


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Beyond Positivism: Building Turkish *Laiklik* in the Transition from the Empire to the Republic (1908–38)

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Abstract

The literature on the development of secularism in Turkey, or *laiklik*, often cites the national state builders' positivist worldviews as a principal explanatory factor. Accordingly, the legal-institutional form Turkish secularism took in the 1920s and 1930s is derived, to a large extent, from the Unionists' and Republicans' science-driven, antireligious ideologies. Going beyond solely ideational narratives, this article places the making of secularism in Turkey in the context of the sociopolitical contention for national-capitalist state building. In so doing, the article contributes to the latest “spatiotemporal” turn in the secularization literature, characterized by an increased attention to historical critical junctures, and sensitivity to multiple secularities occurring in Western as well as non-Western geographies. Based on a bridging of the secularization scholarship with that of state formation, and building extensively on Turkish archival material, I argue that the trajectory, fluctuations, and contradictions of secularization can be closely associated with two intertwined master processes: (1) the construction of internal and external sovereign state capacity, and (2) geographically specific trajectories of class formation/dynamics. The Turkish case demonstrates that secular settlements cannot be explained away simply by reference to the guiding ideas of actors. Contentious episodes such as civil-bureaucratic conflict, war and geopolitics, and class struggles/alliances make a significant imprint on the secularizing process.

Keywords: Secularization; religion; Islam; state building; Turkey

Introduction

The scholarship on late Ottoman and early Republican history agrees that positivism had a significant impact on the mind-set of the Turkish state-building elite. It is commonly understood that positivist, science-driven, and antireligious ideologies were a key determining factor guiding the state builders' secularizing priorities and policies, which culminated in *laiklik*, a particular secular settlement in the 1920s and 1930s. To cite but a few, Zürcher (2010: 214) writes that the Young Turks' “primary concern was to instill a positivist mentality and worldview in

the Ottoman public.” Lewis (1961: 231) holds that positivism “profoundly influenced . . . secularist radicalism in Turkey.” Yavuz and Esposito (2003: xxi) concur: “Nothing shaped and guided the Young Turks and Mustafa Kemal as much as positivism.” With differing levels of emphasis, the allusion to positivism can be found in various historiographies (Ahmad 1993: 77; Berkes 1964: 306; Göle 1997: 48; Karpat 1972: 279; Mardin 1977: 285; Timur 1971: 132) as well as works that deal mainly with the ideational frameworks of Turkish national state builders (Hanioglu 1995, 2011; Mardin 1981; Turnaoğlu 2017).

The importance of these positivist ideologies for advancing secularism in Turkey is difficult to dispute. Nevertheless, simply highlighting positivism offers little to explain the particular legal-institutional form and practices of secularism that emerged in this country. For instance, despite its swift, ambitious, and comprehensive secularizing project, why did *laiklik* fail to bring about institutional differentiation by assuming a monopoly in managing Sunni Islam in the polity, centered on the Directorate of Religious Affairs? What accounts for the systematic favoring of Muslims over non-Muslims in the state-building process, despite the generally anti-religious convictions of the ruling elite? Answering questions such as these requires going beyond the positivism narrative. As Künkler and Madeley (2018: 380–81) write, guiding ideas “are only part of the story” in the study of secularization, and they are “bound to be quite speculative” if they are not complemented by the analysis of the “interests and opportunities associated with variously placed actors.” In other words, secularization needs to be historically and geographically contextualized.

This article sets the development of *laiklik* against the background of the socio-political contention for national-capitalist state building during the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. Its theoretical framework draws on the recent “spatiotemporal” turn in the sociological study of secularization, characterized by an increased attention to historical critical junctures and sensitivity to “multiple secularities” occurring in Western as well as non-Western geographies (Altınordu 2012; Casanova 2006; Gorski 2003b; Katznelson and Jones 2010; Künkler et al. 2018; Pickel 2011; Warner et al. 2010; Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012). Advancing the spatiotemporal turn, the article links the secularization scholarship with that of state formation to nuance the analysis of how secular settlements unfold in critical junctures, which in turn create legal-institutional path dependencies. I propose that the two intertwined master processes cited in the state formation literature should be taken into consideration as potentially influential on the trajectory of secularization in a given polity: (1) the construction of internal/external sovereign state capacity, and (2) geographically specific trajectories of class formation/dynamics. Highlighting the two processes is a reminder that ideological concern about religion versus secularity is often not the sole motivation of actors, nor is it the only issue at stake in critical junctures. Secularization, instead, takes shape in a larger contentious framework, and in close association with other processes of state building that are not strictly about religion. The article thus builds on the work of scholars who underscore the centrality of the state for secularization, which is all the more true for non-Western cases in which public secularity emerges more often through rapid political change than diffuse social evolution (Başkan 2014; Demerath 2007; Keddie 1997; Künkler et al. 2018).

Applying the proposed framework to the late Ottoman and early Republican history, I argue for the following interrelated propositions.¹ First, confirming the theoretical inferences of neosecularization scholars (Goldstein 2009; Yamane 1997), secularization in Turkey followed a nonlinear, uneven, fluctuating, and often contradictory trajectory. The historical narrative will demonstrate that such heterogeneity can only make sense in the actuality of sociopolitical contentions, rather than being a simple implementation of positivist ideas.

Second, the relationship that the Committee of Union and Progress (hereafter Unionists) and Republicans established with Islam was not uniformly negative, but intensely bifurcated. In affiliation with the two master processes discussed in the preceding text, they experienced Islamic entities (social groups, political authorities, identities, institutions, diplomacy, and worldviews) simultaneously as a source of opposition *as well as* an essential basis for their state-building efforts, which caused irregularities in their secularizing policy making.

Third, the findings verify the claim that encounters with colonialism/imperialism is a crucial factor for how secularization unfolds beyond the West (Künkler and Shankar 2018: 17, 26). Yet the impact of the West is not limited to ideational/institutional emulation and legacies, or external pressures. Politico-military conflict with (Christian) Europe may also empower local religions as a source of “cultural defense” (Bruce 2009). Although Turkey was never formally colonized, Western occupation coupled with local Christian separatisms solidified Islam’s privileged position in state building as what Charles Taylor (2007: 455–59) calls a “neo-Durkheimian” collective identity and mobilizing force (see, for instance, Goalwin 2018). Nonetheless, this partiality was concurrently counterbalanced. Led by a faction of the empire’s old ruling elite and allied Muslim notable classes, the Islamically articulated sociopolitical opposition to the state-building initiative accelerated and intensified the nationalists’ secularization efforts.

Fourth, responding to this bifurcated context, Turkish state builders’ secularizing strategy followed a two-tier path. Accordingly, they first incorporated the empire’s Islamic authority, services, and personnel into the institutions of the national state, completed during the 1908–27 period. Monopolizing Islamic power facilitated war-mobilization efforts, provided legitimacy for the regime, and helped neutralize religiously underpinned domestic sociopolitical contenders. Yet after the consolidation of Republican sovereignty, and parallel with the *étatist* turn for industrial development, the latter period of 1928–38 witnessed the controlled diminishment of religion, where the state used its monopoly for the purpose of lessening Islam’s significance in public life. Cutting religious funds, eliminating personnel, and rendering many services unavailable, the Republic instead underpinned secular nationalism, populism, and solidarism as alternatives to Islamic identity. Turkey’s highly regulated path to secularization corroborates the idea of “multiple secularities,” or the variety of lineages and forms of secularization around the world (Burchardt et al. 2015; Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012). In line with Fox’s (2008) global findings on state regulation as an inherent component of secularism, the direct management

¹While some of these propositions can be found with varying levels of emphasis in Turkish historiography, they have never been articulated, illustrated, and explained in a theoretically systematic perspective informed by the secularization and state formation canons.

of the dominant religion in Turkey, as opposed to cutting it loose, emerged as the primary secularizing tool.

Fifth, and finally, the historically specific, namely *capitalist* nature of modern state building should not be overlooked in the secularization canon. Along with and closely related to sovereignty building, which neutralized the power of the traditional ruling elite and social classes, secularization in Turkey (and indeed elsewhere) was intimately linked to “the successful installation of a legal and political framework in which the free development of capitalist property relations is assured” (Stedman Jones 1977: 86). The archival materials show that Turkish state builders consciously worked for the construction of a national economy integrated with global markets, which contributed to the secularization process by undermining various Islamically embedded social groups, laws, customs, and traditional practices.

Bringing forth the contentious aspects of state building in Turkey, I do not claim to falsify the positivist narratives in the literature. As a scientific vision of progress and modernization, European strands of positivism had indeed a considerable impact on the educated elites of developing countries as diverse as Turkey, Mexico, India, Japan, and Brazil (Feichtinger et al. 2018). Nor is it the purpose here to historically trace and “explain” positivist ideologies in Turkey by boiling them down to material processes, or to imply a false dichotomy between the two phenomena. Instead, acknowledging Weber’s notion of “elective affinity,” which emphasizes the reciprocal and intertwined relationship between ideal and material interests/realities (Gerth and Mills 1946: 62; Thomas 1985: 40), my argument *complements* the dominant positivism paradigm with a less prominent one that prioritizes state formation, focusing on sovereign capacity and class dynamics in the making of secularization.

The time frame here is between the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, which prompted the national state-building initiative, and the juncture of 1937–38 that overlapped the constitutionalization of *laiklik* with the end of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s presidency of the Republic. Resting on an array of archival data featuring laws, decrees, parliamentary debates, political party documents, speeches of politicians, along with other historiographies of the period, I employ a methodology of “causal narrative” (Lange 2013: 15, 44). Accordingly, I present a sequential account of this critical juncture to offer insight into the causal processes that led to particular path dependencies for secularization in Turkey. Rather than being concerned with rates of individual religiosity, the level of analysis is macrosociological, akin to Taylor’s (2007: 20, 243) Secularity 1, whereby “a transcendent God” becomes “displaced at the center of social life” and “a retreat of religion in public life” is observed to affect spheres such as politics, the economy, law, education, and civil society. More specifically, the focus is on what Chaves (1994: 756–57) calls the decline of “religious authority,” that is, “social structures whose legitimation rests on reference to the supernatural” and the “capacity of religious elites to exercise authority over other institutional spheres.” I begin with a discussion of the spatiotemporal turn in the secularization debate, followed by my own proposed contribution to that literature, namely the elaboration of sovereignty and class dynamics as influential processes. Using this toolkit, I then delve into a sequential narrative of the late Ottoman and early Republican period to recount the fluctuating and uneven

trajectory of secularization. In the concluding section, I expand on the contributions that the Turkish case offers for Turkish studies as well as the secularization literature.

The Spatiotemporal Turn in the Secularization Debate

By the end of the twentieth century, the secularization debate in sociology seemed to have reached an impasse. On one side of the standoff was the classical secularization paradigm, which emerged in the postwar period to argue that various forces of modernity would unavoidably bring about the decreased social significance and increased privatization of religion (Berger 1967; Bruce 2002; Wilson 1966). On the other side was the religious economies paradigm, which arose in the 1980s and used a neoclassical economic framework to document that individual religiosity was in fact livelier than ever, thus declaring the death of the secularization perspective (Hadden 1987; Stark and Finke 2000; Warner 1993). Sensing the impasse early on, neosecularization scholars came to meet the criticisms against the classical paradigm with qualifiers and clarifications. Distinguishing between micro/meso/macro levels of analysis and latent/manifest processes of secularization, they argued that secularization does not imply a linear, irreversible, or uniform phenomenon of religious decline, but rather encompasses a complex process of religious change occurring unequally in various spheres of society, and across different polities (Dobbelaere 2004; Sommerville 1998; Yamane 1997).

More specifically within the neosecularization perspective, a growing body of scholarship made a call to shift the terms of the sociological debate with particular attention to place and time. This is because the geographical scope had been restricted mostly to the Western world, and the historical methods and processes were not predominant in either paradigm. To historicize the debate, Gorski (2005: 175; 2003b: 122) suggested treating secularization as the “contingent outcome of particular events involving particular actors” and considering the “sociopolitical conflicts” that brought it about. Casanova (2006: 9; 1994: 17), likewise, proposed conducting “comparative sociological analyses of historical processes of secularization” and refocusing “the attention beyond Europe and North America.” In short, cross-religious and cross-regional historical inquiry was highlighted as a promising avenue of research for a context-sensitive and politically informed understanding of secularization (Altinordu 2012; Katznelson and Jones 2010; Pickel 2011).

Many macrosociological case studies and comparative works emerged in the last decade to contribute, directly or indirectly, to historicizing secularization in Western as well as non-Western geographies (Akan 2017; Başkan 2014; Buckley 2016; Cady and Hurd 2010; Grzymała-Busse 2015; Hibbard 2010; Künkler et al. 2018; Kuru 2009; Mayrl 2016; Saeed 2017; Smith 2003; Zubrzycki 2016). To be sure, the works of these authors follow neither a particular theory nor set of methodological guidelines to study religion and secularity. What I call the spatiotemporal turn denotes what Wittgenstein (2009) calls a “family resemblance” of approaches—historically and geographically sensitive accounts that defy the homogeneous and teleological understanding of secularization. While such a perspective may be commonplace among historians, the turn represents a notable historicizing shift within the sociological debates. The comparative-historical agenda underscores the varieties of

secular experience, or “multiple secularities” constructed through contentious, contingent processes, where each secularizing trajectory has different priorities and guiding principles (Burchardt et al. 2015; Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt 2012). As such, secularization is arguably one area of academic inquiry today in which the historical and sociological disciplines forge a more intimate dialogue than they did two decades ago.

Critical Junctures: Secularization in State Building

The spatiotemporal turn in sociology led to a heightened interest in studying critical junctures of state building. Critical junctures refer to relatively short, politically uncertain historical phases where “the decisions . . . of key actors are freer and more influential in steering institutional development than during ‘settled’ times” (Capoccia 2015: 150). In such intervals, a series of highly contingent events set into motion “the adoption of a particular institutional arrangement from among . . . alternatives” (Mahoney 2000: 513). Once consolidated, the new system produces path-dependent outcomes, laying out fairly fixed institutional frameworks and practices that become gradually difficult to change over time (Pierson 2000: 257). Expressed in terms of the secularization canon, critical junctures create “secular settlements,” that is, “relatively stable sets of policies governing the role of religion in particular social domains—in each country” (Mayrl 2016: 2). Künkler et al.’s (2018) comparative volume on non-Western secularities conclude that “foundational moments . . . like the end of colonial rule, civil war, or revolution . . . create path dependencies in religion-state relations” (Künkler and Madeley 2018: 380).

Despite such interest, the literature rarely investigates those foundational moments in a conceptually consistent fashion. This may be one of the reasons why ideational explanations, such as the positivism narrative in the case of Turkey, take precedence over the analysis of actual processes. Ahmet Kuru’s insightful comparative-historical work involving Turkey, for instance, concludes that “ideas and ideologies come first” in the analysis of state policies toward religion, causing him to fall back to the positivism account (Kuru 2009: 10, 83, 214; for a critique, see Akan 2017; Başkan 2014). For a better understanding of the causal mechanisms in critical junctures, “it is important . . . that secularization theory be complemented” (Pickel 2011: 15). Here, I offer to do that with the scholarship on state formation.

The comparative-historical/political sociology literatures emphasize two interrelated master processes inherent to modern state formation, overlapping respectively with the primary concerns of Weberian and Marxian accounts: building internal/external national-sovereign state capacity and geographically specific trajectories of class formation/dynamics. The first refers to central governmental capability to rule, monitor, and transform society (Mann 1984). The scholarship on state capacity is rich and variegated, focusing on the coercive, extractive, administrative, and developmental aspects of the phenomenon (Hendrix 2010; Soifer 2008). The underlying premise of these works is that infrastructural power is conditioned upon the ability of the state “to maintain sovereignty . . . over a geographical territory,” where “state organs . . . are able to hold competing power centers at bay” (Bäck and Hadenius 2008: 3, 15). This requires “eliminating or neutralizing rivals” inside and outside the

national territory through war, diplomacy, civil conflict, and so forth (Tilly 1985: 181). The second master process denotes the struggles and alliances between social classes in the establishment of the national state, that is, “the varied political roles” played by different societal strata “in the transformation from agrarian societies . . . to modern industrial ones” (Moore 1966: viii). State formation is viewed here in primarily socioeconomic terms, where the modern governmental apparatus emerges in the transition from a feudal/precapitalist to a capitalist mode of production, shaped by the complex interplay of class dynamics specific to a given social formation (Anderson 1974). The distinction between the Weberian and Marxian accounts corresponds in general terms to the territorial and capitalist dimensions of power, which are related but not analytically reducible to each other (Arrighi 1994: 33–34; Harvey 2003: 26–31). Despite their differing emphases, the two accounts converge on the idea that modern state formation is ultimately linked to economic development, creation of an efficient administrative structure, and autonomy from other institutions (Gorski 2003a: 165, 160).

Other scholars have also emphasized the significance of modern state formation for secularization, especially in non-Western cases like Turkey where *Secularity 1* occurred rather swiftly, and was directed largely by political authority (Başkan 2014: 7; Demerath 2007: 73; Keddie 1997: 40; Künkler and Madeley 2018: 435). These works converge on the idea that secularization cannot be taken as an isolated variable, but as a multifaceted phenomenon that is “greatly affected by the *surrounding social context*” (Hamilton 2001: 204–5, my emphasis). Underlining the analytical processes of internal/external sovereignty and class struggles/alliances aims to conceptually systematize the various dimensions of that surrounding social context. Applying this heuristic perspective to the late Ottoman and early Republican reality, the next section outlines the general trends for the unfolding of secularization in Turkey, followed by a detailed sequential narrative of major events and processes.

Ottoman Lands at the Turn of the Century: An Overview

In the year 1900, social power relations in the empire were divided along ethno-religious lines. Contrasting the mainly Muslim imperial civil-military bureaucracy, the bourgeoisie of the Ottoman lands was composed predominantly of a non-Muslim commercial class concentrated in coastal regions, serving as the intermediary of global capitalist integration since the previous century (Kasaba 1988). Yet unlike their European counterparts, Greek and Armenian capitalists did not, and in many ways could not, directly influence Ottoman state power for market-based transformation. Instead, these groups increasingly saw their political opportunities in nationalist-separatist agendas, tied closely with their respective ethno-religious backgrounds and dealings with the Great Powers (Keyder 1987: 77). Muslim notables, on their part, were still too weak and disorganized to lead a national-capitalist advance, although they had grown in size during Abdülhamid II’s rule (1876–1909). Composed of landlords, small/medium-sized merchants of local trade, and other Sunni elites and ulema of interior Anatolia, the political priority of this “Muslim Block” was toward preserving the religious-patrimonial empire and curbing non-Muslim privileges rather than modernizing state power (Emrence 2012: 57). Working-class formation was scant and insignificant, and the dispersed small

peasantry could only indirectly impact politics, if at all. Such class dynamics in the first quarter of the century were superposed by internal and external conditions of political conflict, war, and violence on an unforeseen level, which often manifested itself as an internal/external Muslim-Christian antagonism. Leading to its collapse, the empire witnessed a series of separatist movements intersecting with ruinous battles in Tripoli (1911) and the Balkan Wars (1912–13), followed by the European offensive in World War I (1914–18) and the War of Independence (hereafter WOI) (1919–22). In this intricate setting characterized by ethno-religious domestic strife, Western military encirclement, and the absence of politically leading class forces, it was the Young Turks who spearheaded national-capitalist state building in two phases, first led by the Unionists (1908–18) and then by the Kemalists (1919–38).

The Young Turks represented the latest installment of the reformist faction within the Ottoman bureaucracy, which had been going through a “defensive modernization” to gradually split up between traditional and modernist cadres since at least the Tanzimat Reforms (1839–76) (Black 1966: 71; Findley 1980: 149–50). They were a professional-military stratum educated in Western-style imperial colleges, whose primary ideal was “to strengthen their states in the face of internal and external threats” (Gelvin 2011: 71–72). Based on this priority, they developed a bifurcated relationship with Islam long before they took power. On the one hand, Islam was a threat to sovereignty. The legitimation of Abdülhamid II’s absolutism with abundant Islamism (Deringil 1999), along with the rejuvenation of the religious-traditional bureaucracy at their expense, solidified the Young Turks’ view of religion as an obstacle to modernization. They saw a “lack of fit” between [the] value of ‘state preservation’ . . . and the shabby residues of an imperial-Islamic structure” (Mardin 1977: 285). On the other hand, Islam simultaneously emerged as a condition for sovereignty. The overlap of non-Muslim separatist movements and Western military intervention in the Russian War of 1877–78 (known as the “War of 93” in the Islamic calendar), costing the empire 40 percent of its land and 20 percent of its population, was particularly traumatic for the Young Turks (Zürcher 2010: 287). As the new century began, they were gradually convinced that territorial integrity required a Muslim social basis, and a “national bourgeoisie” recruited from its ranks (Toprak 1982). Underlining this bifurcated association with Islam, Barkey (2010: 106) notes that “many of the best early Young Turk thinkers wrote that the social ills of the empire were caused by increased power of the ulema, but urged maintaining a Durkheimian vision of religion as the source of social cohesion.” The concern for sovereignty explains the divided view.

After they took power with the Revolution of 1908, the unfolding of events accentuated the national state builders’ twofold relationship with Islam. Table 1 outlines the major Muslim- and non-Muslim-affiliated sociopolitical contentions, internal and external, that the Unionists and later the Republicans faced in the 1908–38 interval, which were to have a direct bearing on the course of the secularizing process.

The various intersections of Muslim/non-Muslim and internal/external contentions, which will be expanded on in the subsequent sections, created the conditions for the following general tendencies:

Table 1. Major religiously affiliated contentious episodes in national state building (1908–38)

	1. Internal	2. External
A. Muslim	Religiously identified opposition: 31 March Incident (1909), multiple sovereignty during WOI (1919–22), Sheik Said Rebellion (1925), Free Republican Party experience (1930), Menemen Revolt (1930)	Failure of pan-Islamist politics based on the caliphate: Albanian Revolt (1910–12), Franco-British politics of Caliphate (1913–22), Arab Revolt (1916–18)
B. Non-Muslim	Minority social groups: Balkan Wars (1912–13, also external), Armenian separatism, deportation, and massacres (1915), Greek separatism, population exchange (1919–23)	Western encirclement: Tripoli War (1911), Balkan Wars (1912–13, also internal), World War I (1914–18), WOI (1919–22)

A1: The recurrent articulation of Islam as a source of opposition at home bolstered secularization as an essential sovereign state-building strategy. Against the religiously legitimated resistance of the traditional Ottoman bureaucracy and allied Muslim notables, the secularizing reforms were a means to “cripple the ability of the old ruling class to organize and fight back” and were part of a “concrete struggle against one of the primary impediments facing the establishment of bourgeois social forms” (Margulies and Yıldızoğlu 1988; Savran 2010: 80–81).

A2: The decades-long politics of pan-Islamism centered on the Ottoman Caliphate, utilized by Abdülhamid II and later by the Unionists, was firmly rejected by the Republicans. Pan-Islamism failed catastrophically in World War I, and continued to be a major liability for external sovereignty by placing the young Republic in direct opposition to the Franco-British presence in the Middle East. Besides its relevance for domestic politics, abolishing the caliphate secularized foreign policy and “eliminated one possible source of frictions with great powers of the period” (Başkan 2014: 68).

B1 and B2: Western military offensives and endorsement of Christian separatisms brought forth Islam as a “cultural defense,” a countervailing force against a secularizing trend where “religion often provides resources for the defense of a national, local, ethnic or status group culture” (Bruce 2009: 152–53). At the expense of Armenians and Greeks, and the recognition of the Alevi minority as a distinct entity, national state builders privileged a homogenizing conception of Muslimhood in their demographic politics and bourgeoisie creation, and embraced a Sunni Islamic identity and rhetoric, which complicated secularization. By contrast, Western powers directly facilitated secularization in other instances. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, for instance, bound Turkey to provide equal status to non-Muslims, directly impacting the 1926 Civil Code.

Distinguishing between internal and external forces is analytically significant to account for the multiple factors that shape secularization (see, for instance, Demerath 2007). Yet the hierarchy between them should be acknowledged. In what follows, the historical analysis of the Turkish case confirms the theoretical assertion that “domestic forces” are more influential than external ones “as the drivers of secularization processes” (Künkler and Madeley 2018: 372–73). Moreover, underlining

these general and often counteracting trends is not to imply that secularization was simply a pragmatic response to short-term state-building concerns. Instead, by offering an “eventful” historical sociology (Sewell 2005), the rest of the article demonstrates how this series of internal and external events in the critical juncture of 1908–38, as well as the national state builders’ interpretation of those events, influenced the development and institutionalization of *laiklik* in Turkey.

Unionists’ Incongruous Religious Policy (1908–18)

Soon after coming to power in 1908, two major challenges confirmed the Unionists’ bifurcated affiliation with Islam: the Islamically articulated 31 March Revolt (1909) and Christian defeat in the Balkan Wars (1912–13). Spearheaded by the ulema and other components of the traditional bureaucracy, the 31 March Revolt embodied the resentment of Anatolian Muslim notables and the Naqshbandi order, both of whom feared losing their privileged status under Abdülhamid II. The Unionists were shocked that a revolt in the name of Islam could shake the foundations of the new regime so easily (Jäschke 1972: 95). The Balkan Wars, on their part, represented the very own “War of 93” for the Unionists by fusing Christian domestic separatism and external invasion to cost the empire 83 percent of its land and 69 percent of its population in Europe. Around this time, the Unionists fully gave up on the idea that “minorities could be kept within the empire” using Ottomanism, and they turned firmly toward Turkish nationalism with clear Islamic undertones (Shaw and Shaw 1977: 289). With the loss of the Christian Balkans, the emphasis on Islamic solidarity became essential for survival. The Unionists’ incongruous religious policy, which welded a strong secularizing thrust with the privileging of Islamic authority and social groups, makes sense in this context.

Secularization helped weaken the Ottoman traditional bureaucracy and transfer its prerogatives to the emergent national state. The sultan-caliph’s authority to make laws and ratify international treaties was abolished; two-thirds of the palace budget was eliminated. The institution of the caliphate was redefined along temporal rather than religious lines (Ardıç 2012: 144–45). The office of the *Şeyhülislam*, the highest Islamic authority in the empire, was removed from the cabinet in 1916; its temporal powers on education, legislation, judiciary, and finance were reassigned to secular ministries. The sway of sharia courts was diminished in 1911 using tighter regulation, and a secular inheritance law was enacted in 1913. The first Family Code of 1917 brought restrictions on polygamy. The content of primary education was partially secularized, and an initiative to adopt the Western calendar and clock was undertaken. Some Young Turk publications of the era voiced even more systematic reforms echoing the Republican policies that were to follow.

Simultaneously, and somewhat paradoxically, embracing Islam helped war mobilization efforts and entrenched the social basis of the regime vis-à-vis non-Muslims. The Unionists officially declared the Great War a jihad against the Christian West. After 1913, they followed an aggressive demographic policy of Islamization carried out through the deportation and massacre of Armenian and Greek Christians (Dündar 2011). In the process, they also systematically downplayed the distinct identity of the Alevi minority, whose recognition was sacrificed to “the creation of a homogenous Muslim population and public” (Dressler 2013: 107). With a view

to engendering a loyal capitalist class, the properties of the Christian bourgeoisies were confiscated and redistributed to the Muslim-Turkish notables. Throughout the war, Muslim landlords, artisans, merchants, and bankers were enriched through state incentives and quotas, while Christian bourgeoisies faced dispossession and expulsion (Göçek 1996: 109–10). The result was that while in 1913 1 in 5 people in Anatolia was a non-Muslim, by 1925 this rate would fall down to 1 in 40 (Keyder 1987: 79, 69). The evident Islamic partiality of the Unionists, most of whom were ironically devout positivists, can be explained by the ethno-religious clashes inherent to the Turkish state-building process.

Fight for Islamic Legitimacy in the War of Independence (1919–22)

Islam once again emerged as a strong source of domestic opposition in the 1919–22 interval, especially due to the “multiple sovereignty” (Tilly 1978: 191) between the nationalists in Ankara and the Ottoman rule in Istanbul. In 1920, days before the opening of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT), the Ottoman government issued the Istanbul Fatwa declaring the nationalists in Ankara traitors, and called for their slaying as a “religious obligation based on sharia” (Cebeci 2009: 233–34). The Fatwa caused a series of revolts against the Ankara government, while Istanbul formed a “Caliphate Army” to fight the nationalists. Despite the Islamic challenge, the nationalists knew that the WOI could only be successful to the extent that it mobilized the Muslim majority. The war was fought as a Muslim-Christian, military-diplomatic conflict against the Greeks (in the west) and the Armenians (in the east) as well as European occupiers. The nationalists needed the Anatolian propertied elite and ulema to help rally the peasantry for war efforts, to which they complied due to fear of losing their wealth and status acquired during World War I.

There is no other period where Mustafa Kemal and his circle rested so heavily on Islamic rhetoric and symbols. In the 1919 national congresses, for instance, the “brotherhood” of all Muslims in the territory was stated to “prevent the fatherland from being trampled under Greek and Armenian feet” (CHP 2014: 45). Responding to the Istanbul Fatwa, the nationalists issued the Ankara Fatwa soon after, where they claimed to be the true representative of Islam, fighting for the captive caliphate. Committees of religious functionaries informed and incited the masses for Ankara’s cause. The GNAT was opened on a Friday with prayers, and it passed many conservative laws such as banning alcohol. Islamic language also helped secure the financial support of Muslims in Central Asia and India in the name of the caliphate (Hanioglu 2011: 104). A quantitative study of Mustafa Kemal’s speeches indicates that his utilization of Islamic references in the April 1920–June 1923 interval was approximately 11 times more than in the July 1923–November 1929 period that followed (Akyol 2008: 548–49). The religious character of the war was further validated in the aftermath of the Turkish victory, as they implemented the 1923 population exchange with Greece along exclusively confessional lines between Muslims and Orthodox Christians.

Transfer of Islamic Authority to the Republic (1922–24)

Secularization came forth as a key process in the foundation of the Republic. As it abolished the Ottoman Sultanate on 1 November 1922, the Ankara government

made a point of separating this institution from the caliphate, and reducing the latter to a nonpolitical entity of symbolic-spiritual status. Mustafa Kemal's speech that day underlined the difference between the two powers (TBMM 1 November 1922: 311). Yet at the same time, the nationalists pursued a transfer of the empire's religious authority and legitimacy to the national state, especially as a means to neutralize political opposition and appease the Muslim majority. This process had already started during the Unionist period and the WOI, but its legal-institutional framework was constructed in the 1922–24 interval. In 1922, the assembly referred to the caliphate, now separated from the sultanate, as “the legitimate right of the Turkish Government” and promised to “liberate it from the foreigners that enslaved it” (Decree no. 307, no. 308, 30 October–1 November 1922). Moreover, November 1 was proclaimed a holiday, as that year coincided “the birth of the Prophet with the proclamation of national sovereignty” (Decree no. 309, 1 November 1922). The caliphate now belonged to Ankara.

The following year, the founding of the Republic was also colored by a step that embraced Islam, especially given that the word “Republic” in those days was considered to be equivalent to *gavur* (non-Muslim, infidel) (Atay 2012 [1961]: 470–72). In the same law that proclaimed the Republic, Islam was introduced as a state religion, which was absent in the 1921 constitution (Law no. 364, 29 October 1923). The parliamentary discussion that day witnessed a plethora of Islamic references. One deputy likened the new state to that founded by the Prophet Mohammed, and added: “Fourteen centuries later . . . Allah chose another nation to deliver his second miracle, and that is the Turkish nation!” (TBMM 29 October 1923: 96, 100). In the abolition of the caliphate in 1924, the Republic was once again cautious to claim exclusive religious authority. The justification for the law argued that alongside the already existing “Islamic Government, there is no need for a separate Caliphate.” Its first article stated that “the Caliphate . . . is intrinsic to the meaning and notion of . . . the Republic.” Deputies reassured that the caliphate lived on in the Republic: “We have established [today] that the real seat of the Caliphate is the Grand Assembly” (TBMM 3 March 1924: 28, 66; Law no. 431).

The link between the caliphate and sovereignty merits elaboration. Holding an ambiguous status after the abolition of the sultanate, the caliphate soon became the hub of conservative opposition to the Republic. Islamist deputies and press propagated for the proclamation of the Caliph Abdülmecid Efendi as the head of state, to which he was favorable (Ardıç 2012: 274). The caliph's independent reception of official delegates and gifts, participation in Friday ceremonies, and issuing of envoys and statements to the Muslim world undermined Ankara's authority. In this juncture, abolition was not only a secularizing move but also the definitive end of multiple sovereignty that had been ongoing since the WOI. That the same law also exiled the members of the Ottoman dynasty attests to sovereignty concerns. Externally, abolition represented the rejection of pan-Islamist claims over the Middle East. Arab and Albanian revolts, as well as the manipulation of the caliphate question by Franco-British diplomacy rendered this institution a liability for sovereignty. Republican Halide Edip (Adivar), for instance, wrote that Western powers either sought to “control the Caliphate and use it on behalf of their own ambitions” or “suspected Turkey . . . of scheming against” them through its use for pan-Islamism (cited in Kili 2003: 356). Either way, the caliphate caused external fragility,

as it “might have created undesirable conflicts for the young republic” (Başkan 2014: 68). Mustafa Kemal referred to this situation as follows: “We wish the best for the fellow Muslims around the world. Yet, the administration of this community from a single center is a fantasy. . . . Instead of increasing the number and pressures of our enemies like that, let us retreat to our legitimate borders” (Atatürk 2012: 69–70).

Two other laws passed on the same day as the caliphate’s abolition undertook the transfer of religious authority to the Republic. Law no. 429 closed the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Pious Foundations (*vakıfs*), putting an end to the functions of *Şeyhülislam*. It replaced this institution with the Directorate of Religious Affairs (henceforth Diyanet) and the Directorate of Pious Foundations. The task of Diyanet was identified as the “management of religious institutions” as well as “Islamic provisions and matters related to faith and worship” (Article 1). With Article 5, Diyanet undertook the administration of all the mosques and masjids as well as the appointment and remuneration of religious officials. Article 7 established the Directorate of Pious Foundations, which nationalized Ottoman foundations and their properties “to serve the real benefits of the nation.” This was a substantial transfer of funds and property to the national state, for it is estimated that at the time, “15 percent of land in Turkey was enclosed by *vakıfs* and remained out of the market economy” (Ergil 1975b: 250), which consisted of up to “three-quarters of the country’s arable land” (Kuran 2001: 849). Law no. 430, on its part, concentrated all educational affairs and institutions, including former Islamic *medreses*, in the hands of the Ministry of Education. It also monopolized the regulation of Islamic education by establishing the Faculty of Theology in Istanbul to educate “high religious experts” and by making it the ministry’s task to open imam-preacher schools to train religious officials (Article 4). Also in the spring of 1924, all Islamic courts were closed and replaced with civil ones under the Ministry of Justice. Within six months after its foundation, the Republic had already centralized religious services, education, pious foundations, and other sources of religious authority in its own hands. The new regime claimed exclusive ownership of Islamic legitimacy. A few days after Diyanet’s foundation, its officials were instructed to no longer mention the caliph in Friday sermons, but instead “pray for the salvation and felicity of the nation and the Republic” (RepublicanArchives, 7 March 1924).

Religious Dissent and Consolidation of the Republic (1924–27)

The highly antagonistic period between 1924 and 1927 witnessed the consolidation of the regime by Mustafa Kemal’s Republican People’s Party (RPP) against various forms of sociopolitical opposition, especially Islamically articulated ones, in which secularization once again became part and parcel of sovereignty building. The social basis of dissent stemmed from among the very Anatolian Muslim notables and ulema, who earlier supported the WOI and now felt that secular Republicanism betrayed their local authority and interests. Represented by “a parliamentary group generally hostile to reforms,” these elements “fought vigorously to maintain the Islamic understanding of the nation . . . by stressing religious ties” (Karpat 1959: 53). Fronted by landlords, chieftains, and the recently dispossessed ulema, some notables galvanized Muslim peasants in a series of localized rebellions across

Anatolia. The closure of *medreses*, religious courts, and pious foundations in 1924 had deprived the ulema of its main sources of income. Landlords and chieftains, on their part, needed the ulema for the continuation of their dominant rural status. Therefore, there was a “strong correlation” between the distribution, number, and influence of sheiks and ulema and those of “semi-feudal big landlords and tribal formations” (Ergil 1975a: 74).

It is noteworthy that the Sheik Said Rebellion of eastern Anatolia, the biggest rebellion cycle of the period, broke out in February 1925, shortly after the law abolishing the feudal title (*aşar*) was opened for discussion in the parliament. Along with Kurdish nationalism, the rebellion assumed an openly Islamic character, where its leader denounced the abolition of the caliphate, blamed the government for “constantly diffusing irreligiousness,” and called for the annihilation of the Republic as a religious duty for all Muslims (Cemal 1955: 48). In response, the government declared martial law and amended the High Treason Law to criminalize the use of religion for political purposes. During the rebellion, Diyanet was called to action “to prevent the anti-Republican propaganda” by explaining to the masses the values of the Republic (RepublicanArchives, 7 May 1925).

Later in the same year, the government banned all dervish orders in the country and closed their lodges, viewed as a hotbed of insurgency. Closing the dervish orders “helped sever the Ottoman ruling class’ contact with the populace,” which was also a big blow to landlords generating their legitimacy in alliance with local religious leaders (Margulies and Yıldızoğlu 1988). While transferring the property of the dervish orders to the state, the law allowed some of them to continue functioning provided that they were converted to state-run mosques or *maşjids* (Law no. 677, 30 November 1925). The government additionally outlawed “sheiks, dervishes, disciples, dede, seyyid, çelebi, emir, nakib” and other people who held Islamic spiritual titles and positions in the community. Among these groups, Diyanet was allowed to hire those who were loyal and sufficiently “possessed clerical qualities” (Law no. 1011, 19 April 1927; RepublicanArchives, 5 November 1927).

These laws suggest that as the Republic eliminated the influence of certain groups and spaces related to popular Islam, it also took over and integrated some of its remnants to the new “official” Islam. This is reflected also in Law no. 676 passed on the same day as the closure of dervish lodges, which made it a criminal offence to wear Islamic garments except for Diyanet officials, and further disintitiled local religious leaders by depriving them of their symbolic power. On the same week, Law no. 671, known as the “Hat Law,” made it an obligation for all public officials to wear the Western-style hat, banning *fez* and other traditional headgears. It met with “loud resistance from the clergy and conservative small town notables who enjoyed the status of wearing religious apparel which distinguished them from the common man” (Ergil 1975b: 251). In response to a series of uprisings against the law, the government executed around 70 people by hanging and imprisoned many more. To counterbalance the reaction, Diyanet was instructed to declare the Islamic acceptability of wearing hats, even during *namaz* (RepublicanArchives, 5 January 1926).

Controlled Diminishment of Religious Authority (1928–38)

By 1927, Mustafa Kemal had broken “the political authority of landlords and religious leaders,” as the “abolition of the political power of the ulema . . . was also an

attempt to undermine the potential political power of a landed class” (Trimberger 1978: 29). Martial law allowed the elimination of contenders including the Progressive Republican Party and ex-Unionist factions. The Sheik Said Rebellion (1925), the multiple uprisings against the hat law (1925–26), and the assassination attempt on Mustafa Kemal in Izmir (1926) accelerated the removal of the last remnants of opposition against the RPP (Özoğlu 2011: 15–154). From this point on, the Islamic undertones of national state building went through a noticeable decline. Having eradicated the old religious institutions (such as the caliphate, *Şeyhülislam*, *medreses*, sharia courts, and dervish orders) while partly incorporating their powers and capabilities to the state, the Republic no longer utilized their monopoly to promote Islam. Instead, it opted for the controlled diminishment of religious authority, where the state continued to monopolize religious life and institutions for the purpose of gradually lessening their significance in public life.

The main reason for the shift was that Republican sovereignty no longer needed religious legitimation. European wars and non-Muslims separatisms were over, and domestic Islamic opposition was largely neutralized. In 1927, the RPP statute made mention of *laiklik* for the first time, that is, “completely separating religion and the world in the affairs of the state and the nation.” The concept entered the party program in the same congress (CHP 2014: 80–81, 103). Although it was proclaimed during the abolition of the caliphate in 1924 that the Republic was the true abode of “Islamic Government,” Islam as state religion was eliminated four years later, along with all other religious references in the constitution (such as *sharia* or *Allah*) (Law no. 1222, 10 April 1928). From that point on, the law’s justification held, religion would be a private affair “between God and the individual” (TBMM 9 April 1928, Appendix, 2). In the immediate aftermath of the Great Depression, two events in 1930 substantiated and accelerated the policy change: the Free Republican Party (FRP) experience and the Menemen Revolt. The vast mass support for the FRP, especially from those employing Islamic rhetoric to oppose the secular Republic, led to its closure within three months. Soon after, the Menemen incident exacerbated the anxiety of Islamic challenge, when a Naqshbandi mob in western Turkey rioted in the name of sharia and beheaded a reserve officer. In the RPP congress of the following year, PM İsmet Bey (İnönü) referred to these two events as “reactionary elements openly positioning themselves against the Revolution” (CHP 1931: 5).

It is at this juncture that bringing forth Muslimhood as a core element of nation building, prominent since the Unionist period, mainly came to an end (Berkes 1964: 495–96; Hanioglu 1995: 200–3; Mardin 2011: 76). Comprehensive initiatives to modernize and Turkify Islam, the last one being the proposed Religious Reform Project of 1928, were not taken up, although using Turkish continued to be promoted in the 1930s in Quran readings, *ezan*, sermons, and worship. As part of a larger shift of emphasis away from religious authority, especially “after 1930, there began a tendency towards constructing a secular, revolutionary morality that would not require resort to religion at all” (Ayдын 2007: 149–50). The shift was reinforced by the turn toward étatist economic policy, which emerged in response to the Great Depression to uphold planning, protectionism, and state-led industrialism (Boratav 2005). Together, “laicism and étatism summarized the political, cultural, and economic means for elevating the Turkish nation to a position of prosperity” (Parla and Davison 2004: 132).

To reinforce secular authority, Islamic identity was substituted by *halkçılık* (populism) and Turkish nationalism. Inspired by the *solidarisme* of the French Third Republic, *halkçılık* highlighted “social order and solidarity as opposed to class conflict,” and a corporatist “harmony of interests” between all social strata (CHP 2014: 129–30). Nationalism, likewise, offered a nonreligious bond of unity, whose symbols swarmed across schools, squares, streets, ceremonies, and public buildings. Having substantially lost their day-to-day functions such as teaching in schools, arbitrating in courts, officiating marriages, and managing pious foundations, the multiple roles of the imam in the locality were replaced by secular-national authorities—teachers, judges, marriage officiants, and social workers, among others. Other RPP-led institutions established in 1932, such as People’s Homes (in towns) and People’s Rooms (in large villages), sought to create a secular form of association in local communities through various cultural activities (CHP 1942). The Turkish Language Association and the Turkish Historical Society, both founded in 1932, served to trace the historical and linguistic roots of the nation away from the Ottoman-Islamic heritage. Meanwhile, religion was removed from the definition of citizenship in school textbooks. Overall, religious authority, both in terms of personnel/institutions and source of legitimacy, gave way to the expanding secular bureaucracy and a governing ideology of Turkish-national unity.

Examples of controlled diminishment span from spheres such as law and education to the budgets, services, and locales related to religion. For instance, although all authority and bodies regarding Islamic education were transferred to the Republic in 1924, religious education courses at all levels were abolished by 1935, along with the closure of imam-preaching schools (1930), the removal of Arabic and Farsi from the school curricula (1929–30), the dissolution of the Faculty of Theology (1934), and the termination of virtually all Koran courses. Within a decade, Islamic education had almost been completely eradicated from the country. In another sphere, the National Assembly, deputies with religious occupational backgrounds dropped from 20 percent in 1920 to 7 percent in 1923, 4 percent in 1927, 3 percent in 1931 and 1935, 2 percent in 1939, and finally to 1 percent in 1943 (Toprak 1981: 70–71).

The most important instance of controlled diminishment was Diyanet, which had emerged by the end of 1925 as the sole legal body representing Sunni Islam. As seen during the 1924–27 interval, this institution played an important role in legitimizing Republican reforms and counteracting the use of Islam as an oppositional force. Besides, Diyanet’s Friday sermons were key in communicating modern national-capitalist values to the masses in religious terms. A book of sermons published in 1927 is full of such examples: teaching lessons on the religious benefits of trade, industry, agriculture, personal hygiene, national defense, and hardworking (Usta 2010 [1927]). Notwithstanding such an instrumental use of Islam, Diyanet’s centrality was steadily displaced as the decade came to a close. This is visible in the ratio of the Diyanet’s funds in annual budgets, which plummeted after 1930.

Precipitated by the economic crisis, the tendency of decline demonstrated in Figure 1 continued virtually uninterrupted until the end of the RPP rule in 1950. Parallel with the fall in Diyanet’s budget, the hiring of personnel and opening of new mosques significantly slowed down, which was negatively correlated to the

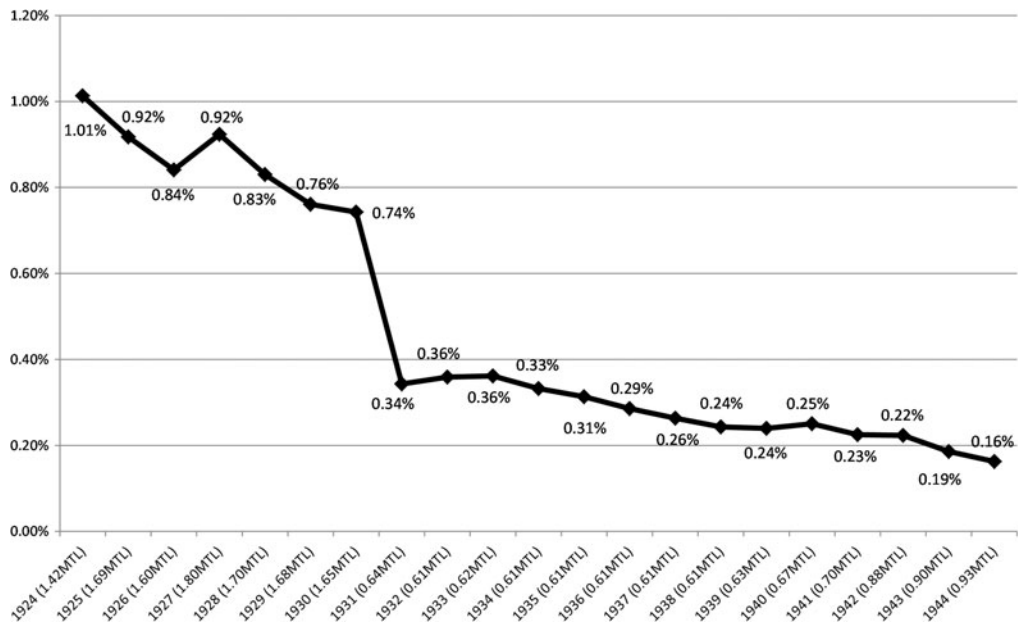


Figure 1. *Diyanet's* Share in Annual Budget (1924–44).
 Source: Data set produced by author (MTL: Million Turkish Liras).

increase in population and growth in the public sector and secular bureaucracy, especially following the étatist turn. After the transfer of mosque administration to the Directorate of Pious Foundations in 1931, there was an initiative to “remove the redundant ones for economizing” (CHP 1938: 491, 483). In 1933, lawmakers similarly decided that vacant positions in Diyanet for preachers and religious teachers would not be filled, but eliminated (Law no. 2171, 8 May 1933). Another law the following year banned Diyanet officials from wearing religious garments outside of places of worship and ceremonies, further limiting the public visibility of Islam (Law no. 2595, 5 December 1934). Nevertheless, Republicans never seriously contemplated relinquishing the administration of Diyanet (or Pious Foundations). Institutional differentiation was an idea mentioned over the years only in passing by a handful of deputies in the parliament, never amounting to a real proposal or debate (Çitak 2004: 255–56). On the contrary, elaborate laws in the 1930s rationalized the organizational structure of Diyanet (Law no. 2800, 14 June 1935) and Pious Foundations (Law no. 2762, 5 June 1935). Trailing a highly regulated path to secularization, the Republic protected its religious monopoly to downplay religious authority and identity, and replaced them with secular ones.

Secularization and Capitalist Transformation

Finally, the capitalist nature of national state building and its immediate link with secularization requires elaboration. The previous sections already demonstrated this relationship, as building Republican state capacity meant eliminating the religious-political power of the Ottoman ruling elite and traditional social classes resisting national-capitalist transformation. Secularization was an essential constituent of the process to neutralize Muslim landlords, notables, and ulema, paving the way for the consolidation of bourgeois social forms in a national framework (Ergil 1975a). As Keddie (1997: 30) emphasizes, secularization in the developing world “was a necessary accompaniment of . . . economic transformations, which the old religio-legal structures with their lack of modern or secular law and their ties to agrarian society could not cope with.” Turkey was no exception, where *laiklik* came to be intimately connected to “integrating Turkey into the Western capitalist political economies to promote national economic growth” (Parla and Davison 2004: 118). Accompanying the elimination of traditionalist sociopolitical rivals, Republicans realized this goal through wholesale secularizing legislative action.

In 1926, although the judiciary had been secularized two years earlier, the legal structure of the Republic was a mixture of sharia, local customs, and Western laws. A uniform legal framework to safeguard private property and related social relationships was missing. Toward that end, four foundational laws were passed in the first half of 1926, largely translated from their European counterparts: the Commerce Code (Germany), Obligations Code (Switzerland), Civil Code (Switzerland), and the Penal Code (Italy). These laws exemplify how secularization gets intermingled with the will to create a globally integrated national economic unit.

In his justification for the Commerce Code, for instance, Minister of Justice Mahmud Esad (Bozkurt) wrote that the reform was needed because Turkey “develops and expands its commercial activity day by day in very close relationship with world civilization.” He added that contemporary global economy

could not be “managed by customary and traditional practices” (TBMM 29 May 1926: 590, Appendix, 21). Yusuf Kemal (Tengirşen), Rapporteur of the Penal Code, likewise urged for a law that supersedes the randomness of “Sharia and customs.” On the Obligations Code, Esad further argued that “the primitive rules” laid out in “the [Islamic] *Mecelle* . . . paralyzed our economic activity” (TBMM 22 April 1926: 173–75). These views echoed those of deputy Besim Atalay a year earlier, when he spoke during the debate on the adoption of the 24-hour clock system and the international (Gregorian) calendar. Blaming the now abolished Islamic calendar, Atalay protested that “we lag so much behind in economic life; our government accepts the latest and most precise calculations.” Muhtar Bey (Cilli) agreed: “Our transactions with Europe are closely knit,” so “instead of using two separate dates . . . we will be using the same calendar” (TBMM 26 December 1925: 277–78). The Civil Code, on its part, comprehensively reconfigured individual, social, and family life, which had always been the abode of Islamic law in line with a national-secular culture based on private property. In presenting the law to the Assembly, Mahmud Esad aptly told the deputies that “when you . . . accept this law, the last thirteen centuries [referring to Islam] will stop; and a new, prosperous, and civilized life will begin for the Turkish nation” (TBMM 17 February 1926: 230). Esad wrote elsewhere that the Civil Code was directly facilitated by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, where providing equal status to non-Muslims was put forward by the European powers as a precondition for recognizing Turkey’s sovereignty (Bozkurt 1944: 9–10).

In another set of groundbreaking laws in 1928, the Arabo-Persian script was replaced with the Latin alphabet and the international numeral system. The reform not only aimed at cutting Turkey off from its Ottoman-Islamic past, but also eased global economic integration. Minister of Education Mustafa Necati defended this perspective: “By using these numbers . . . our nation will participate in the international world in the fields of trade and economy,” which would be better for “our merchants and factories.” Recep Bey (Peker) also pointed to the value of the reform for “commerce and the economy . . . which constitute the point of departure and the essence of life in today’s world.” One deputy succinctly summed up the spirit of the day by saying, “gentlemen, we don’t want Arabic. We want the Occident!” (TBMM 20 May 1928: 204–5).

Another planned economic move was the 1931 Law of Measurements. The law instituted the international metric system, thus abandoning Islamic-customary measurements. Its justification document deplored the coexistence of multiple measurements that caused commercial confusions. This was unacceptable “given that we are intensely integrated with world trade and economy,” and “in export and import, merchants and the people suffer from various losses.” The old system also harmed the “regularity and consistency” of the national economy and the “economic progress of the nation” (TBMM 2 February 1931, Appendix, 1–2). Surname Law of 1934 standardized the use of family names to streamline matters related to private property and inheritance while prohibiting the use of religious-traditional appellations. The 1935 Law on Holidays changed the weekly day of rest from Friday to Sunday. The justification for the law complained that “deviating from the international day of rest [Sunday] . . . has caused us to effectively lose a day” and “was very costly.” Synchronization of “commercial and economic affairs”

was thus necessary. In the parliament, Hakkı Kılıç seconded the resolution: “Gentlemen, the names of days have not descended from the heavens. . . . It was humans who coined names for them, as for everything else. . . . The essence of this [law] is directly economic” (TBMM 27 May 1935: 303, Appendix, 2). The legislative documents of the period are replete with such examples.

Conclusions

Laiklik made its way to the constitution as a central tenet of the Republic in 1937, and the Law of Associations in 1938 further limited the public functions of religions by forbidding associations to be founded on religious or congregational principles. By the time of Atatürk’s death that same year, the legal-institutional framework of *laiklik* was complete. This article presented a historical narrative of the 1908–38 period in Turkey, which witnessed the formation of a particular secular settlement in the transition from the empire to the Republic. Several idiographic and nomothetic conclusions followed, contributing to Turkish studies as well as the spatiotemporal turn in the secularization literature.

The historical trajectory demonstrates that Turkey’s secularizing process was too complex, uneven and fluctuating to be reduced to the positivist ideologies of state builders, despite that being the dominant narrative in Turkish studies. Instead, empirical evidence confirms the neosecularization paradigm’s theoretical insights, which stresses that secularization is nonlinear, heterogeneous, and full of contradictions as a factor of its relationship with various sociopolitical conflicts (Goldstein 2009; Gorski 2005; Yamane 1997). To improve the social scientific understanding of its ebbs and flows and paradoxes, I have linked secularization with state formation to underline two prominent master processes that have applicability well beyond the Turkish case: building internal/external sovereign state capacity and class formation/dynamics. Highlighting these processes invites spatiotemporally sensitive scholars of secularization to avoid isolating their object of study. Conflicts bringing about secularization, whether in Western or non-Western geographies, are not purely ideational ones about the place of religion in public life, but rather take place against a larger contentious background.

Applying the heuristic framework to Turkey helps explain some of its specific path-dependent outcomes. Despite its firm secularizing thrust, *laiklik* did not bring about institutional differentiation. Instead, the course of the contentious process led the state builders to follow a highly regulated form of secularization. In the 1908–27 period, Unionists and later Republicans gradually transferred the empire’s Islamic authority, legitimacy, institutions, and personnel to the emergent national state. Embracing Islamic power helped mobilize the social basis of the regime vis-à-vis non-Muslims and European military encirclement. Meanwhile, the concern for sovereignty consolidated a “neo-Durkheimian” conception of Sunni Islam as the implicit core of national identity (Taylor 2007: 455), which also came at the expense of the Alevi minority whose recognition as a distinct religious group was pushed behind the priority of national-religious unity. In the years that followed, the staunchly secular Republic continued to treat non-Muslims as a security concern (Çağaptay 2006). The roots of that perspective can be found in the coalescence of internal separatisms and external conflicts stretching from the War of 93 and

the Balkan Wars to World War I and the WOI. As Goalwin (2018: 163) writes, “[C]ircumstances during the last decades of the Ottoman Empire created a situation in which religion and national identity were merged.” This is, of course, not meant to justify the mistreatment of non-Muslims, but to explain the evident Muslim bias of resolutely positivist cadres.

The experience of Islam, however, was intensely bifurcated. Islamically articulated opposition emerged as a direct threat to the Unionists and Republicans in various episodes such as the 31 March Revolt, multiple sovereignty during the WOI, and the Sheik Said Rebellion. Despite moments of collaboration in time of war, the challenge of some traditional ulema allied with local Muslim propertied classes proved persistent. In this context, secularization became an integral part of the contention against the remnants of the old regime, where the particular strategy of “merging religious institutions with the state apparatus stopped other aspirants to political power from using their organizational resources to reach out to the masses” (Başkan 2014: 66). Direct control of Islam, in other words, prevented the development of “an independent sector of society that can challenge the state” (Sarkissian 2012: 502), while also seeking to produce legitimacy for the new Republic. Yet after overcoming domestic opposition and fully monopolizing Islamic authority by 1927, Turkish secularization entered a new phase. In line with the turn to étatist industrialism, the 1928–38 interval witnessed the controlled yet steady diminishment of Islam’s social significance in numerous spheres, as well as its replacement with nationalism and *halkçılık* as nonreligious forms of solidarity upheld by an expanding secular bureaucracy. In this regard, there is a clear break from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. Although the latter assimilated the former’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 RPP rule in 1950.

Turkish history offers a rare combination of direct management of religious institutions with rigorous secularization, attesting that the administrative control of religion, as opposed to solely disestablishing it, can also be a way to limit and minimize religious authority (Fox 2008). Though never colonized, Turkey also validates the argument that encounters with European powers have been crucial for the course of secularization in non-Western geographies (Künkler and Madeley 2018: 343). But the impact of the West was far from one-sided. While Europe prompted long-term secularization through eliciting defensive modernization, capitalist integration, and ideological emulation since at least the Tanzimat period, the impact of Western invasion and diplomacy privileging non-Muslims often empowered Islamic “cultural defense” as a countervailing force (Bruce 2009). In other instances such as the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and the abolition of the caliphate in 1924, Western powers more directly stimulated secularization. Finally, the capitalist nature of national state building deserves more attention in the secularization literature. The Turkish case shows that the will to create a globally integrated national-capitalist market manifestly informed the secularizing drive of state builders, both in their struggle with the empire’s old ruling classes and the legislation that replaced Islamic-traditional laws, customs and practices with Western ones. All in all, presenting a rich and original example for the scholarship on secularity, Turkish *laiklik* confirms the spatiotemporally bound nature of secularization, and shows that purely ideational accounts,

such as those based on positivism, are utterly incomplete to capture the many complexities and contradictions of how secularization unfolds in critical junctures.

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