

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

This article elaborates how the Turkish Muslim people preserve and inherent Islam and Islamic practise from one generation to another while facing a secular ideology implemented by the state which views that religion is a dangerous ideology. To collect the data I searched for several books and journal which provided me the illustrations of the Ottoman's development of Islamic education institutions such as *madrassa*, some people whom I considered competent to give the information regarding with the issues such as the Nurcu Cemaat. This articles also seeks to understand why Ataturk abolished the Islamic education institutions and prohibited Islamic activities rooted to the Ottoman culture. Understanding the history concerning the conflicts between alumni of Islamic education institutions and the state will lead to the understanding the present development of the Muslims so that this will be beneficial to avoid the same past conflicts which will take place in the future.

Keywords: Turkey, Education, Islam, Culture, Nurcu, Ottoman

Artikel ini menjelaskan bagaimana Muslim di Turki mempertahankan dan mewariskan Islam dan praktek islam dari satu generasi ke generasi berikutnya di kala ideologi sekuler Turki memandang agama sebagai ideologi yang berbahaya. Data di artikel ini dikumpulkan dari berbagai buku dan jurnal yang menggambarkan perkembangan Institusi pendidikan Islam selama Kekaisaran Utsmani seperti Madrasa, dan juga dari hasil wawancara beberapa koresponden yang kompeten dari lingkaran Jamaah Nurcu. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk memahami mengapa Ataturk menghilangkan institusi pendidikan Islam di Turki dan menghalangi aktivitas Islam yang berakar dari budaya Utsmani. Dengan memahami sejarah konflik antara alumni dari Institusi Pendidikan Islam dengan alumni dari Pendidikan Negara, maka pemahaman perkembangan Muslim akan lebih baik sehingga bisa mencegah konflik yang mungkin dapat terjadi di masa depan.

Kata kunci: Turki, Pendidikan, Islam, Budaya, Nurcu, Utsmani

1. Introduction

Many historians showed us that the Ottoman Empire reigned around 700 years from the 13th century (1299) to the 20th century (1923) when the Turkish Republic came into existence.

Since the republic was established, Turkey have become a secular state. Islam has not been a base of ideology, even the situation went to extreme that all activities of the Muslim community in terms of Islamic teachings were prohibited to perform in public spheres. All Islamic education institutions, such as *madrasa*, the *sufi* lodge or *tekke* and, Qur'anic schools were closed down. Furthermore, in his efforts on crushing the root of the Ottoman culture, Ataturk prohibited some cultural activities which were practised during the Ottoman Empire. For example, wearing headscarf for women was prohibited, and the Arab scripts were changed by the Latin alphabets. *Azan* (call for prayer) which actually should be performed in Arabic was then forced to be called in Turkish, although the issue of prohibition of *Azan* was not the life time of Ataturk, but the second President, Ismed Inonu.

All of the established institutions and cultures which were banned by Ataturk were important institutions and cultures in Muslim's views. Through the institutions and cultures Islamic teachings would keep everlasting from one generation to the next. The above factors come up with the question: "How the Turkish Muslim people had fought to maintain their heritage, mainly the Islamic education institutions which were potential to keep the faith of Muslim from generations to generations? The facts show us that Islam is still alive in Turkey, even, most respondents whom I interviewed claimed 99% of Turkey's citizens are Muslims. In addition, although the state recently still embraces a secular ideology, the religious life of people is similar to other people in Islamic countries, either in worship practices or in practicing other Islamic cultures. Several mosques where I attended were full of *jamaah* either to practice a five time prayer or to perform Friday's prayer. Like other Islamic countries, the Turkish people not only perform fasting in Ramadhan but also perform *iftar* (fast-breaking dinner) and (*tarawih*)¹together.² One of the most interesting phenomena was that I was amazed at the mayor of Istanbul that he invited non-Muslim leaders, such as Turkey's Jewish, Greek Ortodox, Armenian Apostolic and Assyrian Churches of the East communities at the Galata Mevlevihanesi for an *iftar* on Tuesday.³ Furthermore, I found several officers working for Prime Minister's office to perform fasting every Monday and Thursday, which was in Islam

¹ Tarawih is a voluntary night prayer performed during Ramadan.

² *Today's Zaman*, August 2, 3, 2011.

³ *Today's Zaman*, August 4, 2011

called a *Sunnah* (the Prophet Muhammad's tradition). In the office, there was also a mosque, in which the people were encouraged to perform a five-time prayer including Friday's prayer.

This paper will discuss how the Turkish Muslim people preserve their faith, that is Islam, and how they keep teaching their young generations so that the Muslims in the next generations still love and practise their religious rituals while they are facing a secular ideology implemented by the state which views that religion is a dangerous ideology. To collect the data I searched for several books and journal which provided me illustrations of the Ottoman history related to the development of Islamic education institutions such as *madrasa* and other kinds of Islamic education institutions and to find out why Ataturk then abolished the Islamic education institutions and even, the Islamic activities rooted to the Ottoman culture have been prohibited. Understanding the history concerning the conflicts between alumni of Islamic education institutions and the state will lead to the understanding the present development of the Muslims so that this will be beneficial to avoid the same past conflicts which will take place in the future. In addition, I also seek for the research finding with regard to Muslim activities during the rule of the Turkish republic. If I could not find in the sources I attempted to find some people whom I considered competent to give the information regarding with the issues. To better off my understanding about Muslim activities related to the development of religion in society, several times I attended the *Nurcu* Riding Circle either in Istanbul or in Ankara and, hence, I can understand how they prepare their young generations to become imams or preachers who will continue to induce the development of Islamic religion in their society in the long run.

2. Islamic Education Institutions in the History.

The early history of Turkey started from the Ottoman Empire in 1299, but if the Turkish Saljuk of Rum was also assumed to be the early Ottoman Empire, the empire was built in 1077.⁴ The early Islamic education Institutions in the Ottoman history was *madrasa*.

⁴Sulayman Seydi, *An Outline of 2000 Years of Turkey History*, (Ankara: Ministry of Culture and Tourism Republic of Turkey, 2008), p. 76, 167

According to Abdulhak Adnan Adivar, *madrasa* had been built during the Turkish Saljuk of Rum.⁵ In history the *madrasa* consisted of three stages in the development of college in Islam.⁶ The first stage was mosque or *masjid*, but sometimes this *masjid* was non-congregational mosque, and it functioned as an instructional center. The second stage was the *masjid-khan* complex. The *khan* was specifically served as a boarding provided for the students outside of the city. The third stage was the *madrasa* proper. In this place, both *masjid* and *khan* were combined as an institution. This foundation was usually based on the supported of *wakf*.⁷ There is a tendency of history which indicated that history anywhere Muslim community stayed it had the similar characteristics in building educational institutions, even at present, these kinds of institutions can be found in Indonesia, Malaysia and South Thailand.⁸

Historically almost all educational instructions under the Ottoman era particularly Islamic educational institutions were the domain of *ulama*. Saban Sitembolukbasi explained that all of the institutions taught religious lessons. Either *madrasas* or ordinary state schools were supervised by a religious bureaucracy headed by the *Sheykhul Islam*. *Sheykhul Islam* was a member of the cabinet whose formal status was the same as the stakes of the Grand vizier or Prime Minister.⁹ The primary school was closely supervised by the local *imam* and *muhtar*, village headman. The *madrasa*, the general religious higher schools provided an Islamic education teaching the students to be priests, *mudarris* (teachers), *qadis*,¹⁰ mufti, and *sheykhul Islam*.¹¹ In some circumstance, they were also appointed as staff in certain offices. All of the students were not required to pay school fee, even some *madrasas* were built by sultan, and the students were supported with living allowance.

⁵ Abdulhak Adnan Adivar, "Islamic and Western Thought in Turkey" *The Middle East Journal*, Vol 1, No. 3, (July 1947), p. 271.

⁶ Traditionally Muslim children were sent to *masjid* or *khan* after they got elementary religious teaching including reading Qur'an in their houses. See J. Pedersen, "Madrasa," in C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, B. Lewis and Pellat (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. V, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), p.1123.

⁷J. Pedersen, "Madrasa" ..., p. 1123

⁸ For further discussion see M. Hasbi Amiruddin, *The Response of Ulama Dayah to the Modernization of Islamic Law in Aceh*, (Kuala Lumpur: UKM Press, 2004).

⁹Saban Sitembolukbasi, *Aspects of Islamic Revival in Turkey (1950-1960)*, Thesis, (University of Manchester for the Degree of PhD, 1990), p.155.

¹⁰A judge administering both *shari'at* and *qanun* and chief administrator of a *adlik*

¹¹Halil Inalcik, *Ottoman Empire: The classical Age 1300-1600*, (London: Phonix,2005), p.170

Another institution of Islamic education in the early Ottoman Empire was The Palace School, but it was founded later in the fifteenth century.¹² Barnette Miller called the institution the Palace School of Muhammad the Conqueror. Barnette called this name possibly because this school was founded by Muhammad the Conqueror. In the minds of Turkish people Muhammad the Conqueror was known as Muhammad Fatih. The Palace School or great state military school of the Grand Seraglio was founded shortly after the conquest of Constantinople. This school was continued by successors until the reign of Mahmud II (1808-1839) in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. This institution could be classified into Islamic education because in the school, many kinds of Islamic subjects were offered. Miller mentioned “the training covered an average period of about twelve to fourteen years and combined in almost equal proportions of instruction in the humanities of Islam.”¹³

Through the medium of their palace system of education the sultans were willing to produce the warrior-statesmen and loyal Muslim who, at the same time, should be educated, gentlemanly and honest morally. The students of the Palace School, from the day of their admission to the graduation of their study were alertly drilled in the ceremonies of Muslim religion and Turkish etiquette. This school also provided the Arabic grammar and syntax, a study of the Qur’an and explanation of the verses of Qur’an (*tafsir*); Muslim theology (*tawhid* and *kalam*), Islamic tradition (hadits), jurisprudent and law.¹⁴

3. Abolition of religious educational institutions

The Republic of Turkey was proclaimed in Ankara on October 29, 1923 and the proclamation of the Republic had shifted the relationship between state and religion as well as the position of religion in public sphere. Religion in the early Republic period was thus simply

¹²Muhammad Conqueror which is in Turkish people named Mehmet Fatih or Mehmet II reigned 1421-1451, but, Feridun Dirintekin noted the city of Istanbul captured by the armies of Mehmet II the conqueror on the morning of 29th May 1453. Feridun Dirimtekin, *Istanbul after the Conquest According to Foreign Travelers*, (Istanbul: Istanbul Press, 1953), p. 1.

¹³ Barnette Miller, *The Palace School of Muhammad the Conqueror*, (USA: Boston: Harvard University Press, 1941), p. 4

¹⁴ Miller, *The Palace...*p.94

banned from the public sphere.¹⁵ Then, the religious law was abolished and it was replaced by a secular law. All aspects of education were taken away from religious authorities and put under the control of the secular state. *Sheikhul* Islam institution was abolished and another institution, Directorate of Religious Affairs¹⁶ was established on March 3, 1924.¹⁷

In 1924, 479 *madrasas* and Quranic courses were closed related to the enforcement of the “Law for unification of Education” which led the schools to be obliged to follow a national curriculum system of the new educational institution which omitted of religious teachings. According to Bekim Agai, only eight *madrasas* remained open, but it had not had explanation further where the places were and what happened afterward. According to Directorate General Religious Education, there were 29 Imam-Hatip schools in the year 1924. The schools were Afyaon, Amasya, Ankara, Antalya, Balikesir, Bolu, Bozok, Bursa, Edirne, Elazig, Erzurum, Eskisehir, Gaziantep, Konya, Kutahya, Manisa, Nigde, Odemis, Sivas, Savsat, Tire and Ulas.¹⁸ It was also no written or oral explanation further by Directorate General for Religious Teaching. I assumed that the history of Islamic educational Institutions such as *madrasa* in Turkey went into the darkness since Ataturk banned all religious activities in public spheres. Sometimes the schools were open but sometimes schools were closed.¹⁹ When Ataturk declared the abolishment of *madrasa*, he said:” The *madrasas* established by old Turk are degenerated ruins, unable to be reformed in the light of a modern academic mentality.²⁰

I attempt to understand the decision of Ataturk why he, then, gave the instruction to close the *madrasas*. Although it was difficult for Muslims to accept the idea of instruction, in fact, the Islamic educational institutions, such as *madrasas* at that time was not able to teach people as it was really needed by the people who had experienced a lot of changes, while the situation

¹⁵ Bekim Agai, “Islam and Education in Secular Turkey: State Policies and the Emergence of the Fethullah Gulen Group” in Rebert W. Hefner and Qasim Zaman, *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 150.

¹⁶ Recently the institution named The Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi). In short word they call “Diyanet”

¹⁷ Agai, “Islam and...p150

¹⁸ The Directorate General For Religious Teaching, Minister of National Education, Republic of Turkey, *Religious Education From the Past to the Future*, (Ankara: 2010), p.2

¹⁹ I interview with Prof. Dr Bilal Aybakan, (a lecturer at Ilahiyat Faculty of Marmara University), July 12, 2011.

²⁰ Agai, *Islam...*,p. 150

of Turkey which was influenced with neighbouring developed countries needed the people to induce rapid development.

Many historians maintained that the European countries which were neighbours of Turkey at the same time had experienced a great change. The fact that many countries under the Ottoman patronage were freed from Ottoman and some of the countries were colonized by Western countries. The Ottoman Empire itself before fighting for independence by Ataturk was almost occupied by Britain and France.²¹ But, the Sultan of Ottoman at that time could not avoid the British and French occupation because most of the Turkish people did not have enough knowledge and skills to release the country from its enemies.

This assumption at least could be referred to Bediuzzaman's critique toward Sultan Abdulhamid, as described by Sukran Vahide. Bediuzzaman²² considered the Sultan fail to carry out the functions of Caliphate satisfactorily. The prime duty of Islamic Caliph was to show a closer and more constructive concern in the case of the question of education and the *ulama* institution, since this was the basis of the revitalization of Islam and the Islamic world.²³ The other indicator of a picture how backward the Islamic educational institution at that time can be seen from suggestion of Bediuzzaman concerning educational reform on which he gave a stress to teach modern science for students in *madrasas* and *maktabs*. According to Bediuzzaman, the condition of educational system in Turkey at that time caused the people and state to be primitive, uncivilized and rigid.²⁴ Therefore, it was hard to develop and modernize the people and the state in term of their mentality or other skills including the performance of *ulama*.

According to Carter V. Findley, the decline of the Ottoman Empire, in the eighteenth century occurred due to the backward development in all sectors run by the ruling class of the empire. The eclipse of a once important branch of ruling class was even more complete in the religious establishment. This fact was brought not only from the bureaucratization of the *ulama*

²¹ Seydi, *An Outline...* p.128-129

²² His full name is Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, a well-known *ulama* was born in Easter Turkey in 1877 and died in 1960.

²³ Sukran Vahide, *The Author of the Risale-I Nur Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, (Istanbul: Reyhan Ofset, 2004), p.41

²⁴ Vahide, *The Author...* p.43

or from the decline of the traditional religious scholarship but from the inability of men with a traditional religious education system which was known as *madrasas*, to comprehend and comment effectively on the new kinds of problems confronting the empire.²⁵

I referred to the example of what happened to Ibrahim Al-Mutafarika before discussion between Bediuzzaman and sultan took place. Ibrahim was an editor, translator and reformist.²⁶ He was intensely interested in a modern scientific progress, and he transmitted to Turkey the new scientific ideas advanced in more than one case in Europe by religious confrontations. Once upon a time Ibrahim wrote on religious subjects entitled “Risele” (*risalah=Arab*), and his interest in the Unitarians seems to have continued, but his most focused interest lay in science. Ibrahim, hence, desired to build the printing to help the Muslim people easy to find the books that they wished to study. According to Ibrahim by this way one of the Muslim problems of backwardness, could be solved. He sent a treatise on “The Means of Printing” in 1726 to the *Sadrizam*, the *Sheikhul Islam*, and the *ulama*; he hoped the *ulama* would issue a fatwa.

In the treatise he explained the importance of printing for Muslims. In the past, he said, Muslim showed a more serious attention to preserve their scriptures than Jews or Christians did. But, later on, thousands of books were lost forever with the destruction caused by the Mongolian invasion and during the expulsion of the Moors from Spain. But what happen? Most of calligraphers formed the main opposition group; they even organized a demonstration against the printing press; they sought to instigate the people against printing in the name of the safety of religion. Hence, when the fatwa was issued to permit the printing of books, it was not allowed to print all kinds of books related to religious teaching such as Qur’an, Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsir*), *Hadits*, and law (*fiqh*).²⁷ This case can be seen in two sides. First the *ulama* of the time did not care about secular learning (modern science). Second, backward the thought of the *ulama* at that time. That was indeed became an obstacle to modernize the people and state as what Atatürk earnestly required in that time.

²⁵ Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte 1789-1922*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.61

²⁶ Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, (London: Hurst & Company, 1998), p. 39).

²⁷ Berkes, *The Development...*p.40-41

Actually, in the early establishment of the *madrasa* as an institution in the Ottoman Empire was, still a relatively recent innovation. In Islamic thoughts the *madrasa* taught the thoughts of a lot of Islamic philosophers. For example, the Ibnu Arabi's thought²⁸ has been decided as an important subject to study by many scholars at Islamic Universities until the present. Halil Inalcik gave further information concerning this institution. The *madrasas* in the early Ottoman had a good quality because this institution had produced a number of qualified scholars. The Ottoman sultan who wished to establish *madrasa* invited scholars from other cultural centres, such as Konya, Keyseri, Turkistan, Egypt and Syria. If the scholars were seen that they still needed further knowledge some of graduates from *madrasa* in Turkey, were sent to other countries where they considered well-known scholars in the field of science were available. Mehmed al-Fanany (1350-1431) was traditionally regarded as the first *sheykhul* Islam of the empire who was sent to studied to Egypt. *Ulamas* who were interested in Mathematics were usually sent to Samarkand.²⁹ Hence, the teachers who were employed at the *madrasa* were qualified.

The basic need of science in their life of the time was indeed offered by *madrasas* from elementary schools to the highest levels. After the students of *madrasa* learned basic religious teaching which was obligatory and a need for adult Muslims, they continued their study to be a real scholar in Islamic science. At the highest level of study of the *madrasa* the students were taught with Arabic and all of branches and syntax, logic, scholastic theology, astronomy, geometry, rhetoric, jurisprudent, Quranic exegesis, Islamic traditions (*hadits*) and mathematic. Some of *madrasas* also taught a lesson on medicine.³⁰

According to Halil Inalcik since Mehmed Conqueror established a great empire, his realms, had no *ulamas* whose profession was comparable with those of other lands. It meant since that time no *ulama* were invited from other countries as the teachers in the *madrasas*. Those policies could bring about the quality of *madrasa* to become diluted from day to day. Without inviting teachers from other countries or sending students to continue their study to other countries where the professional scholars existed, the *madrasas* merely appointed the

²⁸ Suraiya Faroqhi, *Subjects of Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 27.

²⁹Inalcik, *Ottoman...*,p. 167.

³⁰Halil Inalcik, *Ottoman...*,p. 167-169

teachers as soon as they graduated from their schools. Perhaps, this situation as illustrated by Abdulhak Adnan Adivar *madrassa* since then, never changed, because the subjects which were taught in the *madrassa* never developed and the Muslim thoughts became static.³¹ The same picture as illustrated by Kazamias and quoted by Byron G. Massialas indicated the outlook of primary school and *madrassa* reflected conservative and static society. This also indicated the outlook of the Ottoman society and state affairs of the time.³²

Furthermore the backwardness of *madrassa* was illustrated by Roderic. According to Roderic H. Davison, the quality of the *madrassa* had declined sharply since the sixteenth century, and in the early nineteenth century the educational system of Ottoman which produced the learned men of Islam had fallen on evil days. When the elder Molten first went as military adviser to the Ottoman Empire in the 1830's, he found out that there was unpleasant behaviour of "educated" officials. The learning of Islam was forgotten, the learning of modern west was not yet acquired. No one of the Turk understood Western languages.³³ Jack A. Godstone described that in the late sixteenth century the Muslim seminary (*madrassa*) diluted quality.³⁴ The other clue that how *madrassas* were very unsatisfied of the people was, mentioned by Ahmed Cevdet, who latter became a historian. In the middle of nineteenth century he arrived in Istanbul to complete his *ulama* education and was not satisfied with what he found himself learning at the *madrassa*.³⁵

The other hindrance which was possibly caused Ataturk considered to move very rapidly and furiously because that the situation of politics concerning the status of state was in conflict with sultan. With Ferid Pasya's return to office in Istanbul in April 1920, the conflicts between Istanbul and Anatolia took place more seriously and rapidly. The *Sheikhul* Islam, the chief mufti of empire, at the request of the government, issued a fatwa which stated that the nationalist rebels were kafir and those who are really Muslim should endeavour to kill them. The following days another fatwa was issued. The fatwa stated that Mustafa Kemal and a

³¹ Adivar "Islam...", p. 271-278

³² Byron G. Massialas, "Turkey", in Lee C. Deighton, (Ed.-in-chief) *The Encyclopedia of Education*, Vol.9 (USA: The MacMillan Company & The Tree Press, 1971), p. 282.

³³Roderick Daavison, *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History, 1774-1924*, (Texas: University Texas Press, 1990), p. 166-167

³⁴ Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*, (California: University California Press, 1991), p.383

³⁵ Faroqi, *Subjects of...*,p. 5

number of other prominent nationalists were officially condemned to death in absentia.³⁶ The abovementioned points possibly then made Kemalist group attack caliph institution and abolished it. Mustafa Kemal then accused the Caliph of having betrayed his people by coalescing military forces with the foreigners.

Actually in the early movement Kemalist expected to use Islam as an avenue for the spread of reform, but then, it proved impossible. First, because most of Muslims in Turkey who graduated from *madrassa* did not have modern insights including politics and their vision was narrow-minded even, their vision clashed with Kamalists' expectation. Second, social unrest, particularly the Kurdish revolt in Eastern Turkey used Islam as a base of ideology. Third, it was also possible that the sultan (Caliph) used Islam as his power to fight against Kemalist because the caliphate was the highest religious authority in Islam.

Generally, Kemalists viewed Islam as a potential phenomenon and became a hindrance for the modern state in this period that caused religion to be ousted at the educational and legal institutions and; further laws were introduced to reduce the public visibility of religion. Sufi *tekkes* were closed down, the cultural performances, such as clothing were changed by law from Turkish heritage to Western styles. The further endeavour to strengthen "Turkish national identity," Kemalists cut off the Ottoman history and created a new history for the people, particularly for the young people and it was then called national history.³⁷

4. Muslim efforts

The question at this point is how the Turkish people keep their faith and continued to inherit it to the next new generations? According to some people whom I interviewed, they mentioned that although the law was formally issued by the government, the state was not able to control all activities of the people particularly in the countryside. Though the state prohibited performing of the religious activities in the public spheres including banning imam and *hatib* activities, the people in the rural area still taught their children to read the Qur'an and to learn the basic Islamic knowledge. Based on the research conducted by Richard B. Scott during two

³⁶ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), p.152

³⁷ Agai, *Islam and..*, p.151. The discussion regarding the strain between republic and Muslim leader can also see Falih Rifki Atay, *The Atatürk I knew*, trans by Lewis, (Ankara: Yapi ve Kredi Bankasi, 1973), p.249-252

years in a village within five miles of Ankara, it was found out that since the present religious training needs were not met, the villagers' solution in many villages was the establishment of secret religious schools. They still could provide many kinds of religious teachings which were needed by their children. Even, when the government introduced again religious lessons in 1950s, although it was not compulsory, in the schools most of the parents were not satisfied, because in their view the teachers provided by government were not qualified. Hence, several parents also sent their children to *hoca* (*ulama* in the village) after school.³⁸

Some of families provided and trained religious teachings for their children by themselves in their houses. This sphere was illustrated by Kerim Balci as his own experience in a newspaper "Today's Zaman". How serious of his parents to train their family to perform religious obligations, he showed the attitude of his grandfather in term of performing *namaz* (*shalat*). His grandfather used to plan his day according to the time of *namaz*. When the time for prayer had arrived he used to say with a loud voice just one word "Namaz". This one word would suddenly changed the flow of the day; every body in the house would stop whatever they were doing and run off for ablution, then prayed together. Their sensitivity of *namaz* would peak in the Ramadan days and nights. They attended the extra *namaz* during Ramadan evenings, called *tarawih* where the *namaz* was performed twenty *rakaah*. As that lengthy evening prayer was not enough, grandfather and father used to wake up in the middle of the night, - before *sahur* meal – and performed an additional night prayer called *teheccut* (*tahajjud*). Although I had never reached that level of awareness about *namaz*, but at least, that was a lesson from them to me and in fact to all the members of family.³⁹

Not only in the countryside, but also in capital cities of the provinces, such as Ankara and Istanbul, several mosques still taught Qur'an and basic Islamic teachings for their children. According to an imam who was still in charge as imam- *hatip* recently in the mosque of Site Kudret (site Kudret Camii), if the apparatus found that the people taught Qur'an or religious teachings to their children in the mosque, in Ataturk and Inonu era, they instructed to close the teaching activities, but the people opposed them strongly. Several apparatus, hence, avoided a

³⁸ Richard B. Scott, "Turkish Village Attitudes Toward Religious Education" *The Muslim World*, No. 3. Vol. LV (July, 1965), P.222-229.

³⁹ Kerim Balci "Light of my Eyes: Namaz" *Today's Zaman*, August 9, 2011.

quarrel with the people and then neglected it. The imam gave a certain logic reason why anyone can not stop religious activities among the Muslims. He gave an analogy that to the Muslims, religion was analogous to food. If the people were hungry, we could not stop them to eat the food. If the shops did not sell the food, they would cook the food by themselves in their houses.⁴⁰

The same case was in gathering people for prayer in congregation (*shalat jama'ah*) and attending a sermon, as it was mentioned by the imam, the Muslim people could gather *jamaah* either to perform prayer or to give a sermon in their *hanehs* (houses). Some of the Muslim groups carried out the *jama'ah* rituals in the mosques. Religious dress, particularly the veils or headscarf for women also continued to be worn by peasant people.⁴¹ That was why although Kemalist regime banned any thing concerning the performance of *ibadah* for the Muslim people in public spheres in Turkey, Islam and Muslims were still alive or in progress from day to day basis and they have gradually increased in number.

Although *tarika*, (mystic order) networks were banned in 1925, the followers, particularly *Sunni Sufi* order continued to function in Kurd, and they also maintained their informal religious education centres, *madrasas*.⁴² According to a *Jamaah Nurcu*, which originally came from Kurd, up to now several *madrasas* have been still active at Kurdish district, Anatolia and at several villages near the border of Iran.⁴³ In February 1949, however, religious instruction, which had been abolished throughout the education system, was introduced again in primary school on a voluntary basis. Four months later, the Faculty of Theology, which had been closed down in Istanbul due to the lack of student registrations in Ataturk lifetime, reopened in Ankara under the government's watchful eye.⁴⁴ This sphere gave a wider room for the Muslim community to develop their networks in providing trainings for the young Muslim people.

⁴⁰I interview with an imam at Site Kudret Camii, Ankara, July 18, 2001. When the interview took time the imam is running Qur'anic course for summer season.

⁴¹ Barbara Ward, *The World To-Day Turkey*, (London: Oxford University, 1942), p. 64-65.

⁴² M. Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* (Cambridge University Press, UK, 2009), p. 179.

⁴³ I interview with a Jama'ah Nurcu, in Istanbul, Saturday 9, July 2011.

⁴⁴ Andrew Mango, *The Turks Today*, (London: John Murry, 2004), p.43.

When Inonu came to the power as a president he declared that it was a crime to call for prayer in Arabic, except in Turkish, but after the Democrat Party won the election in 1950 *muazzins* were allowed to use Arabic. In the same year, Adnan Menderes, the Prime Minister, opened “seven year high school for prayer-leaders and preachers.”⁴⁵ In 1953 in line with a room for democracy slightly opened by Menderes, thousands of mosques were built throughout the country by the people. The state, then, only appointed and paid salaries for clerical staff who in charge to serve and control of the mosques activities as civil servants.⁴⁶

As it had been mentioned above, several *tarikas* still existed and it went on secretly among the people in their community like *tarika Nasyabandi*. In 1960 another new Islamic group *tarika, Jamaah Nurcu* emerged. This *jamaah* actually had begun since Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, the founder of *Nurcu* had withdrawn from political activities into silent activities by writing his ideas as an effort to reconstruct the Turkish people to be conscious of their religion. However, it showed the other side that Kemalist had banned all religious activities in public spheres that would become a danger for Muslims in the next generations because in the long run the religion would vanish in the daily life of Muslims. Bediuzzaman believed that it could not be solved through politics or economics because the case was rather ideological. It needed the power of ideas and a cognitive revolution.⁴⁷ That was why he decided to write and discuss the religious teaching among his disciples. His writing and discussion in his circle were then circulated to among other people. The people who were once the members of his circle and the readers of his treatise then became the Nurcu Group which had still continued until the present. One of his loyal disciples, Ahmet Aytemur,⁴⁸ is still active in gathering the people in order to become his *jamaah*.

This *jamaah* is the same as other *tarikas*, in which, they have their own *jamaah* and their own ways how to perform religious obligations. The *Nurcu jamaah* have two groups with different leaders and different vision. One of the groups was led by Fathullah Gullen⁴⁹ who

⁴⁵ Mango, *The Turk...*,p.108

⁴⁶ Mango, *The Turk...*,p.46

⁴⁷ M. Hakan Yavuz, “Toward an Islamic Liberalism?: The Nurcu Movement and Fethullah Gulen” *The Middle East Journal*, Vo. 3, No. 4 (Autum 1999), p.588

⁴⁸ I met him twice, first in his house, in Istanbul, which also one of the place Nurcu Group gathered and the second time in the other *haneh* nearly Sultan Aiyub Mosque, Istanbul. Ahmet Aytemur had accompanied Bediuzzaman for 10 years, around 1950s-1960s.

⁴⁹ M. Hakan Yavuz named this *jamaah* as Neo Nurcu Group. See Hakan Yavuz, “Toward...p.586

considered that the modern science had to be paid more attention to prepare the Muslim next generations. As a result, he can run a large network of secondary schools in Turkey and abroad, private universities and a qualified newspaper as well as a television channel.⁵⁰ Yavuz noted in 1997 Neo Nurcu Group had founded 155 schools and 5 universities in Turkey, and 145 high Schools and 2 universities in 25 countries outside Turkey.⁵¹ The other group can not be identified who their leaders in their community was. According to them all of them were the followers of Bediuzaman Said Nursi school teaching. No one of them is a leader. This group gives a priority to increase their knowledge of Islamic teaching through reading of Bediuzzaman Sayid Nursi books and to strengthen commitment in practicing of religious obligations such as joint prayers with *jamaah* and *wirid*.⁵²

It is very likely that because the pressure of the government to the Muslim activities was tough, fanatic Muslims were increasingly active to develop their teaching secretly through *tarika*, and that was why since 1980 there had been a discernible increase in the activity of *tarika*. Although technically illegal, the orders could provide many services that state could not. One of these is educational facilities provided for the poor. Since 1980 there had been a considerable increase in the number of privately run Qur'anic schools. One of the leading *tarika* in this sphere is the Sulaymancis, so named after their leader, the late Sulayman Hilmi Tanahani. This organization (Tarikat Sulayman), had a country which had wide network of Qur'anic schools which are usually boarding schools where the students were isolated from the outside world. The finance came from Sulaimancis privately which he collected through fund raising campaigns among businessmen. In 1990, the number of students in these schools had currently been estimated as many as 100.000. students⁵³

In Saylan research in 1980 as quoted by Salim Deringil, there were several *tarikats* really active in Turkey such as Nurcus, Sulaymancis, Naksyabadis, Kadiris, Rifais and the Isikcis. Hizbullah and Islamic Brothers were also active. In the recent decade each of Islamic groups also published several media at least one newspaper or magazine.⁵⁴ M. Hakam Yavuz recorded

⁵⁰ Mango, *The Turk...*p. 130.

⁵¹ Hakan Yafuz, "Toward..."p.599

⁵² Wirid means recital of several salawat to the prophet Muhammad and to say a prayer (do'a) .

⁵³Selim Deringil, et.all, *Social Change in Contemporary Turkey*, (Japan: Institute of Developing Economies, 1990), p.50

⁵⁴ Deringil, at.all. *Social...*p.52-53.

that Neo Nurcu Group led by Gullen, and they manages several TV and radio stations. They also published several monthly magazines and daily newspaper. Among them were *Sizinti*, scientific monthly, *Ekoloji*, environment magazine, *Yeni Ilmit*, journal theology, *Aksion*, weekly magazine, *The Fountain*, the religious magazine published in English and *Zaman*, daily newspaper.⁵⁵ *Zaman* was published in two languages, Turkish and English. That was also one of the ways how the Muslim leaders in Turkey managed Muslim communities. Nurcu group, even, published important books as a base of their reference, that is, *Risalah Bediuzzaman*. The books had become a primary source in their teaching which was read everywhere whenever they gathered their community. Many kinds of *Bediuzzaman* books were recently translated into some languages, as I found, in English, in Malaysian and Indonesian.

To strengthen their organization some of followers of *tarikah* were active in business. Some people had possessed a lot of firms which had become established. One of the important people shown by Selim was that Prime Minister Turgut Ozal's elder brother, Mr. Korkut Ozzal. He was one of the well known *Naksyabandi*, which had organic links with *Al-Baraka*, a Saudi finance organization.⁵⁶ One of the followers of Nurcu jamaah was shown to me by other followers that he had some properties leased in America.

At least there were three main factors leading to a new approach toward religion initiated by government, which made the end of anti clerical and state-domination toward Muslim activities in Turkey. First, the fact that Muslims in Turkey were known as majority, it reached 99,2 percent.⁵⁷ It was known that it was in Islamic teaching that every Muslim had to do every thing what God and Prophet has instructed to do so. Every Muslim, therefore, will endeavour as much as he can to be a good servant before God. In certain cases, Muslims will prefer to choose the God's instruction than other kinds of instruction. For this condition, it would be useless for the government if they continued to force them to do what Muslim did not believe in.

⁵⁵Yavuz, "Toward...", p.596

⁵⁶Deringil, at.all. *Social...*, p. 53

⁵⁷ www.enfal.de/turkiye.htm. In Ali Carkogle and Ersin Kalaycioglu research was reported 98 percent Turkish people believe in God, but they did not explain if there are all Muslim or include other religion follower. See Ali Carkoglu and Ersin Kalaycioglu, *Turkish Democracy Today: Election, Protest and Stability in an Islamic Society*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 121

Second, the change of the state's approach on religion was brought about with the introduction of democracy in 1946. In a speech on November, delivered by Ismet Inonu, the President of the time, declared that the general election scheduled for 1947 would be free and direct.⁵⁸ That opportunity was not only taken by politicians but also by the citizens who remained deeply religious, to put pressure on the fulfilment of religious demands which grew among Muslim people. Inonu allowed this condition in order to court the pious votes.⁵⁹ This sphere consequently made the ruling Republican People's Party ease its religion to become more visible in the following years and was gradually reintegrated into the state system of education. In the next year, it was decided to open a faculty of theology in Ankara and simultaneously training centres were established for imams and hatips, the prayer leaders and preachers. The courses teaching the Qur'an recitation began to increase in number and religious instruction became a voluntary subject in schools.⁶⁰

Third, there was the growing consciousness among of the ruling Kemalist elite group that several years of oppressive politics with regard to Islam and Muslim activities had not led to desired effect. On the contrary, due to the lack of control from the government on Islamic educational institution on the part of their teaching quality, such like the former *madrasas*, the people were seeking their Islamic knowledge by their own ways. That caused the emergence of new authorities over which the state had no influence and whose training it could not be controlled. They had a bitter experience that it had shown the unsupervised inculcation of traditional religious teaching, *madrasa*-educated sheikhs who led to be the religious groups hostile to the secular state. The above factor led to the solution that was seen as an enlightenment form of republican Islam, propagated by state itself through the creation of new institutions of Islamic teaching and learning.⁶¹

Since the government had been led by AKP (2002), almost no problems for Muslim were encountered in term of expanding their Islamic educational institutions, even, in terms of all aspects of Islamic teachings. Unlike the Ataturk which considered the religion was potentially dangerous to the state, the government, on the contrary, now sees religion as an important

⁵⁸ Eric J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), p. 211

⁵⁹ Mango, *The Turks...*, p.43

⁶⁰ Sitembolukbasi, *Aspects of...*, p. 159

⁶¹ Agai, *Islam...*, p. 152

element in social life. In the book issued by Directorate General for Religious Teaching, mentioned that religion was a component of human identity as an individual and was the fundamental source of value that made life meaningful and sustainable. It was impossible to find a society without a religion throughout the history.⁶² With regard to Islamic educational institutions which were in the history called *madrassa* since republic period which was changed by imam-hatip schools now are spread anywhere throughout the country.

Now, not only through government but also through other Islamic groups such as Fethullah Gullen's group and Sulaimancis had founded many Islamic schools in Turkey, even in several countries outside Turkey. In Indonesia, for example, in the Aceh province two Fatih Bilingual schools were founded, one for boy students and one for girls. They are also taught the Turkish language so that several students often took time to take part International Turkish Olympiad in Turkey. This year one of the students from Aceh won 3 packets⁶³ of competitions of International Turkish Olympiad which was closed on July 2, 2011.⁶⁴

According to Mustafa Kucuglu, vice Directorate General for Religious Teaching of Ministry of National Education, there are approximately 45.000 graduates of Imam-Hatip schools every year and 235.000 students in this year are studying at Imam-Hatip schools. Some of them will be appointed to be administrators in several offices and some of them will choose to become Imam and Hatip in several mosques. They also can continue their study to Ilahiyat Faculty in which they can choose to become religious teachers. If they are willing to be a mufti they can choose another special program at Haseki Egitim Merkezi for a two and half year course.⁶⁵ Ilahiyat faculty which was closed down in the early Turkish Republic has opened again since 1948, and now has founded 40 faculties in 102 state universities in Turkey.⁶⁶

In addition, according to Mustafa Kucuglu, every general school now provides religious subjects in a simple form, and the important things are to teach the students to understand basic religion of Islam. For example, there are subjects such as ablution (*thaharah*), Prayer (*shalat*),

⁶² Directorate, *Religious Education...*, p.1

⁶³ *Serambi Indonesia*, July, 2011

⁶⁴ *Today's Zaman* July 2, 2011.

⁶⁵ I interview with Prof. Dr. Bilal Aybakan, a lecturer at Ilahiyat Faculty of Marmara University, Istanbul July 12, 2011.

⁶⁶ I interview with Dr. Ibrahim Helalsyah, one of the lecturer at Istanbul 29 Mayis University, July 27, 2011.

fasting, charity (zakah) and hajj. In order to teach them to become a good Muslim, the Directorate also prepares syllabi about etiquette in Islam for example, how to behave in front of parents, teachers and elder people and how to live in a clean environment. Furthermore, the syllabi have been prepared to teach other kinds of Islamic teaching, that is, Islamic Tradition (*Hadits*), Theology (*Kalam*), Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic History, Comparative History of Religion, Preaching and Vocational Practice including Recitation of Holy Qur'an.⁶⁷

Besides rebuilding a number of imam-*hatib* schools and providing syllabi for religious teachings in general schools, the government which is led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, AKP leader, also always meets the people's needs to appoint new personnel of imam-*hatips* or muftis. In 2003, 15.000 new posts were occupied and appointed by the Directorate of Religious Affairs.⁶⁸ In the present time there are 124.000 workers employed at the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi*) which include 900 muftis, 1.425 *vizes* or preachers, and 60.000 imam-*hatips*, where they are spread throughout Turkey.⁶⁹ Diyanet and Directorate of Religious Teaching are preparing to build several imam-*hatip* schools outside Turkey as they have once built in Balkan.

The Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet Isteleri Baskanligi*) is a state organization which is responsible for making people well-informed about religious issues. Imam-*hatip* schools are run by the Directorate General for Religious Teaching affairs under Ministry of National Education, while the *Diyanet* appoints the alumni of the schools as workers to carry out the religious service within a sound knowledge to the Muslim people. In addition, *Diyanet* also runs in-service training courses to professionally improve its entire staff and increase their capability building in service especially muftis, the chief officers representing the Presidency in towns, and cities.

The course which are designed to empower mufti or *vaize* take twenty-eight months or a two-and half year and the courses taught are Arabic, *Fiqh*, *Hadith*, *Tafsir*, *Aqaid*, Islamic

⁶⁷ Directorate, *Religious*...p.10.

⁶⁸ Gunter Seufert, "Religion: Nation Building Instrument of the State or Factor of Civil Society? The AKP Between State-and Society-Centered Religious Politics" in Hans-Lukas Kieser (ed.), *Turkey Beyond Nationalism Toward Post-Nationalist Identities*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 136

⁶⁹ I interview with Kadir Dinces, a public relation of The Presidency of Religious Affair in Ankara, Monday 18, 2011.

Thought, and Qur'an reading (*qiraah*). For the Arabic subjects, Grammar, Reading Comprehension, Writing, Listening and Speaking and Arabic Translation to Turkish and Turkish to Arabic Translation are taught. Tafsir subjects consist of Qur'anic Translation, History and Procedure, and Classic Text Studies. *Hadits* subjects taught are History and Procedure, Resources and Research Techniques, Analysis and Criticism, Understanding and Interpretation of Prophet Muhammad's life, Classic Text Studies of *Hadits*. *Fiqh* subjects taught are Introduction to Science of *Fiqh*, *Fiqh* Procedure, *Fiqh Makasid*, Comparative Text Study, Classic Text of *Fiqh*, Islamic Inheritance Law, Islamic Catachism with proofs of *Fiqh* Public and Private bases, *Fiqh* of Current Problems, contemporary *Fiqh*, Problems and Fatwa Procedures. Islamic Thought subjects taught are Islamic thoughts and Religious Education, Islamic thought: a Critical Thinking, Islamic Thought Module Styles-Theology, Islamic Thought Morality and Mysticism, Communication and Guidance in Common Religious Education. Qur'anic Beautiful Recitation takes six semesters. The staff who desires to be muftis or *vaizes* also can go through attending PhD program in Islamic science.⁷⁰

Presently the Diyanet office also functions as an institution to correct Qur'anic writing and Qur'anic recitation. When I came to the office, one of the skilled workers in charge, Ali Ozgelen, showed me what he had done, that is, corrections of the Qur'anic writing which is misprinted. According to Ali Ozgelen, someone who wishes to be a skilled corrector has to take a course of Correcting Qur'anic Recitation (*tashih-i huruf*). This course has been open since 2008. In this course, the Diyanet does not only correct the errors of the Qur'anic print-out but also has to be able to read Qur'an in several kinds of *qiraah* as Ali Ozgelen showed in front of us as a skilled graduate from this course.

Perhaps only one problem comes up now, that is, prohibition of wearing headscarf or *jilbab* at universities and state office spheres. That is an urgent problem for women. It could not almost be counted how many women had to choose to continue their study abroad because they could not wear headscarf when they enter universities. Most of Muslims consider that wearing headscarf for the women is obligatory. They believe that it is a sin if they do not cover their head. That is why some of them prefer to choose to go abroad where the universities

⁷⁰ Republic of Turkey, The Presidency of Religious Affairs, Selcuk Professional Religious Training, 2011.

prohibit their head to be covered with scarf. How important to wear headscarf in Muslim women's view in Turkey? Based on his research in 2007 Ali Carkoglu and Ersin Kalaycioglu reported that the issue of scarf wearing women in Turkish universities and public offices at large was quite a potent one among a large segment of the electorate to choose a certain party which was committed to release the law which banned headscarf wearing at universities and state office spheres.⁷¹ The latest news was reported by Today's Zaman, one famous newspaper in Turkey, which consists of a group of female activists have launched an online movement, a campaign that promotes the abolishment of the headscarf ban at university campuses, in public agencies and in Parliament.⁷²

5. Concluding Remark

Ataturk closed religious educational institutions and other religious activities in public spheres because of the failure of *ulama* and sultan with regard to the adjustment of development of Islamic education with the change of people living in a modern world, mainly the world around Turkey. The backwardness of Islamic education had much influenced static and even decline of Turkey it was compared with development of the countries around Turkey. Thus, The Ottoman Empire known as forceful and sturdy counting was able to control several islands and continents, which in the end, gradually were defeated by other countries, even the Turkish territory was almost occupied by French and Britain.

Historically it has been acknowledged that merely the force of the Turkish National Struggle led by Ataturk could liberate Turkey from several enemies which led Turkey to become the Republic of Turkey. Unfortunately, the fighters did not graduate from *madradas* or other Islamic schools. Most of them were the soldiers trained and graduated from secular schools, even in the secular countries outside Turkey. The background of their education and training shaped their vision and ideology of their life. The experiences of Ataturk through religion could function as a spirit which was used to fight against the enemies, in fact, it was very difficult that religion could function to develop modern states. At that time, there was no

⁷¹ Ali Caroglu and Ersin Kalaycioglu, *Turkish Democracy...*, p. 153. Further discussion regarding headscarf in Turkey see Dilek Cindoglu and Gizem Zencirci "The Headscarf in Turkey in the Public and State Sphere, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vo. 44, No.5 (September 2008), p. 791-806.

⁷² Today' zaman, July 12, 2011

choice for Turkey except Turkey had to establish a modern country, because the countries around Turkey have become strong with a modern and secular system. If Turkey were not strong enough at that time, it was very possible to be colonized by other strong countries.⁷³

It has been, however, six centuries that the Ottoman Empire came into existence, where the Islamic religion must be strongly embedded in the heart of the Turkish people and that is why it is not easy for the people to forget their faith. The prohibition of practicing religious activities including religious education in public sphere which was issued by Ataturk and Kemalist, in fact was not very effective. The Muslim people mainly in the suburbs practiced their religious activities from one generation to the next. The same cases related to religious education activities, either *madrassa*, Qur'anic schools or basic religious education which were provided in houses (*haneh*) among the people or in houses of imam for children, were activated secretly or slightly more open. Moreover, *tarika* group activities, although *tekke* was closed by the government in the early republic, kept being active because they did not depend on certain places. They always travelled from one place to other places around their net-workings. As I found out that, Nurcu group never used mosques as a place for gathering people. They always used the *hanehs* (houses) as place where they gathered the community either to perform prayers in congregation (*shalat jamaah*), *wirid* or to learn a lesson from Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's books. The *tarika* group develops rapidly because it is supported by middle class people who have been economically established. Some of their members are active in political parties and some of them have become bureaucrats, but most of them are the businessmen who become the donators of their activities. Because some of them have entered the bureaucracy it is predicted that religious activities for Muslims in Turkey will not encounter any obstacles and the activities will continue to progress in the coming years.

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⁷³ There was a fact that many Muslim countries in the time were colonized by western country, for example Indonesia was colonized by the Dutch, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam and Egypt was colonized by Britain.

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