteria, are forwarded to the municipal mufti's office. Here, a further selection process determines which sermons proceed to the General Directorate of Religious Services. Within the General Directorate, the Sermon Review Commission branch carefully analyzes the forwarded sermons. Their evaluation focuses on whether the sermons meet established standards, particularly in terms of the evaluation criteria set by Diyanet. Finally, the sermons that meet

[9]https://webdosyasp.diyanet.gov.tr/muftuluk/UserFiles/istanbul/Ilceler/sultangazi/UserFiles/Files/Hutbe%20Hazırlama%20ve%20Değerlendirme%20Klavuzu_e96fd79b-d5ba-4834-b121-ca7d242f85d7.pdf

these standards are selected for publication by Diyanet, completing the comprehensive process. This comprehensive process of evaluation came into effect in 2006 when there was a relaxation in the high centralization of sermons with more authority granted to local levels. However, despite this increase in local-level authority, the expansion of Diyanet's institutional framework has paradoxically allowed the state to regain, and even increase, control over this process, enabling potential interference at various stages.

Date: 24.07.2020

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِنَّمَا يَعْمُرُ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَلَمْ يَخْشَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ فَعَسَىٰ أُولَٰئِكَ أَنْ يَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُهْتَدِينَ

وَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ:

مَنْ بَنَى مَسْجِدًا لِلَّهِ بَنَى اللَّهُ لَهُ فِي الْجَنَّةِ مِثْلَهُ.

HAGIA SOPHIA: THE CONQUEST'S SYMBOL, THE CONQUEROR'S ENTRUSTMENT

Honorable Muslims!

Today is the day the recitations of takbir, tahlil, and salawat echo again around Hagia Sophia's domes, of adhan and salat rise from its minarets. The longing of the descendants of Mehmed the Conqueror and the silence of the grand temple have come to an end. Today, Hagia Sophia is meeting its mu'min and muwahhid congregation again.

Endless thanks and praise be to Allah (swt) who enabled us to gather here on such an honorable and historic day today. Salat and salam be upon Prophet Muhammad (saw) who gave the good news about the conquest by saying, **"Verily you shall conquer Constantinople. What a wonderful leader will he be, and what a wonderful army will that army be!"**[1]

Salam be to the spiritual architect of Istanbul, who hit the roads to become the addressee of this glad tiding, Abu Ayyub al-Ansari in particular, the Companions of the Prophet, and those who followed their blessed footsteps, and all our martyrs and veterans who made Anatolia our homeland, defended it, and entrusted it to us.

Salam be to that young and determined ruler Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, who produced the most advanced technology of his era, had the ships move over land, conquered Istanbul with the permission and help of Allah, and then did not allow anybody to cause even the slightest harm to even a piece of rock in this honorable city.

Hagia Sophia is a rose-colored good news from centuries ago. Hagia Sophia is the conquest's symbol and the entrustment of its Conqueror who endowed it on condition that it remains a mosque until the Last Day. Salam be to our authorities, scholarly and intellectual people, leaders full of wisdom and benevolence, and all our brothers and sisters who have from past to present worked with their heart and soul for this rare and precious entrustment to meet its congregation.

Dear Believers!

Hagia Sophia's reopening to worship means the reinstatement of this holy place, which embraced Muslims for five centuries as a mosque, to its original function.

The reopening of Hagia Sophia to worship means all crestfallen and oppressed masjids on earth, first and foremost Masjid al-Aqsa, to have their hopes up again.

The reopening of Hagia Sophia to worship means that our civilization, the foundation of which is tawhid, the building block of which is knowledge, and the cement of which is virtue, continues to rise.

Dear Muslims!

The Islamic civilization is centered around the mosque. Our mosques are the source of our unity and amity, and knowledge and wisdom. The Almighty Allah (swt) states regarding those who build and maintain mosques and masjids, **"The mosques of Allah are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and establish prayer and give zakat and do not fear except Allah, for it is expected that those will be of the [rightly] guided."**[2]

The Prophet Muhammad (saw) gives glad tidings that people who make any effort for construction of a mosque and its maintainance will be rewarded with Paradise, **"Whoever builds a masjid for (the sake of) Allah, be it small or large, then Allah will build a house for him in Paradise."**[3]

Dear Muslims!

Now, what falls upon us is to make our mosques vivid with our sense of unity and brotherhood. Our duty is to center our lives around the mosques. We all must fill mosques and spring to life with mosques, regardless of gender or age. We need to work more with greater belief, ambition, determination, excitement, and devotion in order to uphold the divine meaning of the Hagia Sophia Mosque.

[1] Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Musnad, IV, 335.
[2] Tawbah, 9/18.
[3] Muslim, Zuhd, 44.

General Directorate of Religious Services

LOCATION : NATIONWIDE
DATE : 12.01.2018

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَقُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ إِنَّ الْبَاطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوقًا

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ:

اللَّهُمَّ لَكَ الْحَمْدُ أَنْتَ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ... أَنْتَ الْحَقُّ، وَوَعْدُكَ الْحَقُّ وَقَوْلُكَ الْحَقُّ، وَلِقَاؤُكَ الْحَقُّ، وَالْجَنَّةُ حَقٌّ، وَالنَّارُ حَقٌّ، وَالنَّبِيُّونَ حَقٌّ، وَالسَّاعَةُ حَقٌّ ...

TO STAND BY THE TRUTH, AND AGAINST THE FALSEHOOD

Blessed Friday to You, Brothers and Sisters!

Our Prophet (pbuh) conquered Mecca with his army, the city where he had to leave ten years ago with the journey of hegira. The Messenger of Allah was born and grew up in this blessed city and he was longing for it. He looked at the city with longing eyes then he went towards the House of Allah with enthusiasm and excitement. After the tawaf (circumambulation), he went in the Kaaba and cleared it and its surroundings from the idols after he recited this verse: [1] وَقُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ إِنَّ الْبَاطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوقًا **"And say: truth has (now) arrived, and falsehood perished: for falsehood is (by its nature) bound to perish."**[2]

Honorable Believers!

One of the most beautiful names of Allah Almighty is "Al-Haqq" (The Embodiment of Truth). Our Lord is the only source and sole owner of the truth and justice. He invited people to know the truth with His holy prophets, from Adam to Muhammad Mustafa (pbuh.). The battle between truth and falsehood in human history started with the two sons of Adam, Habil and Qabil. While Habil stood by the truth with submission and sincerity, Qabil choose falsehood with his greed and jealousy. To the end of days, Habil will be the leader of the good ones and the goodness, while Qabil will be known as the symbol of evil ones and evil with the murder he committed.

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

The truth is the faith of tawheed. It is the faith in and submission to Allah. It is being a servant only to Him. The falsehood is to deny the existence and oneness of Allah and associate partners with Him. It is to serve others than Him. It is to be a servant to desires and wants. It is to be blind and deaf towards His countless blessings.

The truth is the life giving principles and the beauties of the manifest religion that is Islam which makes us human and the world a place to live. The falsehood is the beliefs and ideas that are incompatible with our supreme religion. It is the practices that wage war on Islam. It is the evil that harms the honor and dignity of the people.

The truth is the Holy Quran, our guide to salvation, which distinguishes between good and evil. It is the irreplaceable example of our Prophet (pbuh.). The falsehood is the behaviors that aim to remove our Holy Book and the holy sunnah of our Prophet from the hearts and the minds.

The path of the truth is the path of the prophets, martyrs, and good and faithful believers. At the end of this road lays a paradise of eternal blessings. The path of falsehood is the path of unbelievers, condemned, those who stray from righteousness, and the evil ones. The end of this road leads to hell that is home to doom and loss.

Brothers and Sisters!

While those who stay on the path of the truth become the hope of the oppressed and the downtrodden; those who unite in falsehood generally become the voice of oppression and the oppressors. While those who set their hearts to the truth fight for high values; those who fell into falsehood hold interests and self-seeking above all. While the lovers of the truth work in order to build the earth and make it livable; the servants of falsehood seek sedition, malice, lies, slander, and mischief. While those who stand by the truth strive to make peace, comfort, and justice prevail on earth; the followers of falsehood try to spill blood and tears, turn cities into ruins, and harm the minds and the hearts.

Brothers and Sisters!

Our Poet of Independence describes a heart that is a lover of truth in these lines, and how meaningful they are:

It cuts me to bone when I see a bleeding wound,
I would get whipped to relieve it, or get kicked!
I can't say "Never mind, let it go", I'll mind.
I'll trample, get trampled, I'll raise the truth!

So, brothers and sisters! Whatever the circumstances, let us continue to stand by the truth and against the falsehood, let us continue to be the voice of the truth. Let us not abandon recommending one another the truth and patience. We must not forget that the help and mercy of Allah is going to be with us as long as we keep serving the truth. The falsehood could never hurt us as long as we pick up and raise the truth.

I want to conclude this khutba with this hadith of our Prophet:

"O Allah! All the Praises are for You; You are the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth and whatever is therein. You are the Truth, and Your Promise is the Truth, and Your Speech is the Truth, and meeting You is the Truth, and Paradise is the Truth and Hell (Fire) is the Truth and all the prophets are the Truth and The Final Hour is the Truth.

O Allah! Please forgive my past and future sins and those sins which I did in secret or in public. It is You Whom I worship. There is no God but You."[3]

[1] Al-Bukhari, Oppressions, 32, Sahih Muslim, Jihad and Expeditions, 87.
[2] Al-Isra,17/81.
[3] Al-Bukhari, Oneness, Uniqueness of Allah (Tawheed), 35.

Written by: General Directorate of Religious Services

Figure 5. Examples of two different sermons in English

This thesis analyzes 214 Friday sermons collected from the website of Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Sermon Archive covering the period between July 22, 2016, and July 24, 2020. The period begins with the first Friday sermon following the coup attempt in the summer of 2016 and concludes with the first Friday sermon at the Hagia Sophia after 87 years on July 24, 2020. This periodization allowed me to grasp the profound politicization of Islam and

civilizationist discourse evident in Diyanet's sermons. In exploring the contextual nuances within these sermons, I focused on examining them in Turkish, without relying on translations available in various languages such as English and French. By prioritizing the original Turkish texts, I aimed to preserve linguistic authenticity and enable accurate interpretation, mindful of the risks of unconscious bias and possible distortion or loss of meaning in translations (Mckenna, 2022). The complexity of translation underscores the importance of conducting the analysis in the original language, especially when it comes to metaphors and non-equivalent elements that are vulnerable to the loss of meaning in cultural nuances (Ho et al., 2019). As a secondary component, relevant newspaper articles, school textbooks and statements by public and political figures were analyzed to elucidate the prevailing agenda during the period in which the sermons were delivered. These sources were subsequently utilized for the interpretation of the sermons; therefore, they do not qualify as primary sources and do not constitute the majority of this research. The availability of these sermons in textual form such as PDF or Word lent itself easily to various processes of coding (Schreier, 2014). In-depth analysis of these sermons demonstrates how the civilizationist discourse of Friday sermons has changed, shaped, and accompanied religion in association with populist politics during this interval. It also sheds light on how the Diyanet interprets civilization as part of a wider unity beyond the nation, known as the ummah. The underlying goal is to understand Turkey's religio-political landscape from 2016 to 2020, bolstered by the leadership of President Erdoğan and the institutional support of the Diyanet.

Data analysis began with a phase of "open-coding," where data were re-examined, reorganized, and deconstructed into discrete parts by manually searching through the textual material and coding all relevant areas of the data with as few preconceived ideas as possible (Welsh 2002). To facilitate this process, categories were established based on the concepts outlined in the theoretical framework, employing a combination of deductive and inductive

coding methodologies to derive codes from the data (Mayring, 2019). Specifically, the foundation for inductive coding was rooted in the content of the data, while deductive coding was theory-driven, utilizing NVivo codes extracted from the sermons. This dual approach not only enhanced the coding process but also established a framework for analyzing the data effectively. Thus, the analysis overlapped with summative content analysis, which involves examining the occurrence of a concept and contextual changes in the texts, rather than analyzing the entire texts themselves (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). In alignment with this framework, some researchers (Holsti, 1969; Weber, 1990; Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Schreier, 2014; Selvi, 2019) have noted that content analysis involves the use of a set of procedures to make valid inferences from verbal, visual, or written data inductively or deductively depending on their context. Building upon this foundational understanding, my approach was grounded in existing theories of populism as a starting point and aimed to reveal the relations between religion, nationalism, and civilizationism, thereby recognizing populist tendencies and ascertaining explicit and implicit meanings (Bernard et al., 2017). This methodological approach aided in refining the codes during the coding process, allowing for a more nuanced combination into latent codes. An examination of the latent constructs in the content analysis further shifted the focus to words that occur in connection with the concepts, elucidating the meanings behind those words (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

Friday sermons as orations produced by the Diyanet can be coded textually as religious documents, and their analysis demonstrates "how the words in the documents connect to the world beyond the text" (Silverman, 2020, p.183). This connection is further illustrated by examining how these orations relate to distinct ideological frameworks within specific social and historical contexts in Turkey, reflecting the concept of the "world beyond the text". Some researchers employ hermeneutics as a form of narrative analysis for interpretive analysis of such religious texts in theology (Bernard et al., 2017). However, in

this thesis, qualitative content analysis was utilized as a more fitting conceptual approach to examine the Diyanet's Friday sermons. By focusing on qualitative content analysis, I was able to address the nuances within the texts more effectively. When analyzing the transcribed data, the research questions of this thesis were taken into consideration and all data were coded in NVivo using a latent coding list (Bernard et al., 2017) consisting of words and phrases that have a high association with the theoretical framework. The breadth of content in Friday sermons encompasses various issues, including social, political, cultural, and moralistic themes. In my analysis, I did not solely emphasize the religious moralistic significance of these discourses; instead, I delved into contexts that are social, regulatory, civilizational, and national.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) delineate three distinct methodologies for conducting qualitative content analysis: conventional, directed, and summative. In this thesis, I initially employed the directed approach, presuming the presence of populist elements within the sermons. This method utilized populist theory as a guiding framework for the initial codes, thereby facilitating the interpretation of textual data through a systematic classification process aimed at identifying themes or patterns. The directed approach to content analysis is typically informed by existing theories that underpin the fundamental principles of study design and analysis. This approach follows a structured process, where pre-identified key concepts and variables—albeit somewhat loosely defined—serve as initial coding categories, though they may not constitute the main codes (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). However, upon realizing the absence of a populist register within the sermons, I transitioned from directed to a summative approach to interpret the textual data, focusing on identifying specific content to better understand its contextual use. Then, discourses were grouped and segmented under appropriate headings and subheadings. I used segmentation, which means dividing the material into units in such a way that each unit fits into exactly one (sub)category of the

coding frame (Schreier, 2014:2012). For the sake of brevity and clarity, excessively long names were avoided in the sub-categories in NVivo; thus, names were labeled in a concise yet descriptive manner that encapsulated the essence of each category (Schreier, 2012). This data extraction in NVivo proved instrumental in deconstructing and categorizing themes, particularly those related to the civilizational issues voiced in the sermons.

Using NVivo significantly aided my examinations of the sermons within primary categories based on a three-level framework: micro, meso, and macro, which correspond to the individual-moralistic, social-regulatory, and national-civilizational contexts of the sermons, respectively. Rather than relying on a narrow set of predetermined codes, I adopted a semi-structured approach to create and categorize my codes while analyzing the Diyanet's sermons. Through this analytical process, my primary aim was to assess the prevalence of chosen phrases in Friday sermons, examining their explicit and implicit relevance to systematic patterns, as well as the occurrence of specific thematic attributions or messages. This methodological effort facilitated the mapping of civilizationist discourses employed over a four-year period. To enhance the reliability and validity of the analysis, highly implicit terms were intentionally omitted from the coding process to mitigate potential subjectivity biases (Krippendorff, 2004). Subsequently, the sermons were coded into manageable content categories through a process of selective reduction. By reducing the text to categories, I was able to concentrate on specific words or patterns that inform the research questions. According to Schreier (2014), conducting a valid analysis requires that the material be adequately described by the coding framework, ensuring that aspects of the material are covered or excluded through categories during the coding process. In this context, each aspect can evolve into a main category or dimension, and creating subcategories for each dimension facilitates a thorough exploration of the material while adhering to the three requirements of unidimensionality, mutual exclusiveness, and exhaustiveness.

The micro, meso, and macro-level attributions in sermons, as contextualized by Ruiz (2009) facilitated the thematic classification of content and aided in discerning the tone of the Diyanet in each sermon. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that sermons cannot be rigidly categorized, as overlaps were observed in many sermons. For instance, a single sermon might simultaneously encompass all three levels, while others may include only two or even one. Therefore, it is essential to consider micro-meso-macro categories as non-mutually exclusive attributions used in the Diyanet's sermons. The first level focuses on personal and moral attributions, while the second level emphasizes on social and regulatory topics, including the Diyanet's messaging concerning the private sphere. The third level encompasses national and/or civilizational themes that delve into political narratives of the Diyanet. Depending on the relevance and scope of the categories, materials were allocated to their respective categories within the coding frame. This subsequent step, which involved both description and interpretation, necessitated a thorough examination of every relevant aspect of the material in question (Schreier, 2014).

My contribution lies in examining how the fusion of nationalism and Islam, coupled with civilizationist and populist repertoires, shapes the discourse of the Diyanet and bolsters the AKP's conservative approach to legitimize itself and its politics. By integrating theoretical knowledge with empirical data, I provide a nuanced understanding of how civilizationist and populist discourses can be framed and situated, as discussed in the preceding theory section. I contend that the AKP has constructed a radical nationalist-populist and Islamist movement, which arguably reached its zenith in the post-coup period. This period is essential for understanding how rhetoric mobilizes a distinct separation between the 'pure people' of 'us' and the perceived 'evil other' of 'them,' as seen through the lens of the Diyanet. In the subsequent analysis chapter, I illustrate how the Diyanet seeks to promote a civilizational discourse that supports President Erdoğan's populist narrative, ultimately enriching and

reinforcing religious nationalism. The theoretical objective is to contribute to social scientific knowledge by elucidating the distinctions, overlaps, and interplays between religion, nationalism, civilizationism, and populism.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Diyanet's Sermons

The increasing intervention of religious identities into politics, summarized as the "Islamization of Politics" (Karpat 2001), has acquired a distinctive dimension in contemporary Turkey, manifesting as a phenomenon intricately intertwined with the collective memory of the Ottoman Empire (Özdalga, 2022). In this chapter, a comprehensive analysis of the Friday sermons delivered by the Diyanet is conducted to tell the story unfolding from the coup attempt in 2016 to the re-opening of Hagia Sophia for worship in 2020. Throughout this process, there has been a discernible shift from the hitherto dominant nationalist discourse, primarily centered on counterterrorism (Saçmalı, 2013; Gürpınar and Kenar, 2016) to a broader supranational, Islamic-civilizational discourse. However, it is important to note that this shift does not imply that these discourses should exist separately from each other or always be considered together. As I delve into this matter, my aim is to demonstrate the fluidity and interchangeability between nationalism and civilizationism, while highlighting the three different levels of discourse (micro-meso-macro) observed in the sermons—of which only the macro-level addresses broader issues of politics and identity. It would be misleading to argue that the Diyanet exclusively focuses on national and civilizational themes, as this perspective overlooks the individual and societal moral and regulatory rhetoric that it promotes. Moreover, contrary to certain scholars who assert the presence of populist tendencies in Friday sermons (Yılmaz et al., 2021; Yılmaz and Albayrak, 2022), the analysis conducted in this thesis revealed a conspicuous absence of such tendencies. Instead, the sermons appeared to adhere to three levels of discourse: personal-moralistic (micro), social-regulatory (meso), and national-civilizational (macro). The conclusion chapter will further explore this issue after examining the sermons across these three levels below.

In his fieldwork, Saçmalı (2013) observes that after 2012, the Diyanet decided to drastically change the topics of its sermons in order to avoid repeating themes from the early Republican periods. Therefore, to prevent this repetition, initiatives have been set in motion within the central structures of the Diyanet to diversify the content of the sermons. Taking into account this initiative by the Diyanet, as suggested by several scholars (Kenar, 2011; Saçmalı, 2013; Gürpınar and Kenar, 2016; Özdalga, 2022), there has been a notable evolution in the Diyanet's conception of the nation after 2012, although it did not fully embrace strong civilizationist tendencies until 2016. This transformation aligns with the changing perspectives among policymakers concerning the dominant Kemalist nationalist ideology, a form of which had prevailed since 1923. Consequently, viewing the Kemalist perspective as exclusionary of faith elucidates the rationale behind efforts to steer the country away from its secular-national identity towards a religious-civilizational one. Following this process, a significant transformation has occurred in the official understanding of the Turkish nation and the role and significance of Islam. My analysis sheds light on this specific transformation that took place in the Diyanet.

Friday sermons serve as a crucial tool for engaging with the conservative population in Turkey, as the essence of liturgical impulse hinges on the significance attributed to congregational gatherings. Furthermore, these sermons offer valuable insights into the government's robust connections with religion. The rationale behind the choice of Friday prayers lies in their obligatory nature for Muslim men, in contrast to daily prayers (Özdalga, 2022). According to Ete and Yargı's survey on the Perception of Religiosity in Turkey (2023), the fact that 48.8% of Turkish men regularly attend Friday prayers suggests that the Diyanet could effectively engage with this demographic through the delivery of weekly sermons in mosques. Since these sermons are prepared by officials from the Presidency of Religious Affairs within the General Directorate of Religious Services, these religious texts

are intended to greatly influence on people by appealing to their hearts and minds. Moreover, these sermons aim to shape how individuals perceive themselves as part of a unified community (ummah) with heightened status and authority (Turner and Arslan, 2013; Özdalga, 2022). Viewed in this light, the congregation may emerge as a ritual embodiment of the concept of the nation, as envisioned by Benedict Anderson's concept of an 'imagined community' (2006). Despite the likelihood that congregants may never personally know or meet most of their fellow believers, they share "the image of their communion" (Anderson, 2006, p. 6) and along with shared understandings of religion, nationalism and widely civilizationism, people might recreate the borders of their communion. In this context, it becomes imperative to delve deeper into the micro, meso, and macro levels attributed to sermons, delineating the concepts of personal-moralistic, social-regulatory, and national-civilizational unity encapsulated at each level. Figure 2 below displays the frequency of each of these levels of discourse.

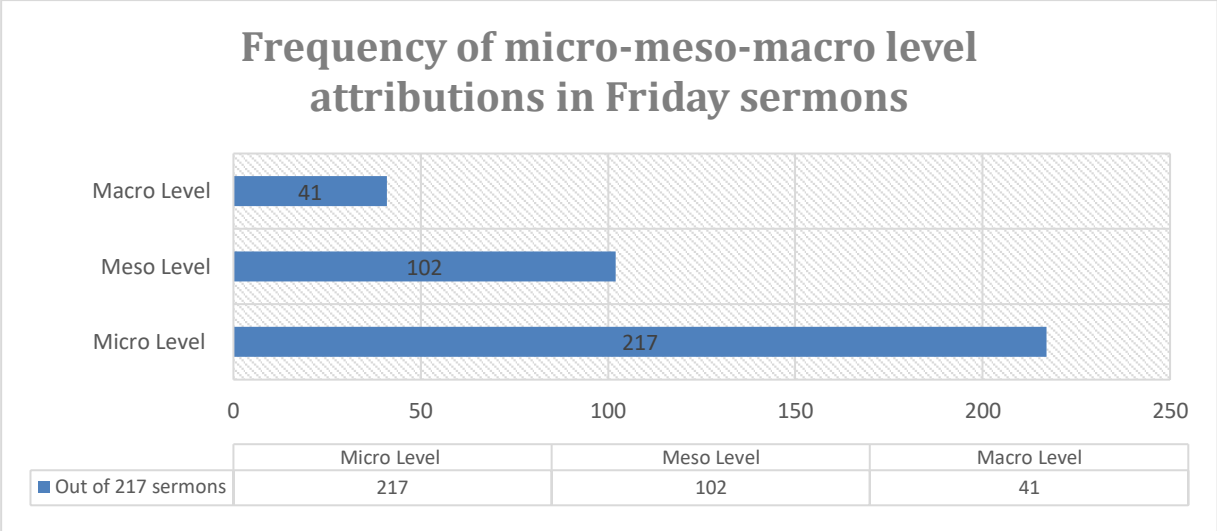

Figure 6. Frequency of micro-meso-macro level attributions in Friday Sermons

As illustrated here, an examination of the 217 Friday sermons spanning from 2016 to 2020 reveals that throughout this period, micro-level attributions are present in every sermon, while meso-level attributions are discernible in only about half (102) of the total sermons, and macro-level attributions that address the nation or civilization are found in a fifth (41) of them. Given that each sermon does not adhere strictly to a singular level and often encompasses multiple overlapping levels, it becomes evident that out of 217 Friday sermons, 41 of them incorporated civilizational and nationalist attributions, constituting 19% of the total sermons. The micro and meso levels primarily center around individual ethics and societal responsibilities, such as assisting the disadvantaged, supporting individuals with disabilities, advocating for social justice, and regulating the private sphere. Building upon previous research, findings about nationalist content in sermons (Saçmalı, 2013; Gürpınar and Kenar, 2015) indicate that macro-level attributions are predominantly contextualized within a civilizational framework. This framing highlights a transitive relationship with nationalism and the potential for coexistence or overlap, emphasizing Islam's role as a civilizational force that safeguards its values and highlights shared historical legacies. In the following sections, I will analyze and illustrate the three levels of rhetoric, with special attention to the macro-level category.

4.1 Micro Level (Personal-Moralistic) Sermons

The first category encompasses fundamental practices of personal and moral principles, naturally appearing in every sermon. At this level, the sermons assume a predominantly advisory tone, specifically providing guidance to the ummah and its responsibilities to Allah as pious Muslims. These sermons cover topics such as the five pillars of Islam, the Islamic narrative, Islam's path, raising awareness, how to spend a lifecycle, kindness and mercy, as

well as the importance of the individual's roles in family and social solidarity. These codes under the micro-level category encompass themes that are entirely religious and lack national or civilizational references. Therefore, they serve to illustrate how the Diyanet explores the intricacies of Islam within a theological framework, thereby contributing significantly to this thesis's framework.

4.1.1 Five Pillars of Islam

The first code in personal-moralistic sermons relates to the framework of Islamic ethics and morals. The sermons from the Diyanet frequently addresses the five pillars of Islam: Shahadat, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and zakat. These pillars, considered foundational elements of Islam, serve as informative tools for the listeners, offering guidance on the consistent observance of these fundamental tenets. Shahadat, regarded as a crucial pillar of Islam, signifies a "declaration of being a Muslim," "liberating people from slavery to others and aligning them as servants of Allah" (11.11.2016)[10]. Diyanet demonstrates how this aspect permeates significantly through all aspects of life. Additionally, worship is underscored as a "pillar of religion" deemed as a "righteous deed" leading individual to "paradise" and serving as a deterrent from sin (07.06.2018) which is a symbol of "resurrection and liberation" (04.13.2018). Furthermore, fasting as a virtuous act, is portrayed as safeguarding people's "tongues from harmful words" and strengthening their "willpower" (02.08.2019) by distancing people's "hands, minds, and hearts from evil" (07.06.2018). Lastly, pilgrimage and zakat are highlighted as obligations for the wealthy in Islam, with pilgrimage strengthens people's "submission and awareness of being part of the Muslim community," while zakat or infak, as a form of "sacrificial offering," serves as a reminder against "becoming enslaved by

[10] Quoted sermons are hereafter noted by month/day/year and will be referenced further in the bibliography. They can be accessed for further investigation at: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Sermon Archive.

worldly pleasures" (07.06.2018) and fosters bridges of goodwill between the poor and the rich through sharing (05.08.2020).

4.1.2 Islamic Narrative

Another prominent code emerges as Islamic narratives, as the Diyanet frequently incorporates religious stories—drawn from the Quran or hadiths—as advisory anecdotes. These hadiths and narratives are often cited and highlighted in bold within the sermons, serving to distinguish them from the sermon itself. These narratives help in aligning and understanding righteous deeds through the actions of the Prophet or Islamic myths, which hold sacred meanings and impart valuable lessons.

"The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), who set the most beautiful example for his ummah with his words and actions, was so sensitive about telling the truth that he prohibited even joking with lies, especially when it came to dealing with children. On one occasion, he heard a woman calling her child and saying, 'Come, I will give you something.' When he asked the child, 'What will she give you?' and received the answer, 'Dry dates,' he cautioned, 'Be careful; if you had not given him anything, it would have been recorded as a lie for you." (01.04.2019).

As mentioned above, other religious myths narrated within the same context emphasize righteous and moral behavior. For instance, the story of Noah's Ark exemplifies compassion as Noah invites his son to join his ship (01.24.2020). Similarly, the narrative of Abraham and his son Ishmael illustrates the willingness to sacrifice everything without hesitation in the way of Allah (01.24.2020).

4.1.3 Islam's Path (Sırat-i Mustakim)

Another category consistently addressed is Islam's path (Sirat-i Mustakim), explained as the belief in tawhid or the "rightful path of God for the mumin" (the one who accepts Islam as a

religion) (08.12.2016). The Diyanet consistently emphasizes the duty of adhering to this path and "to stay away from evil and to spread goodness on the Earth" (07.28.2017). According to the Diyanet, a true Muslim recognizes that "their Lord sees and hears everything, whether it be hidden or manifest". This specific code serves as a moral reflection of Islam.

4.1.4 Raising awareness

The individual's role in raising awareness on issues such as environmental degradation, global warming, suffering and oppressed people, and unethical behavior is a predominant topic addressed in this type of sermons. The Diyanet emphasizes that Muslims should bear responsibility for adhering to the requisites of Islam, which includes being a "helping hand" to "the oppressed, the victims, the forsaken, and the orphans" as it is considered a "righteous deed" (02.17.2017). According to Diyanet, being a good Muslim entails not only fulfilling the five pillars but also being a giver and helper. Furthermore, the Diyanet raises awareness about global problems such as "pollution of the soil, water, and air," attributing these issues to human wastefulness which results in the degradation of the Earth and "turning it into a captive of evils and squandering the universe" (02.09.2018). The Diyanet endeavors to raise awareness of these issues as both a religious and human duty to "keep the whole earth, the place of worship for believers, clean" and emphasizes "the responsibility to future generations to dispose of plastics in recycling bins and act in accordance with environmental ethics" (10.19.2018). This code demonstrates that while providing religious content, the Diyanet also seeks to raise social awareness among the congregation, striving to address various aspects of life.

4.1.5 How to Spend a Lifecycle

Diyanet also offers recommendations on how to navigate the lifecycle of a human being, emphasizing the importance for a Muslim to differentiate between time spent on Allah's

deeds and time spent on frivolous pursuits. Diyanet consistently reminds people that "death will appear at an unknown time" (12.28.2018), urging Muslims to live their lives in accordance with Islamic moral values rather than leading a "heedless and irresponsible futile life" (02.17.2017).

4.1.6 Kindness and Mercy

Being kind and merciful reflects Diyanet's interpretation of Quranic teachings on how to be a good Muslim in the eyes of God and how to disseminate these values throughout the entire community to raise awareness. Diyanet advocates for a society that adheres to virtues such as "justice, honesty, compassion, brotherhood, and sacrifice" (04.13.2018), considering these moral virtues as essential for those striving to attain "God's love". They are expected to harbor "love and compassion in their hearts" while refraining from "belittling or disrespecting" anyone (04.27.2018). Diyanet consistently portrays believers as part of a collective identity and underscores their interdependence, urging them to be "friends and brothers" to one another. Being Muslim entails a responsibility to "compete in goodness not in evil," as part of the ummah, and to "help one another in kindness" while "never abandoning compassion and mercy" and refusing to "tolerate oppression, violence, or brutality" (01.20.2017).

It is worth noting that some codes exhibit a combination of micro, meso, and macro level elements. The following two codes I am about to discuss may appear similar to codes in other categories, but they resonate in different contexts within different categories. Upon analyzing these sermons, I found that the code "Importance of family" encompassed both personal-moralistic and social-regulatory meanings, while "Solidarity" contained elements of personal-moralistic, social-regulatory, and national-civilizational meanings. As a result, I recoded these codes within different categories in NVivo. Subsequent sections will delve into

the specifics of social-regulatory and national-civilizational categories, aiding in a more nuanced understanding of these distinct categories.

4.1.7 Importance of Family

By coding the importance of the family, I aim to illustrate how Diyanet seeks to consolidate the family's place in society and emphasizes the significance of this institution. Diyanet underscores how growing up in a "loving and caring environment" shape one's character (06.07.2019), fostering the development of goodness and trust without alluding to any kind of regulatory nature in the family's role (11.15.2019). The family is mostly depicted as a "sacred abode embellished by the mercy of the Lord" gaining sacred significance in the eyes of the Diyanet. Therefore, the family's role in shaping society is deemed undeniable by the Diyanet, as it is seen as "an educational institution where loyalty is mixed with sacrifice, faith with generosity, knowledge with wisdom, and love with respect" (05.11.2018). Hence, this institution holds significant importance for the Diyanet as a social fabric, consistently referenced in Friday sermons. However, unlike the social-regulatory category, Diyanet's personal-moralistic references to the family do not seek to interfere with the private sphere and primarily focus on its moral sphere.

4.1.8 Solidarity

Solidarity is another code frequently referenced by the Diyanet, utilized within specific contexts. In a personal-moralistic sense, Diyanet employs solidarity as a binding context that holds significance for faith, holidays, and gatherings, emphasizing their role in fostering unity within the religious congregation. As a condition of being part of this congregation, people "come together more closely" during special feasts (08.21.2018) and "fulfill the requirements of the bonds of brotherhood, and properly carry out the duties of solidarity" where their "unity and togetherness reach the peak" (09.12.2016). Especially in the personal-moralistic context

of solidarity in Diyanet's sermons, the power of religion as a unifying force is palpable, maintaining a profound sense of brotherhood. As Davutoğlu (2014) notes, these provide a means of individual ethical control and socialize basic modes of behavior, while their social reflections unite Muslims from diverse ethnic backgrounds, facilitating solidarity. Indeed, observing these differing characteristics of solidarity within personal-moralistic categories will serve to distinguish them from their usage in social-regulatory and national-civilizational categories.

Since all these codes in this category neither reflect social-regulatory nor civilizational-national attributions, they resonate as moral appeals stemming from Islam in the Diyanet's Friday sermons and are analyzed accordingly. Sermons in this category assist religious Muslims in understanding and remembering these personal-moralistic tasks while emulating the Prophet's behaviors and following the path of Islam to become good Muslims. This category, with their enlightening and guiding structure, speaks primarily to the field of social ethics.

4.2 Meso-Level (Social-Regulatory) Sermons

The meso-level emerges with a social-regulatory emphasis and serves as an overarching category for sermons that address the management of social life, encompassing a blend of political and social issues. Unlike the micro-level attributions in sermons, this specific level as a category delves into the nuanced preservation and regulation of values essential for the AKP-led identity-based transformation. Within this category, meticulously crafted codes such as aiding countries in need, fostering solidarity, combating moral abuse, nurturing pious generations, and regulating the family institution stand out as pillars of socio-political reflexes. These codes serve as a lens through which to explore the relational network

embedded within Diyanet sermons, revealing the underlying factors through which the AKP endeavors to redefine the nationalist-conservative imagination and shape the concept of the 'new Turkey'. By contextualizing each code within such political landscape, the meso-level aims to elucidate this intricate relational network.

4.2.1 Helping Countries in Need

The initial code I would like to address is entitled as 'helping countries in need,' which exemplifies the distribution of aid within a specific geographical region or regions, identified with their Islamic heritage or common heritage shared with Turkey. This code is simply an example of a nation's commitment to demonstrating generosity and fostering brotherhood with countries that are considered part of the vast geography. Especially, within the framework of Islamic moral principles, the act of helping serves to strengthen solidarity with countries that are considered integral to Islam. The Diyanet often calls upon the ummah to support countries in need, either financially or morally, through fundraising events organized by the Presidency of Religious Affairs and Religious Endowments. Such actions are regarded as an extension of the "nation's goodwill and charity" to the global community, depicting individuals in these countries as "oppressed and victimized brothers and sisters," aiming to strengthen the bonds of unity (09.02.2016).

The Diyanet's consistent emphasis on the Turkish Religious Foundation's role in extending the nation's support globally, facilitated by public contributions, demonstrates the nation's generosity and resilience in combating oppression worldwide, thereby proving transnational solidarity. This encourages donations for the ongoing construction of mosques and *külliye*[11] in various locations such as "Cyprus, Kyrgyzstan, Albania, Djibouti" with

[11] A külliye is considered a Turkish-Ottoman traditional social complex, which includes all the buildings built around a mosque, such as a madrasah, soup kitchen, fountain, library, hospital, tomb, bathhouse, tekke, and zawiye.

sermons typically concluding with the following words: “Whoever builds a mosque for the sake of Allah, Allah will build for him a similar palace in paradise” (05.19.2017). As part of aiding other countries, mosque construction and foundational activities occasionally become potential political agendas, frequently referenced in President Erdoğan’s political discourse. For instance, during the re-opening ceremony of a mosque in Kyrgyzstan, President Erdoğan proclaimed it as “a symbol of unity and peace among brothers…” asserting that “…wherever there is a dome or a minaret today, we know that it is a Muslim land” (TCCB, 2018). This statement, perceived as a commitment to the geographical land viewed as an alliance, holds sacred and existential significance for the civilization’s path. Subsequent code of solidarity should be analyzed accordingly with this matter.

4.2.2 Solidarity

For Diyanet, solidarity serves as both a supportive element and a unifying force of the ummah, transcending geographical boundaries, and finds consolidation within “the mosques constructed with the support of the nation”. These mosques, serving as cradles of congregations, emerge as places where all believers “stand shoulder to shoulder, strengthening their unity and solidarity” (03.22.2019). This specific act serves to mobilize a sense of spirituality, fortify ethics, and strengthen the ummah by addressing detrimental behaviors such as dependency, and bad habits, which are perceived as leading “to the dissolution of families, squandering national wealth, and shaking spirituality to its core”. Diyanet evidently perceives solidarity as a matter requiring regulation even within the private sphere, as evidenced by its assertion that it is tragic for an individual to pass away “without being able to utilize their talents for the benefit of the ummah” (02.23.2018). Regulating this sphere of life is considered to fortify Islamic morals, with the belief that standing against oppression and injustice will lead to the disappearance of “all forms of evil, malice, and falsehood” through striving to embody the qualities of the ummah. To achieve these goals

without any moral abuse, solidarity is portrayed as an empowering phenomenon, stimulating "the consciousness of the ummah" and reinstating "peace and tranquility, compassion and mercy, justice and truth within the Islamic geography" (11.04.2016). Diyanet regularly underscores the necessity to fight for solidarity to embody the essence of being a true Muslim and as part of it attempts to regulate the private sphere.

Hence, I classified the code of solidarity (also) into a social-regulatory category, distinguishing it from the previous personal-moralistic category to illustrate the distinctions. Solidarity in this category is perceived as not a directly civilizational aspect of Islamic unity, portraying Muslims as individuals in need of protection for Islamic values, especially against moral abuses.

4.2.3 Moral Abuses

Moral abuses are often depicted as things that would never be allowed by religion and true Muslims must remain steadfast against them (e.g. extra-marital partnerships, interest gains, withholding rightful dues or theft, dissemination of disinformation, indulgence in irrelevant pursuits, and hostility towards the environment and the people) (01.25.2019). Therefore, Muslims, as integral members of the ummah, are expected to unwaveringly uphold Islamic moral values, which are perceived as fundamental for the nation and the broader civilization. The Diyanet asserts that individuals who partake in moral transgressions will not be considered true Muslims in the eyes of Allah. Consequently, the Diyanet consistently advocates for the protection and dissemination of these values across a broader, transnational cultural landscape. This is exemplified by its efforts to extend a "helping hand" to countries in need and establish *külliye,* which may oversee various activities in these regions.

4.2.4 Regulating the Family and Raising Pious Generations

When discussing societal values, two primary codes emerge as the most regulated and frequently mentioned: the institution of family and, as an element of it, raising pious generations. The previous sections have shown that the AKP vowed to dismantle the secular hegemony that had shaped young generations for decades in accordance with Republican ideals (Yabancı, 2021) and endeavored to transform them into 'pious' or 'devout' generations (Rogenhofer, 2018; Kirdiş, 2021; Bacik and Seker, 2023). This endeavor manifests in Diyanet's Friday sermons as a social-regulatory basis of private sphere, primarily focused on regulating the family to raise pious generations. To some extent, the two are interconnected because Diyanet imposes the responsibility of raising pious generations onto families and consistently addresses this issue as a must.

First and foremost, the family institution is discussed as the cornerstone of the Diyanet, which emphasizes that marriage is the covenant between men and women, described as a "solid foundation laid to protect society and generations" (01.05.2018). Moreover, the Diyanet stresses the importance of strengthening the family covenant by stating that "good habits and morals are acquired within the family" (02.23.2018), and highlights that the weakening of today's spirituality is partly due to the weakening of family ties (02.15.2019). This stance appears to align with President Erdoğan's expressed goal of "raising pious generations" (Evrensel, 2019). The sermons also address how extramarital relationships and same-sex partnerships "lead to the collapse of the family institution while also threatening the existence of pure generations" (01.25.2019). Therefore, the Diyanet frequently emphasizes the importance of three main institutions when it comes to raising "pious generations" and discusses their impacts. These institutions are firstly, the family, where generations acquire their "selfhood and perspectives on life"; secondly, the school, where they acquire "knowledge, consciousness, and culture"; and finally, the mosque, where they gain "identity,

sense of belonging, and spiritual enrichment" (09.23.2016). These three pillars are of paramount importance for the Diyanet, serving as constant regulatory sites for preserving Islamic identity and values.

Similarly, in his speech at Ankara University's Faculty of Theology, President Erdoğan expressed the idea of creating a pious tradition and generation, stating, "God willing, a pious youth, a pious generation will be raised by your hands... If we achieve this... all spiritual values will suddenly experience a leap, and a nation that loves each other for the sake of Allah, not for personal gain, position, or power, will emerge" (Evrensel, 2019). In doing so, President Erdoğan underscores the importance of creating the pious tradition and generation necessary for shaping the religio-national identity. It is important not to overlook the emphasis placed on cultivating such a youth, which aligns with the government's aim of "raising a pious generation" as articulated by Diyanet. In this regard, the social-regulatory attributions in Diyanet's Friday sermons represent a general framework in which certain ideas coexist, that are undeniably prominent and compatible with AKP's idea of creating an alternative identity. Overall, the meso-level resonates as an instrumental category in the transition from micro- to macro-level sermons, embodying a shift that is social-regulatory in nature, although not distinctly political.

4.3 Macro Level (National-Civilizational) Sermons

The final category is macro-level, which constitutes the majority of my analysis. I consider this category to be national-civilizational, because of the transitivity of nationalist and civilizationist attributions, coupled with the reinforcement of sentiments associated with being Turkish and broadly Muslim. These attributions in sermons not only contain historical references evoking nostalgic tendencies towards the creation of a nation, but also encompass

efforts to construct a civilizational identity that transcends the national identity, supported by the perception of Islamic civilization. Naturally, this category embodies a reflective trajectory that encompasses the past, present, and future of the envisioned civilization. The predominantly nationalist and religious discourses as part of this envisioning are deeply rooted in both the state and religious rhetoric, serving as a mobilizing force within society. Thus, these attributions are implicitly reinforced at both the micro- and meso-levels, ultimately finding their distinct articulation in macro-level themes within sermons. As discussed earlier, the institutionalization of Diyanet's influence, as an "extending hand," underscores its expanding feature through sermons that appeal to all segments of society. For this purpose, a closer examination of national-civilizational sermons will reveal the utilization of a language that is relatively more belligerent and even hostile. This level of categorization will assist me in reflecting on comparisons with the first two levels.

The codes presented below have played a significant role in determining whether sermons involve acts of conflict, defensiveness, or expansionism as a nation and more broadly as a civilization, thereby making a substantial contribution to this analysis. These codes have been developed based on theoretical concepts of civilizationism and nationalism (Chapter 2), as well as the political ideology of the AKP embodied as the Turkish-Islamic synthesis (Chapter 1). Therefore, civilizationism with its thin and universalist nature (Hale and Laruelle, 2020:2021, Ceronne, 2023) can be linked to thicker codes that have ideological foundations such as collective memory, Islam-nation nexus, civilizational leadership to defend the oppressed, patriotism, martyrdom in the name of the nation and Islam, nostalgia, sacralization of victory, and the nation's enemies. The specific 2016-2020 period will illustrate how the Diyanet aligned its sermons with the civilizational tendencies of the AKP.

4.3.1 Islam and Nation

Through this specific code, an analysis transitioning from the general to the specific has led to the formation of other codes. From this perspective, an attempt will be made to understand how the Diyanet perceives the connection between Islam and the nation, and how the historical, cultural, and civilizational perceptions established between them are reinforced. Consequently, efforts will be made to comprehend the special connection that integrates Islam and nationalism, thereby seeking to elucidate the sense of belonging intended to be created through the imaginary of civilization.

In the sermons of the Diyanet, rather than making a distinction between the concepts of Islam and the nation, I often encountered discourse that emphasized their fluidity/interconnectedness and even expresses the hope for the "perpetuity of Islam in these lands" (08.25.2017) (when referencing "these lands," the sermons do not specify the location, thereby suggesting an abstract space). Additionally, the perception of a transversality between the history of the nation and religious history, often associated with the idea that victories won for the nation have a religious significance, and victories won for religion have a national significance. This notion is articulated with the following words: "Our ancestors fought for the glory of Allah... The same spirit was present in the Battle of Badr, in the Gallipoli Campaign... The same spirit was present in the Conquest of Mecca, in the Conquest of Istanbul... The same spirit was present in the War of Independence, in the Battle of Manzikert..." (08.25.2017). In the sermons, past achievements are frequently recalled, and the idea of transferring these achievements as a set of values, particularly to the "pious generations" mentioned earlier, is emphasized. This is particularly evident in the encouragement to give children "names that will always remind them of their Muslim identity" and to include "both religious and national elements in their names" (06.29.2018). These values have become a set of factors that not only safeguard national achievements, but

also strengthen the connection between religion and the nation, thus preserving a deeper social memory. Moreover, mosques, which are described as bastions of these values, are regularly mentioned for their importance in "giving life to believers, imbuing cities with spirit, and contributing to the emergence of civilization" (09.29.2017).

There is a vision of the future within the Diyanet that emphasizes the importance of preserving the "ancestral homeland" as a force for maintaining a sense of civilization. Through the "nation that took pride in building Allah's mosques throughout its history," it is envisioned that there will be no future "without mosques, calls to prayer, homeland, or flag" (08.17.2018). This perception, in the context of the construction of a collective identity, underscores the remarkable characteristics of the Diyanet, which is not only a religious institution, but also serves as one of the integrative factors of religio-national identity. The connection established between religion and the nation strengthens the sense of nostalgia for the common heritage, which reminds us of the consciousness of being an ummah as members of an extended family that must work together within the framework of a common ideal to bring back the glorious days when civilizational values flourished (Yılmaz et al. 2021). However, analyzing sermons within this framework led to the realization of the transitivity between nation and civilization which remained highly persistent in sermons, leading to overlaps and occasional ambiguity in their usage within Diyanet's sermons contexts.

4.3.2 Nostalgia for the common heritage

Belonging to a civilization encompasses a shared history and heritage (Ceronne, 2023), which goes beyond a singular identity to include plural identities (Hale and Laruelle, 2020), such as the Ottoman heritage of the nation and the broader Islamic heritage of the civilization. Belonging to this civilization thus involves not only reimagining the nostalgia associated with the Ottoman past, but also rethinking its Islamic heritage. The Diyanet frequently asserts that

the enduring values are grounded in "14 centuries of vast experience" (07.22.2016), incorporating Islamic history as an integral part of civilization. Particularly evident in sermons following the 2016 coup attempt, nostalgia is crafted around the notion that Turkey has been perceived as "a Muslim homeland for centuries" (07.22.2016), emphasizing the narrative that "heroic ancestors defended this homeland through a noble struggle, drawing strength from their faith and persevering with their love for the homeland" (03.16.2018).

Struggle and difficulty often prevail in the sermons, as they are seen as opportunities for progress or expansion, as indicated by the assertion that "the difficult processes of the past are harbingers of new Islamic resurgences" (12.16.2016). Particularly noteworthy is the concept of considering the nation's land as a "safe haven" for one's own geography, where it is emphasized that "millions of brothers and sisters[12] fleeing civil wars, atrocities, and massacres... have taken refuge in our lands" (07.07.2017). Instead of considering the nation only within its national borders, reimagining it with broader, expanding borders and a history of continuous creation in a way that is consistent with civilizational perspectives emerges as one of the salient features of nostalgia in these sermons. Accordingly, the Ottoman heritage emerges as a complementary element of the civilizational identity, with victories, especially those achieved through battles fought by the Empire, being prominently highlighted, as exemplified by the statement: "Let's not forget our history, our culture, our values, our victories that have made us who we are and brought us to this day" (03.16.2018). Due to the transitivity between national and civilizational, the nostalgia for the Ottoman past and the Islamic heritage has considerable significance within a civilizational perspective. This significance stems from its ability to embrace plural identities, rather than a singular identity and this diversity serves as a fundamental element in shaping political agendas and expectations.

[12]Here, Diyanet references refugees and immigrants who share a common religious heritage.

Nostalgia is also associated with loss, displacement, and the longing to return home or for an "imagined or idealized home" (Boym, 2001, p.7), or recognized for specific references to a "sentimental longing" for the past (Muro 2005, p.572) and a feeling that something good has been lost and that the world used to be a better place (de Vries and Hoffmann, 2018). Contrary to its typical use as national past or history as a key component of ethnic nationalism and populism (Elgenius, and Rydgren, 2022), nostalgia could also be perceived by nations as a civilizational longing. In this sense, beyond being a nationalist longing for an idealized empire, there is an attempt here to reinterpret a significant common history, perceived within the common culture of Islam, as a "common geography" (more on that below), and use this as a bridge between civilization and the nation.

4.3.3 Collective Memory

After analyzing the code of nostalgia for the common heritage, I felt the need for another closely related category, namely collective memory, because I noticed that many references to the recent past were reflected as part of the 15 July 2016 Coup Attempt and, unlike nostalgia, were used to keep hatred against the enemy alive and to refresh collective memory. According to the sermons, to keep this memory alive, it is imperative to pass on "great events of history... from generation to generation and not to be forgotten" (03.17.2017), as their forgetting could endanger the civilization and jeopardize the survival of both nation and religion. Such a collective memory facilitates the association of memory with current events such as "July 15th". It leads Diyanet to characterize certain efforts, exemplified by past wars, as efforts by vaguely-defined powers to "erase the nation and the ummah from the stage of history" and to highlight July 15th as "one of the greatest betrayals in the history of this civilization" (01.26.2018). These unfortunate events seem to have posed threats to both the Islamic ummah and the nation, forcing both the Diyanet and the AKP to recognize the need

for visual representation to demonstrate strength and establish a geographical coherence in the minds of the people.

The use of maps for nations becomes imperative to delineate an "inside" where the strength of the unity is consolidated and an "outside" where the threats are discernible, as well as to promote a homogeneous society devoid of political, economic, and cultural disparities (Adadağ, 2020). In this way, maps can also be used to illuminate specific geographies or cultures that transcend national borders. As it exemplified from Diyanet's sermons, any present threat or danger, fueled by collective memory and perpetuated over time, prompts the Diyanet to articulate this danger by delineating "us" and "them" through the abstract yet key concept of the "geography of the heart" (04.14.2017). The concept is abstract because it shows the connection between the lived space, where people have collective memories of where they live, and the perceived space, where people reimagine the borders with a common history. As a result, this connection offers initial data for depicting the entire geographical expanse extending beyond the former Ottoman borders, encompassing both the Turkish and Islamic regions intertwined with Turkey's shared cultural heritage. Figure 3 below provides an example.

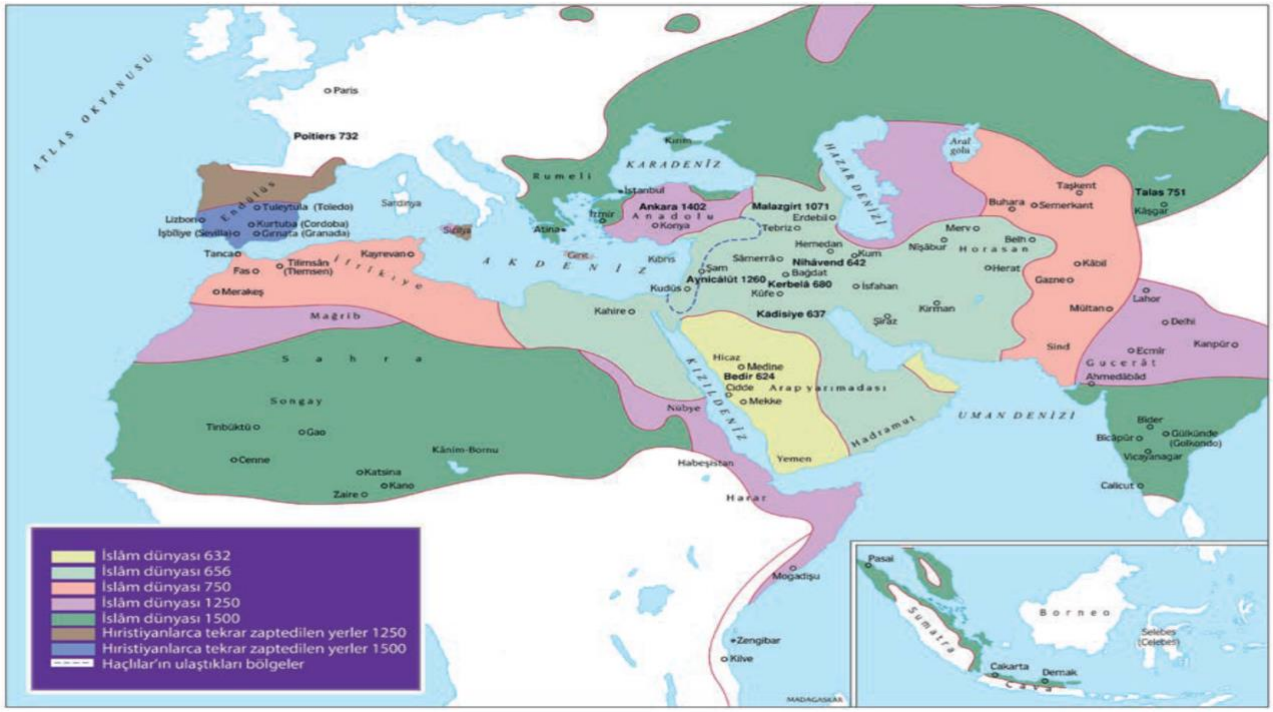

Figure 7. "Geography of the Heart" map from the 9th grade religious culture and ethics textbook

This map is featured in the 9th grade Religious Culture and Ethics textbook, a collaborative publication of the Directorate of Educational Services of the Diyanet and the Ministry of National Education. Although the historical and geographical emphases, rooted in retrospective imaginaries, have often been criticized as evoking an imperial nostalgia devoid of contemporary relevance and hollow patriotism, it is evident that the stance of the Diyanet aligned with the AKP, based on the thesis of "reconciliation with history and geography," a notion articulated in right-liberal intellectual circles since the 1990s (Bölükbaşı, 2021). This particular notion is also evident in Erdoğan's speech on the 15th anniversary of the founding of the AKP: "This political party may be 15 years old, but the civilizational cause of this party and its members is an ancient cause of 1,400 years". In another document published by the Directorate of Religious Education in 2020, the aim of religious education is highlighted as students' understanding of the "geography of the heart," emphasizing the fundamental goal of fostering "a youth that analyzes the position/situation of Muslims in the world considering the

past/present of Islamic civilization and geography of the heart, and envisages the future" (MEB, 2018).

The construction of such a term is highly insightful for conceptualizing an abstract space that is part of a broader geography, without which undefined supranational borders or civilizational identities could not be comprehended. Therefore, the Diyanet uses the term to manifest this vision in the minds of individuals as a geographical region that is perceived as affecting both the nation and the civilization. The term "geography of the heart" is sometimes used as a 'heartfelt bond' (12.09.2016) with other countries belonging to the common heritage, or the "geography of Islam," which represents broader borders than even the imperial past. As can be seen from the map above, the area defined by the Diyanet as the "geography of the heart" consists of the following regions: Hijaz region, Jerusalem and its surroundings, the regions of Damascus and Baghdad, Iran, Khorasan, Turkistan (Central Asia), Transoxiana region, Indian Subcontinent, Anatolia and Balkans, North Africa (Egypt and the Maghreb region), and Andalusia. This term and its constant use have received little scholarly attention and will be discussed further in the conclusion section to provide a more comprehensive analysis.

Finally, this specific inside/outside dichotomy within one's own culture or geography as part of "us" and the others as "them" can sometimes foster a sense of division and create a Manichean dichotomy of religious and moral values. The civilizational approach of the Diyanet, for example, views people who are part of this common heritage as allies, while others are perceived as threats, enemies, or immoral ones, and are pushed outside the realm of the civilizational perception. Islamism and its civilizational nature create divisions against opponents while fostering an environment of ideological unity or solidarity in allied regions, as "its survival and maintenance depends heavily on this level of opposition" (Yılmaz, Demir and Morieson, 2021, p. 3).

4.3.4 Threats to the Nation/Unity against the Enemy

Unlike other codes, these two codes are formulated to illustrate how the Diyanet perceives threats such as terrorism, immorality, and violence, positioning individuals who oppose the morals, identity, and future aspirations of the nation or civilization as elements that threaten the solidarity of the ummah. Moreover, by using elements such as collective memory and nostalgia, the Diyanet shows how the enemy can pose a threat, even if it does not specifically identify who the enemy might be. The "strife and discord intended to be instilled in hearts," which the Diyanet views as a threat posed by a nebulous enemy, may lead to the erosion of the civilizational 'heartfelt bond,' and may thus damage "unity, togetherness and brotherhood" (01.06.2017). The attribution of civilizational significance through myths and symbols is a constant feature of the Diyanet's discourse, especially by linking civilizationism to specific elements of nationalism, adopting a particularist stance and serving both to exclude foreign symbols as representatives of the civilization and to reinforce the complementarity between nationalism and civilizationism (Ceronne, 2023).

Particular emphasis is placed on the constant external threat that seeks to "foment feelings of hatred and enmity," and targets "unity and solidarity" (07.07.2017). By recalling common symbols of civilization such as the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem, Hagia Sophia and the battles of Karbala, the Trench, Manzikert, Gallipoli, the conquest of Istanbul, it is emphasized that vigilance against this enemy should always be maintained, as it was yesterday. Thus, this symbiotic relationship between the nation and the civilization, which complement each other's history in a way that creates a common identity, provides for the preservation of shared values against a common enemy today, or in the future. However, as mentioned, the Diyanet does not directly refer to these specific enemies in its sermons. Rather, there is a perception of numerous undefined enemies such as "those who target this heroic nation," "internal and external enemies," "enemies of Islam," "corrupt people," "the

münafıks (false Muslims)," "the global centres of deviant beliefs that drive the world into chaos," "those who seek to ignite fires in every corner of Islamic geography," and "those who divide brothers against each other with the weapons of strife, terrorism and treason" (07.24.2020). Although the enemy is not explicitly named as a clear target, it can be inferred that the Diyanet is referring to the Western civilization in such examples. The perception is that the preservation of unity and solidarity will be achieved through the defeat of the enemy, and that it will protect the Islamic geography from all threats. In order to have this collaborative force, patriotism and martyrdom are explicitly used as galvanizers of the supranational identity.

4.3.5 Patriotism/Martyrdom in the Name of the Nation and Islam

In the Diyanet's sermons, patriotism and martyrdom are almost always used in the same context, which imbues the concept of homeland and glorifies it with a deeper meaning. The exact presentation of the concept of the nation is unclear, as the Diyanet uses the following expressions to define this concept: "This nation has defended justice in all circumstances, established civilizations and spread civilizations to all corners of the world" (07.29.2016); the ancestors "draw strength from their faith while defending the homeland" (03.16.2018), and the values they uphold represent all the "material and spiritual values" (03.16.2018) that the nation possesses. When a homogeneous national consciousness positions itself as the leader and bringer, founder, integrator and protector of the civilization, it becomes a civilizational consciousness linked to the transnational borders with looser relationship with nationalist ideologies.

Remaining vigilant against any threat and "preserving the memory" of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the nation, as well as "embracing the noble values for which they sacrificed their lives," are other themes emphasized in the Diyanet's sermons

(03.17.2017). In its origin, this nation, which has been "the standard-bearer of Islam" for centuries, is expected to imagine this place "not just as a piece of land" but as a vast geography (07.13.2018), perhaps drawing a mental map to defend its own borders or a larger geography, and "preserving the legacy left behind". This "preservation of the legacy" is intertwined with martyrdom, as it means "cherishing the memory of the martyrs who remain alive in the hearts" and "holding fast to the lofty values for which they sacrificed their lives" (03.17.2017) and not to deviate from the sırat-i mustakim (righteous way) "that upholds Anatolian wisdom that majority of Muslims have walked upon from the generation of the companions of the Prophet to the present day" (07.13.2018).

In another sermon, the homeland is seen as a place where "bodies are put up as barriers" but "not a single inch is surrendered," and where "all material and spiritual values" are defended so that "the call to prayer does not cease, the flags are not lowered, and honor remains untarnished". The equivalent of defending this sacredness is described as "heroism or martyrdom" (03.16.2018), thereby reviving and sacralizing the notion of a "Muslim homeland" built upon it (08.30.2019). This idea can initially be understood as a symbolic connection that is the reason for nationalist thinking, as "a community that collectively owns and belongs to a territory that is whole and cohesive" (Chowers, 2018: 938). However, this homeland, soaked in the blood of martyrs, reinforces the belief in collective salvation through the periodic mobilization of a sacred community, so that "popular memories and origin myths are reinterpreted as sacred events in the formation and mission of a holy people" (Smith, 1996:587). These territorial attachments to "ancestral homelands" and sacred sites are sometimes manifested in maps of nations and sometimes in maps of civilizations, creating a link in people's minds between lived space and perceived space.

4.3.6 Leader Civilization who Defends Oppressed

Nations maintain connections with their past and heritage by consistently engaging with other countries in many forms. The Diyanet, as a duty, shows this connection in its sermons by regularly referring to the harsh conditions in the "geography of Islam" or the "geography of the heart" and their need for help as part of the nation's "brotherhood" or the ummah. Certain reflections of these harsh conditions can be found in the Diyanet's sermons, which consider Turkey as a leading nation that protects people's lives without expecting anything in return and raises the idea that Turkey's existence is the "last bastion that will ensure peace and tranquility" (07.14.2017) in this vast "geography of the heart".

Therefore, since there are many symbolic memories to be protected nationally at home (e.g., Hagia Sophia) and civilizationally abroad (e.g., Masjid al-Aqsa), as well as sister nations with 'heartfelt bonds,' the Diyanet shows its desire to reunite these nations under Turkey's leadership "as one heart without losing faith, hope and courage... against the oppressor" (04.07.2017), thus elevating Turkey to the status of a protective force. Furthermore, this sentiment is echoed in the sermons delivered by the Diyanet, especially when it comes to Turkey's aid to these nations. Qur'anic interpretations of hadiths such as "as long as a person helps his brother, Allah helps him" are presented as a justification for this sacred decision. There are many references to the support given to active conflict zones in the form of military aid, and to other territories (as mentioned in the category of social-regulatory sermons) through the construction of mosques, Koranic schools, and similar facilities.

The Diyanet regularly cites the situations in Somalia, Yemen, Syria, Rakhine and Palestine, positioning the Turkish nation and the ummah as the "voice of the oppressed" against the inhumane interventions inflicted on these nations (04.15.2016), which are considered as 'heartfelt bonds,' and declaring itself as the only nation to proclaim to the

world, for centuries, that humanity has not died (09.08.2017). In one of the sermons, the Diyanet, emphasizing the concept of the "geography of the heart," mentions how the oppressed, the victims the deprived, the displaced, the migrants "from Gaza to Sarajevo, from Kirkuk to Somalia, from Sudan to Pakistan, from the steppes of Asia to the edges of Africa, from every corner of the world, are praying" so that "the last bastion (Turkey) of the Islamic ummah does not fall" (07.14.2017). These prayers serve as an indicator of the size of the congregation and demonstrate the (assumed) value placed by the ummah on Turkey's assistance, guided by sacred significance. Thus, their prays signify that individuals continue to be grateful to Turkey as the protector of the civilization. In these sermons, another idea is that Jerusalem is not just an "ordinary piece of land," but rather an "inheritance" passed down from ancestors, and it exists as a "common value for all Muslims and humanity"—and Turkey is the guardian of this sacred land (05.18.2018). All in all, there is frequent emphasis on the importance of embracing a sense of unity against the oppression and suffering endured by the "geography of the heart" and against oppressors who "intend to divide, weaken ... and turn the geography into a land of blood and tears" (05.18.2018).

The sermons commonly present the construction of "bridges of compassion across geographies" (07.17.2020) as an obligation attributed to Turkey and the Turkish military, referring to the struggle of the "heroic nation". This is expected from a nation that "did not allow its homeland to be violated, its flag to be lowered and its call to prayer to be silenced". The constantly reiterated heroic nationalist consciousness and Islamic morality, by merging it with civilizational consciousness, is almost always reaffirmed with the goal of being a leader who "thwarts dark plots with wisdom and foresight and remains, as in the past, the solution for the helpless, the refuge for the orphaned, and the hope for the oppressed and refugees" (10.11.2019), while maintaining unity and solidarity. The Diyanet, therefore, seeks to demonstrate its commitment to extending a helping hand to all corners of the world, and

especially the “geography of the heart” (05.19.2017). Finally, the Diyanet seeks to deepen its influence in these geographies by providing scholarships through Quranic courses abroad and international Imam Hatip and theology programs (05.25.2018). This appears to be both a means of “preserving the legacy of the ancestors” by ensuring the presence of mosques, calls to prayer, homeland, and flag, as well as a way to leave “lasting legacies for future generations” (08.17.2018).

4.3.7 Sacralizing Victory

This final code is particularly associated with national triumphs in the sermons of the Diyanet; however, it is evident that Turkey’s history is inherently intertwined with Islamic and Ottoman history, and thus such victories acquire not only national significance but also hold a distinct civilizational meaning. In this context, it is noteworthy that the Diyanet specifically envisions the nation as a foundational element due to its concept of “defending righteousness, building civilizations, and spreading civilizations to all corners of the world” and its emphasis on never being “embarrassed, victimized, or deprived” by Allah for its efforts to preserve these values throughout history (07.29.2016).

The Diyanet frequently displays this attitude, often citing the resistance against the coup attempt of 15 July 2016 as an example of a sacred victory. Thus, rather than becoming mere “memories” embedded in social imaginary, these victories are presented by the Diyanet as “sacred values that enlighten the future,” emphasizing the need to transmit them from “generation to generation” and preserve them from oblivion. Many victories, as seen through the lens of the Diyanet, are portrayed as “epic tales of martyrdom,” with the idea that understanding this heroic “spirit” is especially imperative (03.17.2017). In sermons that begin with verses from the Quran, the Diyanet discusses victories in Islamic history as “victories of Allah” and emphasizes their status as part of a “common history” that is perceived as a

repetition of the past. Emphasizing that the "sacred promise" was witnessed once again during the events of July 15, the Diyanet describes that night as follows:

"On July 15th, we all witnessed that our noble nation, upon the call of our leaders, flooded the streets with the remembrance of God on their lips, the sound of prayers in their ears, and the desire for martyrdom in their hearts, to defend their homeland, rights, laws, free will, independence, and sovereignty" (07.14.2017).

The sacralization of these "victories" in the context of the Diyanet is aimed at keeping the values and memories alive, thus perpetuating the consciousness of unity and the ummah, and ultimately "presenting civilization to the world". Considering this civilizational value, the Diyanet describes its connection to the land as "irrigated with the blood of martyrs," and portrays it as an inseparable part of a vast geography that embodies a "sacred consciousness" rather than being just a piece of land. The sermon continues: "we, when necessary, may go hungry and thirsty, but we will never compromise our freedom and independence, nor our dignity and honor. We stand firm against attacks on our homeland, our sacred values, our unity, and solidarity by making every sacrifice required" (10.11.2019). As a result, "uniting around values" means a sacralized victory over all struggles and is reinforced by the belief that victory always belongs to the "nation that stands by the side of the truth and justice" (02.28.2020). Turkey being a flagbearer of the civilization for the Diyanet, the sermons give another sacred significance to the re-opening of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul in 2020, the Harim-i Ismet[13] of a vast ummah, which proves that "Islamic civilization continues to rise despite all difficulties" and symbolizes the determination of the "beloved nation, prioritizing faith and love of homeland, to build a solid future drawing from its spiritual roots" (07.24.2020). This significant event clearly becomes the zenith of the long-awaited sacred victory over

[13] Sacred, protected place by the God.

civilizational threats, serving as a quintessential bastion for safeguarding culture and identity of the civilization.

Conclusions

In tracing Turkey's historical trajectory through the ebbs and flows of Kemalist reforms, a nuanced examination of history reveals that the ties between the state and religion were never fully cut off. Instead, they remained persistent and evolved, prompting scholarly debate on whether secularizing reforms represented a definitive departure from Ottoman political heritage or an extension of earlier reformist endeavors (Davison, 1998). Such debates illustrate the intricate interplay of secularism and tradition in shaping the nation's socio-political landscape. What is of greater significance is the contention posited by certain scholars that the top-down imposition of Turkish *laiklik* fostered a socially immobile society, disproportionately affecting individuals from religious backgrounds who have long grappled with marginalization across the socio-economic and political spheres (Yılmaz, 2009; Taşpınar, 2007; Türköne, 2007; Karpat, 2002; Göle, 1997:2005). Considering all these debates, it is unsurprising that the manifestation of secularization, taking on distinctive forms in varied societal contexts, assumes a unique trajectory within Turkey, seeking to curtail the public visibility of Islam (Peker, 2020). However, evoking an anomaly, while it has been argued that secularism sought to eliminate Islam (Türköne, 2003) or eradicate it from the public sphere (Göle, 1997; Kamil, 2023), the process of secularization in Turkey reveals a context in which religion was transformed into a public service and rigorously regulated–albeit not uniformly for all religions–rather than being separated from other social institutions and simply relegated solely to the private sphere (Gözaydın, 2009; Peker, 2016; Çıtak, 2020; Kirdiş, 2021; Yılmaz, 2021). Undoubtedly, these instances serve as compelling evidence that the Kemalist state's institutional and constitutional oversight of religious activities underscores the state's intrinsic entanglement with religion, thereby challenging the notion of complete detachment (Yılmaz and Barry, 2020).

Furthermore, Turkish *laiklik* not only sought to separate religion from all other social power relations but also mandated its regulation "by the state for the state" to safeguard against perceived encroachments on modernization (Parlak, 2020; Bozdoğan, 1997). The crux of the matter lies in the state's stringent oversight of religious affairs, which has birthed a unique Turkish model of secularization. This model has resulted in a palpable sense of detachment among Muslims from their Islamic identity and traditions, leading to the individualization of their faith (Akgönül, 2018). Consequently, certain communities began to perceive this as victimization, a sentiment that resonated with the policies of the AKP. The party reframed and exacerbated these perceptions by positioning itself and its leader as guardians of religious values while simultaneously converting religious practices and their regulations into official state policies through a top-down populist rhetoric (Yılmaz et al., 2021). This particular sense of victimization emerged as a strategic tool for conservatives and, subsequently for the AKP during its early years. This approach strategically appealed to conservative individuals, capitalizing on collective memory and intermittently evoking Ottoman nostalgia. The AKP cautioned Muslims about the potential return of an era of bans and closures targeting Islam should the party lose power to its competitors (Yılmaz, 2019), thereby solidifying its authority. As Roy (2005) suggests, especially for Islamists, the acquisition of state power can pave the way for the re-Islamization of a society once influenced by Western values. The AKP pursued this re-Islamization by propagating a form of religious nationalism against internal and external threats. Utilizing Islamic collective memory and national-populist strategies–significantly accelerated and intensified after the coup attempt of 2016–the party reproduced a perception of threat, reinforcing the narrative of a "new Turkey".

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that the Friday sermons of the Diyanet between 2016 and 2020 played a pivotal role in a transformation that culminated in a novel fusion of

nationalism, Islamism, and civilizationism, arguably reaching its zenith with 2020 re-opening ceremony of Hagia Sophia as a mosque—framed as a national-civilizational victory over the West. Through this move, the AKP sought to extend the concept of "being the voice of the oppressed," initially conceived within national borders, into transnational realms, thereby encompassing the wider geography known as the "geography of the heart" and embodying a particular imaginary of civilizationism.

In a context where the politicization of the Diyanet is legitimized, it becomes reasonable to anticipate the classic politicization of the sacred through the alignment of its rhetoric with that of the AKP. This alignment is particularly evident in efforts to cultivate "a youth that critically examines the position of Muslims in the world, considering the past and present of Islamic civilization and embracing the concept of "geography of the heart" to envisage the future" (MEB, 2018). An analysis of the Friday sermons reveals that the political endeavor to envision solidarity beyond national borders is actively promoted and religiously justified by the Diyanet. Along the way, it was anticipated that the Diyanet utilized religion and nationalism to shape the discursive and ideological construction that supports and contributes to the formation and mobilization of collective identities around the concepts of the "people," "nation," and "civilization. However, when addressing the classic question of the politicization of the sacred or the sacralization of politics, it is not entirely accurate to speak of a direct instrumentalization or politicization of religion in the sense of the Diyanet. Instead, there appears to be a subtle process by which the AKP and conservative discourse gain a religious basis or legitimization via the Diyanet.

As observed in the example of Turkey, the country derives religious legitimacy through its claim to represent Islamic civilization. In this context, the term civilization holds significance, as it is not entirely detached from the nation as an imagined construct. This characteristic renders it not inherently embedded in populism (Yılmaz et al., 2022) but rather

represents another thin ideology with universalist values (Cerrone, 2023). Hence, the AKP sought to discursively construct a civilization under the leadership of the nation, aspiring to spearhead it, while also integrating elements of Islamism. Prominently observed in Diyanet's Friday Sermons, the ideology within sermons consistently strives to reinforce the concept of being at war, advocating vigilance, and promoting the "self-determination" of the nation and civilization. As emphasized by Barry and Yılmaz (2018, p.7), the Diyanet's status as one of the largest recipients of government funding among ministries intersects with its role as the "most politicized and undisputed ideological tool" of the state. However, contrary to initial scholarly expectations, the analysis of Friday sermons from 2016 to 2020 clearly shows that the Diyanet refrains from overtly employing these tools at a populist level, and it does not become instrumentalized by politics; rather, it provides a religious basis for political discourse.

Notably, references to immoral and self-serving elites–an indispensable part of populist rhetoric–are conspicuously absent from the Diyanet's sermons. The Diyanet does not consistently employ a political discourse, as evidenced by the micro-, meso-, and macro-level distribution of sermon categories in the qualitative content analysis. Instead of a populist register, it frequently adopts a civilizationist-nationalist concepts, which falls in line with the policies of the AKP. Nevertheless, this does not imply that the Diyanet, within its own sphere, does not contribute to populism; adeptly utilizing civilizationist-nationalist stances, the Diyanet provides narratives that align with the AKP's populist discourse that also mobilizes nationalism and civilizationism (Bacik and Seker, 2023).

Moreover, the term "geography of the heart" provides a critical lens for understanding the AKP's reimagining of the nation within a civilizationist framework, depicting national solidarity through a broader spectrum that aligns with a transnational cultural identity. This concept emerges as one of the key findings of this thesis, which has so far failed to be

sufficiently examined in existing scholarship. Through this lens, President Erdoğan seeks to construct a civilizationist vision by merging his expansionist policies abroad with populist politics at home, creating potential new imbalances in global politics considering inter and intra-civilizational. Especially, in the imagination of a vast geographic vision, this concept of "geography of the heart" depicts an abstract vision of incorporating neighboring countries within national borders while also exemplifying an expansionist policy that transcends the national boundaries and might clash with other countries' civilizationist imaginations. Future studies should further analyze this concept through the lenses of political sociology and the nexus of religion and nationalism, rather than limiting the analysis solely to the context of populism. This concept of "geography of the heart" serves to clarify ambiguities surrounding religion, nationalism, populism, and civilizationism, particularly when attributing certain characteristics to the theoretical framework of civilizationism and populism in Turkey. Specifically, concerning the Diyanet, this thesis underscores the significance of the sermons from the 2016-2020 period in comprehending the complex interplay of religion, nationalism, and civilizationism in Turkey. Furthermore, the findings offer valuable insight into similar countries where religion is politicized, whether overtly or covertly, as a marker of 'the people', the nation, and/or the civilization, offering a basis for comparative analyses.

A closer examination of civilizationism, as undertaken in this thesis, contributes to ongoing discussions about the potential transition from nation-states to "empires," as every neo-imperial, expansionist state rhetoric justifies itself by invoking a distinct "civilizational" identity that needs protection (such as Western Christian, Orthodox, or Islamic) (Akturk, 2022). Bacik and Seker (2023) note that in response to the mindset of civilizationism and populism, certain political actors may find it profitable to propagate the idea that the collapse of their civilization is imminent, positioning only themselves and their parties as capable of countering this threat. Such narratives can easily create the conditions for the popularity of

political ideas that promise to correct the historical failures of “us,” or the in-group. Such ideologies resonate effortlessly with the religious identity frameworks, effectively promoting national unity and civilizational survival. In the case of Turkey, this phenomenon is particularly emphasized by religious identity, which helps clarify national unity within a specific ummah belonging to a shared civilization. My qualitative content analysis reveals that between 2016 and 2020, Turkey’s shift toward an overtly civilizationist framing was underscored and guided by the Diyanet and its sermons. These sermons instilled, either directly or indirectly, the notion of a continuous conflict with the Western civilization and positioned President Erdoğan as the leader of both the nation and the broader ummah united by Islam. This analysis exposes a deeply entrenched political vision that evokes a distinctive “civilizational” identity rooted in Islam and Turkishness, warranting further investigation into other countries and geographies where civilizationism, nationalism, religion, and populism may be similarly intertwined.

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