



Max Planck Institute for the Study of
Religious and Ethnic Diversity

Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser
und multiethnischer Gesellschaften

MMG Working Paper 13-02 • ISSN 2192-2357

MURAT AKAN

A Politics of Comparative Conceptualizations
and Institutions: Two non-European Images
on European Secularity in the Writing of
the 1961 Turkish Constitution



Murat Akan

A Politics of Comparative Conceptualizations and Institutions: Two non-European Images on European Secularity in the Writing of the 1961 Turkish Constitution

MMG Working Paper 13-02

Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften,
Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity
Göttingen

© 2013 by the author

ISSN 2192-2357 (MMG Working Papers Print)

Working Papers are the work of staff members as well as visitors to the Institute's events. The analyses and opinions presented in the papers do not reflect those of the Institute but are those of the author alone.

Download: www.mmg.mpg.de/workingpapers

MPI zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften
MPI for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen
Hermann-Föge-Weg 11, 37073 Göttingen, Germany
Tel.: +49 (551) 4956 - 0
Fax: +49 (551) 4956 - 170

www.mmg.mpg.de

info@mmg.mpg.de

Abstract

Multiple conceptualizations of *laiklik* were pronounced in the writing of the 1961 Turkish Constitution. Based on an analysis of the records of the writing of the 1961 Constitution as well as on memoirs, newspapers, and interviews, this paper seeks to answer the question: Which conceptualizations of *laiklik* were put to the defense of which institutional arrangements and for what political goals? Then, the paper explores a possible critique from the narrative of the questions of *laiklik* and religions in the writing of the 1961 Turkish Constitution to (1) some liberal and multicultural assumptions prevailing in the contemporary literature on secularism and religion; (2) some aspects of Charles Taylor's hermeneutical approach; (3) some aspects of the rising multiple modernities approach.

Author

MURAT AKAN is a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity from September 2012 till September 2013 on a scholarship from the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey. He is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science from Columbia University in 2005. His past work has appeared in the *British Journal of Sociology*, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, and *Studies in Comparative International Development*.

murat.akan@boun.edu.tr

Contents

Introduction.....	7
The Infrastructural Politics of <i>Laiklik</i> in the Writing of the 1961 Turkish Constitution.....	8
The Liberalism-Multiculturalism-Secularism Debate and the Question of Infrastructure	17
Isomorphism and the Question of Change	22
Multiple Modernities and the Question of Secularism.....	32

Introduction

Multiple conceptualizations of secularity were pronounced in the writing of the 1961 Turkish Constitution, including the three types Charles Taylor articulates in his widely debated work *A Secular Age*.¹ In the midst of this multiplicity, two different “conceptualizations” of European Secularity in particular – one as a certain set of institutional arrangements (falling within or near Taylor’s secularity I), and the other one as a certain sociological context more broadly defined (where religion has ceased to be an anti-regime threat, falling within or near Taylor’s secularity II) – among the 1961 Turkish Constituent Elite, corresponded to two different kinds of political goals, but both sought to defend the same institutional arrangement to regulate the relation between state and religion(s). These competing “conceptualizations” and political goals converge in the defense of the same institution – a Directorate of Religious Affairs consisting of state salaried imams under the executive branch of the state. I have argued elsewhere in detail that this divergence in “conceptualizations” and convergence on the same institution turn into a coherent and analytical story from the hermeneutical angle of “infrastructure” (*altyapı*), an angle which casts light on “a political sphere,” and this political sphere calls for rethinking the relations between conceptualizations and institutions.² In this working paper, I would like to start exploring a possible critique from my narrative of the questions of *laiklik*³ and religions in the writing of the 1961 Turkish Constitution to (1) some liberal and multicultural assumptions prevailing in the contemporary literature on secularism and religion; (2) some aspects of Charles Taylor’s hermeneutical approach; (3) some

1 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

2 Murat Akan, “Infrastructural Politics of Laiklik in the Writing of the 1961 Turkish Constitution,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 13, no. 2 (2011): 190-211.

3 *Laiklik* is the concept used to refer to the relationship between religion and the state in Turkey. It denotes a condition rather than an “ism.” Its parallel would be *secularity* and not *secularism*. *Secularism* would correspond to *laikçilik*, but this concept is not common, except for a few usages during the writing of constitutions. Whether *laicism* and *secularism* are different concepts referring to different phenomena, or simply French and English versions of the same phenomenon, is an issue of debate. See Taha Parla and Andrew Davison, “Secularism and Laicism in Turkey,” in *Secularisms*, ed. Janet R. Jacobsen and Ann Pellegrini (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 61; and see Jean Baubérot, “Laïcité, Laïcisation, Secularisation,” in *Pluralisme religieux et laïcité dans l’Union Européenne*, ed. A. Dierkens (Bruxelles: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1994), 9-20.

aspects of the rising multiple modernities approach, and finally discuss the relevance of my critique for researching secularism and religion.

The Infrastructural Politics of *Laiklik* in the Writing of the 1961 Turkish Constitution

In the detailed narrative of a less than year-long episode of constitution writing by supplementing the records of the 1961 constituent assembly debates (three volumes and 3974 pages) with other primary documents such as memoirs, newspapers, and interviews, I have only come as close as tracing – always with a Weberian hesitance – the “elected affinity” between certain conceptualizations of European secularity, certain institutional proposals, and certain political goals among a political elite. I offer charted summaries of these relations below, and follow with an analytical narrative, highlighting certain aspects of the much detailed story embedded in these charts.

Figure 1. A Flow Chart of the Writing of the 1961 Constitution

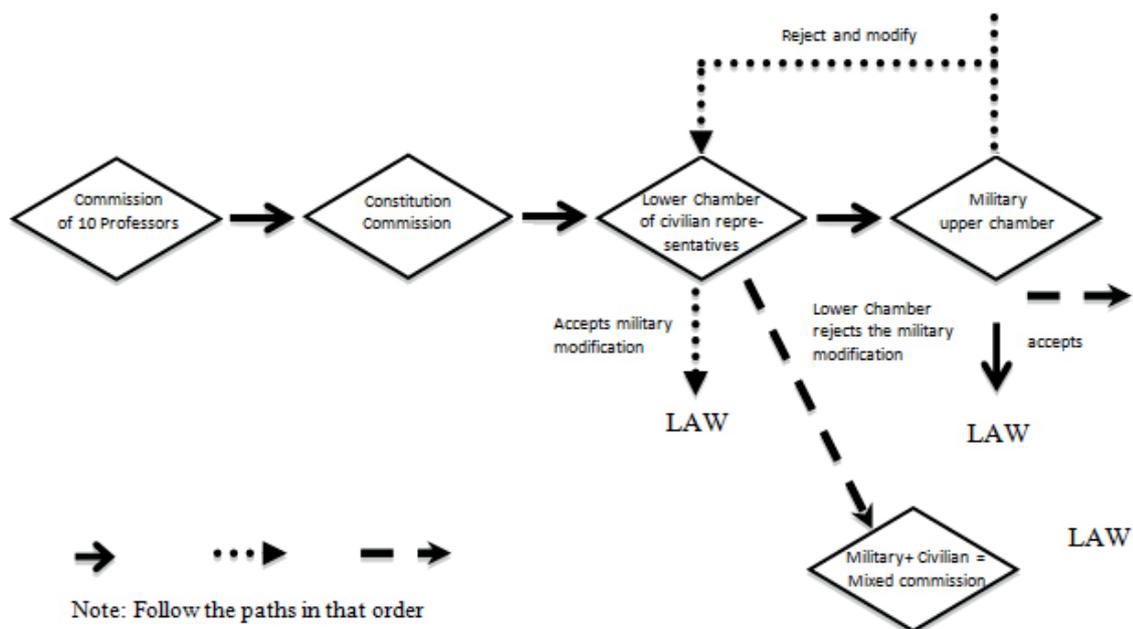


Table 1. Conceptualizations of Laiklik in the 1961 Constituent Assembly Debates on Articles 2, 19 (article 12 in the first draft) and temporary article 2.*

Institutional						Sociological (So)			Comparative Perspective		
Separation(S), 5	Separation, but the Turkish Context necessitates state involvement in order to ... (SB)					Impartial state support (ISS), 2	Non-discrimination (ND), 2	Utility of Religion (UR), 2	Privatization of religion (PR) or Differentiation of spheres (DS), 6	Western (W), 3	Not western (NW), 5
	Police [zabita] (P), 1	Control religious content and practice, 7	Help to religious freedoms, 1	Put religion under the State, 2	Be at least equalitarian, if not laic, 1						

*The major categories are not mutually exclusive, but the subcategories are. In other words, sometimes a speaker did offer an institutional and a sociological conceptualization, and simultaneously put Turkey in comparative perspective, but no speaker for instance ever tried to simultaneously conceptualize laiklik as separation and impartial state support.

Table 2. Mapping Conceptualizations onto Institutional Propositions*

State builds some aspect of religious infrastructure for majority and minorities (SBIMM)	State builds some aspect of religious infrastructure for majority (SBIM)	State induced centralized independent religious infrastructure (SICIRI)	Religious groups build their own infrastructure (RGI)
(Impartial state support) [2] (Separation, but...) (anti-western) [3]	(Separation) (anti-western) [1] (Separation) (western) [1] (Utility of Religion) [1] (Utility of Religion) (anti-western) [1] (Separation, but...) [7] (Separation, but...) (sociological) (western) [2] (Separation, but...) (sociological) (anti-western) [1] (Sociological) [2] (Sociological) (western) [1]	(Separation) [1]	(Separation) (western) [1] (Separation) [1] (Non-discrimination) [2]

* (Separation) (western) [1] reads one speaker conceptualized laiklik as western and as separation

On May 27, 1960, a military coup was carried out in Turkey and the procedure in the flow chart above (figure 1) was set up to write the new constitution. The discussions in the Turkish 1961 Constituent Assembly Lower Chamber (see figure 1) are a significant part of my analysis. These discussions cannot be treated as the main determinant of the resulting constitutional institutions, because the military had the upper hand in the writing of the constitution (see figure 1), and the lower chamber was numerically dominated by the Republican Peoples' Party. Although officially there were 74 seats in total reserved in the constituent assembly for two political parties – the Republican Peoples' Party (CHP) and the Republican Peasant Nation Party (CKMP) –, the newspaper *Milliyet* reported that 142 out of the 272 total seats were CHP supporters.⁴ Professor Hıfzı Veldet Velidedeoğlu, member of the Professor's commission and the lower chamber, in his memoirs reports 225 CHP supporters.⁵ Kadircan Kafılı, a member of the CKMP and a newspaper columnist, reports 220.⁶ Yet, the discussions offer an opportunity to study the following question: Which conceptualization of *laiklik* was put forth in defense of which institutional arrangement and for what political goal? The Records of the writing of the 1961 Constitution in three volumes⁷ and other primary sources that help delineate the context of the writing of the constitution provide immensely rich material for working towards an answer to this question.

My summary tables, which explicate in detail various comparative conceptualizations of *laiklik* vis-à-vis Europe and map them on institutional proposals for each speaker, reveal no simple isomorphic relation. Table 2 maps the different conceptualizations in table 1 onto the proposed state role in building religion-infrastructure (education in religion, maintenance of mosques, training and paying clerics, etc.) in general. In a close reading of these debates, one cannot miss the focus on the question of religion-infrastructure rather than the more limited liberal question of the limits state power over individual action and speech. During the debates, 16 out of the 31 speakers, with different political, institutional, and conceptual positions and

4 *Milliyet* (1960) 'Kurucu Meclis Seçimleri Tamamlandı: Gayri Resmî Tasnife Göre 142 CHP'li 85 Müstakil ve 25 CKMP li seçildi' ["Constituent Assembly Elections are completed: According to the unofficial classification there are 142 CHP supporters, 85 independent and 25 CKMP supporters in the assembly"], 31 December.

5 Hıfzı Veldet Velidedeoğlu, *Türkiye'de Üç Devir Var* ["There Are Three Epochs in Turkey"] İstanbul: Sinan Yayınları, 1972), p. 187.

6 Kadircan Kafılı, "Evet mi Hayır mı? . . ." ["Yes or No?"], *Tercüman*, 1 June 1961.

7 Kazım Öztürk, Kazım (1966) *Türk anayasası. [Records of the Turkish constitution], 3 volumes* (İstanbul : İş Bankası Yayınları, 1966).

political affiliations, explicitly established a relation between religious freedom and infrastructure.

What is striking regarding the question of isomorphism is that there is absolutely no one-to-one correspondence between the meanings attributed to *laiklik* and the institutional proposals. The closest cases to an isomorphic mode were “*laiklik* as impartiality” – which was only put in defense of “State builds some aspect of religious infrastructure for majority and minorities (SBIMM)” – and “*laiklik* as non-discrimination” – which was only put to the defense of “Religious groups build their own infrastructure (RGBI).” However, the reverse was not true. SBIMM was not only defended by “*laiklik* as impartiality” and RGBI was not only defended by “*laiklik* as non-discrimination.” “*Laiklik* as separation” was the conceptualization that underwrote the highest number of institutional proposals (three out of four, see table 2). The institutional proposal of “state builds infrastructure for majority” (SBIM) – which was the republican status quo – was the institutional arrangement that was defended from within the most number of different conceptualizations of *laiklik*, three out of five, to be exact. And, despite the risk of stating the obvious, these multiple combinations of conceptualizations and institutional arrangements were coterminous.

Now, I will only address two of the conceptualization-institution combinations summarized in table 2: institutional and sociological conceptualizations of European secularity and their corresponding institutions and political goals, because in my analysis of the 31 speakers’ discussion, these different conceptualizations mapped to different political goals.

Only two political parties were allowed in the constituent assembly: the Republican Peasant Nation Party (CKMP) and the Republican Peoples Party (RPP). Only five speakers put forth a conceptualization of *laiklik* as institutional separation, and all five were from the CKMP. These five CKMP members also agreed that religious freedom requires guarantees against government coercion, and three of them linked this explicitly to the past where the republican elite had promoted anti-religious laws. All five speakers clearly converged on the goal of increasing the space for religion, and found the CHP’s emphasis on regime threat exaggerated.⁸ None of the five speakers addressed non-majority religions and two of them explicitly declared Turkey to be a Muslim-majority country. Three of the speakers defended a limit on speech critical

8 E.g. see Kazım Öztürk, *Türk Anayasası* [Records of the Turkish Constitution], 3 volumes, p. 1399.

of religion. Only two speakers, either through silence on the state's role or expression of worry about state involvement, implicitly seemed inclined towards religious communities managing their own affairs.

The other three explicitly welcomed a state role in some aspects of religious affairs. Those of the speakers who addressed "*laiklik* as separation" in a comparative perspective saw it as European, and referred to *laiklik*'s "worldwide meaning" or "scientific meaning."⁹ One of them, however, merged a nationalist-religious anti-European line along with his conceptualization of *laiklik* as separation.

The general stance of the Republican Peasant Nation Party (CKMP) was to enhance the public role of religion at the least as a source of public morality. This stance was visible in the constituent assembly, but much more visible in the statements of party members made outside the assembly. The head of the party, Osman Bölükbaşı, on October 12, 1960, while the 1961 Constitution was still being drafted by the Ten Professors' Commission, in a lead newspaper article entitled "'27 May' and the Order We Expect," explained that,

to render the order we expect permanent and fruitful, an appropriate mean and spiritual ground has to be made ready before anything else. In order to prepare this ground, morals and warning (*ibret*) have to be placed at the foundation of this order.

A member of the CKMP in the lower chamber, Kadircan Kafılı, in an article in the newspaper *Tercüman* on June 1, 1961, took this emphasis on morality one step further by putting morality even before the constitution: "The real foundation of democracy is morality, but other sources are also needed, the first of these other sources is a perfect constitution."¹⁰ And in a newspaper article on the question of religious reform that he wrote on May 8, 1961, Kafılı defended the idea that any state-led reform of religion is against *laiklik* as separation.¹¹

Yet, Kafılı was one of the three speakers who welcomed a state role in some aspects of religious life, and the one point common only to these three speakers among the group of five was the emphasis on the importance of infrastructure for religious freedom. The argument was that religious freedom required infrastructure, because religion was not only a matter of faith (*iman*), but more so a matter of practice (*amel*). Sadettin Tokbey, from the CKMP, one of the five defending *laiklik* as separation and

9 Kazım Öztürk, *Türk Anayasası* [Records of the Turkish Constitution], 3 volumes, p. 967.

10 Kadircan Kafılı, "Evet mi Hayır mı?..." ["Yes or No?"], *Tercüman*, June 1, 1961.

11 Kadircan Kafılı, "Dinde Reform Tasarısı..." ["Proposal for Reform in Religion"], *Tercüman*, May 8, 1961.

supporting an institutional proposal of a state-induced separation, made the clearest statement on the matter: “Freedom of conscience is a circuitous phrase.”¹² He differentiated between belief and practice and stated that “it is our duty to provide the facilities for practice for those who feel the need for practicing [religion].” He placed the emphasis on infrastructure when he stated, “to be able to use all these rights we need organization.”¹³

The argument of the CKMP members found a conceptualization of *laiklik* as separation compatible with an institutional proposal of a state role in building infrastructure for the majority religion. Their argument went on to claim that past republican policies were responsible for the weakened infrastructure for Islam. Therefore, the state had to take an active role in building religion-infrastructure. In the rest of the argument there were two positions. Two of the speakers defended the Directorate of Religious Affairs as it was, while the other, Tokbey, wanted to see it become separated from the state but assigned a role to the state in the transition period to separation. The common point of these speakers was that the focus should be on institutionalism under infrastructural constraints only, and not on the threat to the regime on which CHP members based their arguments.

All speakers who offered a sociological conceptualization of European secularism were either from or sympathizers of the CHP. A state role in regulating religious institutions was argued to be different from Europe institutionally, but on the way to Europe sociologically. These institutions were defended using an argument based on the different sociological stage in which Turkey finds itself vis-à-vis Europe. Expertism, culturalism, and historicism were the main modes of reasoning for marking difference between Turkey and Europe as part of the argument from sociological necessity.¹⁴

The head of the Constitution Commission (see flow chart 1), a member of CHP, offered the following conceptualization of *laiklik*, clearly a sociological one;

laiklik, as far as its historical trajectory (*tarihi seyri*) is concerned, is not only the separation of religion and the state. It is the separation of religion and science, religion and art, religion and law, and religion and economics.¹⁵

12 Kazım Öztürk, *Türk Anayasası* [Records of the Turkish Constitution], 3 volumes, p. 1348.

13 Kazım Öztürk, *Türk Anayasası* [Records of the Turkish Constitution], 3 volumes, p. 1349.

14 For historicism and modernity, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

15 Kazım Öztürk, *Türk Anayasası* [Records of the Turkish Constitution], 3 volumes, p. 1381.

The widening of the question of separation from an institutional focus to a sociological terrain and bringing in “historicism” allowed for turning the question of institutions from an “end” to a “means” to reach a certain sociological state. The speaker quoted above topped this sociological move with more contextual specifics. First, there has not been a religious reform in Turkey and second, as a result of the low level of education, Islam has been intertwined with ignorance in Turkey. He concluded by commenting on infrastructure to argue against any claims of contradictions of the Turkish State’s involvement in religious affairs and for the compatibility of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) with *laiklik*:

Since there is no clerical class (*ruhban sınıfı*) in Turkey, obviously a few persons gathering together cannot be allowed to establish a religious organization. This is impossible. In addition, the persons who are given the duty to provide religion services are not spiritual (*ruhani*) persons. They are civil servants. In other words, they have neither holiness nor greatness. From this perspective, if we accept the Directorate of Religious Affairs as an administrative institution, then the [principle of laiklik in the] constitution is not violated.¹⁶

In a nutshell, the argument of the head of the constitution commission was that if the state did not build and maintain the infrastructure, others would, and in the Turkish context of intertwined low level of education and religiosity, such a decentralized formation of religion infrastructure outside the state would be a regime threat and if its materialization would interrupt the historical trajectory of *laiklik*.

This historicist argument in defense of state involvement in religious affairs was given a new twist by the role of a European scholar in the closure the Faculty of Theology in Istanbul University in 1933. Kadircan Kafı from the CKMP underlined the closure of the faculty as an example of the anti-religious policies of the Republican People’s Party. A CHP member responded with the argument that the closure of the faculty of religion was not a result of a republican anti-religious policy, but rather just the result of a historical development (*tarihi tekamül*), which the CHP member defended with the European expert report on the state of Istanbul University:¹⁷

Atatürk did not close the Istanbul Faculty of Theology.... Then, in order to reform *Darülfünun* [Istanbul University], an expert, with the name Professor Malsh, was brought in from Europe. If you read the report this person submitted, you will understand.... Professor Malsh says in the report he submitted to the state: “I cannot have a say in the direction

16 Kazım Öztürk, *Türk Anayasası* [Records of the Turkish Constitution], 3 volumes, p. 1384.

17 On modernity, colonization and expertise, see, Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

the religious institution of a nation will take place, but this is the situation: It [the Faculty] has four students and approximately forty professors”.... That is to say, on its own, as the result of a historical development [*tarihi tekamül*] this institution has been closed.¹⁸

On other occasions, historicism sometimes was preceded with outright denial of the contradiction that the Directorate of Religious Affairs posed for “separation.” In this regard, Professor Bahri Savcı’s position, which he rearticulated through the writing of the constitution, was quite interesting. He was one of the ten professors who drafted the constitution, and he later entered the lower chamber as an independent from the professional group quota for universities. In a written statement he had attached to the Ten Professors’ Commission report, he had strictly opposed religion courses in public education, and part of his argument relied on a claim to “Turkish difference” articulated more as culturalism than historicism:

One possible argument for the defense of religious education in public schools is that religious education by the state can help in fighting against backwardness [tradition]. This argument is fallacious. The only way of fighting backwardness is education in positive science.... The characteristic of the religion of Islam is to infiltrate the life of the state. The religion of Islam will enter through the gateway opened by this paragraph of article 12 and will aim at first controlling the state and then the whole society.¹⁹

However, in his speech on *laiklik* in the lower chamber, Savcı rearticulated his position. He ended with an outright denial of the contradiction between a state-funded DRA and *laiklik* and finally followed by contextual necessities. He disqualified this state-funded institution as a public service, and made accommodating remarks on religious education. Towards the end of his speech, Savcı started turning towards particularistic arguments on Islam to articulate the “Turkish difference” in between culturalism and historicism:

And finally, laiklik is the following: religion is not a public service.... This is scientifically true. In this respect, our constitution as a whole and in its article 19 is completely *laik*. Yet, a question will remain in the minds of the speakers who took the floor here....: if laiklik is that, then what is the place and reason of the Directorate of Religious Affairs? The constitution mentions education in religion. What does that mean? Aren’t these in contradiction with laiklik? In my judgment the answer to these questions is “no.” Both

18 Kazım Öztürk, *Türk Anayasası* [Records of the Turkish Constitution], 3 volumes, p. 1412. Soysal misquotes the numbers in the report. The original text of the report Albert Malche, *İstanbul Üniversitesi Hakkında Rapor* [Report on Istanbul University], Istanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1939), p. 52, reads “13 teachers and 3 students.”

19 Kazım Öztürk, *Türk Anayasası* [Records of the Turkish Constitution], 3 volumes, p. 172-3.

education in religion and the Directorate of Religious Affairs are simple ways of policing [*zabıta*]...This is the situation: Religion of Islam is overtaken by superstition. And there is an illogical and unreasonable system of religious education. Now, it is not contrary to laiklik to show religion in its pure principles to the children of those who ask for it in order to save the Religion of Islam from superstition and the a la turca system of education. The education in religion in article 19 is not about conveying a state religion or to arrange all of our political, social, and economic life according to religion, but only to teach properly to the children of those who ask for it the pure principles of religion ridded of superstition. Along with this situation, if we also remember the rules of no religion in the state organization and taking religion out of the state organization, what we have is a simple policing [*zabıta*] by the state for the sake of ordering a disordered field [here he is talking about the DRA].²⁰

There were also utilitarian Republicans who explicitly were in favor of violating the differentiation of spheres for purposes of governmentality. I will mention one of them. A military academy teacher who entered the Lower Chamber of Representatives from the National Union Committee quota, who at the start of his speech stated that *laiklik* means that religion stays under the protection (*himaye*) of the state, in his articulation went way beyond this idea:

The only institution spread all over the patrie and which can gather citizens under a roof is the institution of religion. If we can benefit from this institution properly, I believe that it will play a huge role in our national development. Our national development does not only depend on material things. It is certain that development does not happen only with building factories. In parallel, there is the necessity to rise morally...The principle of laiklik is still understood by the public as if it is a principle bringing irreligion (*dinsizlik*).²¹

In line with his conceptualization of *laiklik*, the military academy teacher proposed turning the optional courses on religion and morality that existed at the time into required courses and to add a new paragraph to the article on religious freedom that defines religion as a supportive institution to national education, a proposal that explicitly violated the differentiation of spheres.²²

This concludes my brief narrative of the question of *laiklik* and religion in the writing of the 1961 constitution. Now, I would like to turn one by one to the three theoretical areas, mentioned in the introduction, that I see invoked in my narrative of the writing of the 1961 Constitution.

20 Kazım Öztürk, *Türk Anayasası* [Records of the Turkish Constitution], 3 volumes, p. 1372.

21 Kazım Öztürk, *Türk Anayasası* [Records of the Turkish Constitution], 3 volumes, p. 1357-8.

22 Ibid., p. 1358.

The Liberalism-Multiculturalism-Secularism Debate and the Question of Infrastructure

Is this focus on “infrastructure” from multiple political angles theoretically significant beyond the 1961 narrative? I think it is. Drawing attention to the precise concerns political actors have when discussing religion, in this case their focus on “infrastructure,” can highlight some of the limitations of current discussions on secularism and religion, which are excessively focused on “religious practices” and “ways of life,” both in its liberal and multicultural forms. They all sidestep the question of religion-infrastructure by subsuming it under a normative-political position of religion-infrastructure as an outcome of voluntarism à la John Locke.²³ However well put such a normative position may be, it is hardly sufficient as a starting point from which to empirically understand how religion-infrastructures are established and grow; or whether or not the state plays a role in the establishment or the growth; and how these infrastructures can sometimes precede the “voluntary” individual who chooses to join or financially support these institutions. I am referring to the two competing views on the relationship between institutions and individuals as they play out regarding the question of secularism and religion: On the one hand, there is the view that believers establish their religious institutions, and on the other hand, the view that religious institutions establish their believers. I think both hypotheses deserve to be on the map of the researcher, yet today the former gets the spotlight. Especially in moments of institutional design, like the one discussed in this paper, one common assumption among the politicians debating the institutions is that these are the institutions that will shape the choices of the present and future generations.

The concept of “religion” in Charles Taylor’s greatly debated *A Secular Age*, for example, has no element of infrastructure. It is just a “belief in the transcendent” supplemented with “the sense we have of our practical context.”²⁴ The latter additional qualification places the question of religion within the liberal question of the “good life.” Or, an article by Robert Audi, “The Separation of Church and State and the Obligations of Citizenship,”²⁵ very often cited for its explicit articulation of the

23 John Locke, “A Letter Concerning Toleration” in John Locke, *The Works of John Locke in Nine Volumes*, (London: Rivington, 1824 12th ed.), Vol. 5.

Accessed from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/764> on 2012-11-16

24 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p.16.

25 Robert Audi, “The Separation of Church and State and the Obligations of Citizenship,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 18 (3) (summer 1989): 259-296.

liberal principles behind institutional separation, treats the infrastructural question as exogenous. Again, when Jocelyn MacLure and Charles Taylor, in *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*,²⁶ offer a liberal-multicultural defense of “reasonable accommodations,” there is no distinction between practices and institutions. Their focus is mostly on practices, and the main example that informs their discussion, as it does the majority of the past decade of writing on secularism and religion, is the “scarfed girl.” Let’s have a quick look at each position.

Audi explicates the following liberal principles behind the doctrine of separation: the libertarian principle, the egalitarian principle, and the neutrality principle. The libertarian principle protects against government coercion, the egalitarian principle against government discrimination, and the neutrality principle against government favoritism. The libertarian principle posits that “the state permit the practice of any religion, within certain limits.” Audi suggests some of these limits to be “certain basic human rights, such as the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”²⁷ The egalitarian principle maintains that “the state may not give preference to one religion over another.”²⁸ The neutrality principle posits that “the state should give no preference to religion (or the religious as such)” over non-religious matters. For instance, the principle of equality “precludes such things as requiring a certain religious affiliation, say that of the majority, for a public office,”²⁹ and the principle of neutrality goes “against requiring periods of prayer or even of silent religious observance in public schools.”³⁰ So many states fail with regard to these three principles, which, in my opinion, are absolutely strong from a normative-political theoretical position committed to democracy and equality. We can simply judge these failures, but we can also examine the “nuts and bolts”³¹ of these failures, the mechanical and the hermeneutical politics within them. Part of this politics also involves bending and crossing the three principles, and linking them to the question of “religion-infra-structure” in different ways. Two positions which subscribe to the liberty principles can be deduced from this principle of different state obligations. My examples from the 1961 constituent elite discussions were that while some participants deduced from

26 Jocelyn MacLure and Charles Taylor, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*, trans. by Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

27 p. 262

28 p. 263

29 p. 263.

30 p. 264.

31 Jon Elster, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

religious freedom a state obligation to build religion-infrastructure, others opposed such a deduction. We do not have to go all the way to Turkey, as Minister of Interior and later President Nicolas Sarkozy's famous concept of *positive laïcité* establishes precisely such a state obligation from the principle of liberty.³² In other words, these principles can play out in various ways and sometimes undercut each other in ways we can only see if we shift the focus from the level of practices to the level of institutions.

The liberal-multiculturalist-secularism argument finds an articulation, with an explicit focus on principles and institutions, in Jocelyn MacLure and Charles Taylor's *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*.³³ MacLure and Taylor's starting point is that "the ends and means of secularism have not been distinguished with sufficient clarity in the pertinent academic studies in the social sciences, law, and philosophy."³⁴ Their approach calls for a re-discussion of "the constitutive principles of secularism" and "deriv[ing] the concrete [institutional] arrangements from these,"³⁵ which is called forth by the "new challenges"³⁶ of diversity facing secularism in contemporary North America and Europe. They set the main problematic of secularism as "moral autonomy" under conditions of "moral pluralism":

The question of secularism must therefore be approached within the broader problematic of the state's necessary neutrality toward the multiple values, beliefs, and life plans of citizens in modern times. That requirement of neutrality must be further clarified, however. A liberal and democratic state cannot remain indifferent to certain core principles, such as human dignity, basic human rights, and popular sovereignty. These are the constitutive values of liberal and democratic political systems: they provide these systems with their foundations and aims. Although these values are not neutral, they are legitimate.³⁷

32 Nicolas Sarkozy, *La République, les religions, l'espérance* (Paris: Cerf, 2004), p. 16, emphasis added.

33 Charles Taylor, "Modes of Secularism" in *Secularism and Its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Charles Taylor, "Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism" in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, eds. Eduardo Mendiata and Jonathan Vanantwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Jocelyn MacLure and Charles Taylor, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*, trans. by Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

34 Jocelyn MacLure and Charles Taylor, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*, trans. by Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), p. 23.

35 Charles Taylor, "What Does Secularism Mean?" in *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 314.

36 Jocelyn MacLure and Charles Taylor, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*, p. 29

37 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

In order to provide equally for the moral autonomy of all under conditions of moral diversity, state neutrality is necessary, and MacLure and Taylor's next important step is that the state must make "reasonable accommodations" in order to maintain its neutrality. But why could limited state neutrality – limited by the core liberal principles – not provide the conditions for "moral autonomy"? Why is it that now in the name of "reasonable accommodations," limited state neutrality has to be limited one more time? The answer is, in its republican form (French and Turkish), that

the secular state, in working toward marginalizing religion, adopts the atheist's and the agnostic's conception of the world and, consequently, does not treat with equal consideration for citizens who make a place for religion in their system of beliefs and values.³⁸

And in all of its other forms, the "multiculturalist critique" that Taylor and others had articulated in the "politics of legal recognition of difference" still applies. According to this critique, "One of the central arguments in favor of multiculturalism as a principle of political morality is that certain public norms applying to all citizens are not neutral or impartial from a cultural or religious point of view."³⁹

For MacLure and Taylor, the root of "non-neutrality" in the cases of France and Turkey is easily traceable to a state which turns secularism into a comprehensive doctrine. But what about some other cases? As the authors continue to give concrete examples, mostly from Quebec, it becomes apparent that the legitimate non-neutrality of the state is often not only limited to the "core principles, such as human dignity, basic human rights, and popular sovereignty." "The cross on Mount Royal in Montreal," according to MacLure and Taylor, a reminder of the past rather than a religious identification on the part of public institutions,⁴⁰ is one thing, but as they mention, "prayers said at the beginning of sessions of a municipal council or the crucifix above the Speaker's chair in the Quebec National Assembly"⁴¹ can compromise the neutrality of the political space, "after all, the Quebec National Assembly is the assembly of all citizens of Quebec."⁴² These particular concrete comprehensive doctrinal non-neutralities, I would say, could be more directly addressed, rather than being subsumed either under general philosophical-metaphysical vicissitudes of the concept of "neutrality" or under conceptual covers such as "indirect discrimination"

38 MacLure and Taylor, 31.

39 Ibid., p. 67.

40 Ibid., p. 50.

41 Ibid., p. 51

42 Ibid., p. 51

(it looks quite direct to MacLure and Taylor, and to me at the least), or under ethnographically authoritative claims of “what the people want”; such as, “in actuality, members of the religious minority groups rarely militate for the removal of symbols of their host country’s religious heritage. They are more likely to demand, in certain situations, a pluralization of the religious symbols in the public space.”⁴³ It looks like what is being “reasonably accommodated” here is not only the practices of minorities, but also the space of the state (and in comparative politics analysis the accommodation of some states vis-à-vis other states); namely, a comprehensive doctrinal non-neutrality not limited to the “core principles.”

And, going back to MacLure and Taylor’s claim about the root of secularism’s “non-neutrality” in France and Turkey, they seem to miss simple empirical facts on France and Turkey (more on Turkey) for which not they, but at least two generations of area/country specialists are responsible. For instance, historian and sociologist Jean Baubérot was a member of the *Commission de réflexion sur l’application du principe de laïcité dans la République*, the commission which submitted a report to the French president in 2003,⁴⁴ advising that a law banning “*signes religieux ostensibles*” (visible religious symbols) in public elementary, middle and high schools pass parliament in 2004.⁴⁵ However, Baubérot vetoed the suggestion for a ban – the only veto in the commission, but a heavy one, from a historian. In 2008, Baubérot published a book entitled *Une laïcité interculturelle: La Québec, avenir de la France?*, but his criticism in 2003 of the ban and the reason for his veto, which he expressed in an article published in *Libération*, was not that the French state had crowned itself with *laïcité* as a comprehensive secular philosophy, but rather that the French state was not *laïc* enough, and was suspect of “*catholaïcité*.”⁴⁶ Along similar lines, there is a whole academic literature committed to and empirically demonstrating that *laiklik* in Turkey is actually *Sunni-laiklik*, – as the 1961 narrative above also attests – and this literature is strictly ignored in the comparative politics literature.⁴⁷ The 1961 narra-

43 Ibid., p. 51

44 Commission de réflexion sur l’application du principe de laïcité dans la République, “Rapport au Président de la République” (Paris: La Documentation française, 2003).

45 Projet de Loi: encadrant, en application du principe de *laïcité*, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics. Sénate 66.

46 Baubérot, J. 2003 ‘La *Laïcité*, le chêne et le roseau’, *Libération*, December 15, 2003.

47 E.g. Taha Parla, *The Political Thought of Ziya Gökalp* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978); Taha Parla, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Kültürün Resmi Kaynakları*, 3 vols [Official Sources of Political Culture in Turkey] (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1992) ; Taha Parla, *Türkiye’nin Siyasal*

tive also suggests different politics of institutions vis-à-vis their positioning as means or ends. The focus on “practices” and “symbols” has to be accompanied by a closer look at the state infrastructure and its relation to religion-infrastructure.

Isomorphism and the Question of Change

Do the non-isomorphic relations between conceptualizations and institutions I documented from the writing of the 1961 Turkish Constitutions pose a critique of the kind of hermeneutical approach Taylor is pursuing and advocating in the study of secularism? I think it at the least marks the limits of Taylor’s hermeneutical approach.

Charles Taylor’s 1971 article “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” outlines the fundamental pillars of a hermeneutical approach as follows;

- (1) Meaning is for a subject: it is not the meaning of the situation in *vacuo*, but its meaning for a subject, a specific subject, a group of subjects, or perhaps what its meaning is for the human subject as such (even though a particular human might be reproached with not admitting or realizing this).
- (2) Meaning is of something; that is, we can distinguish between a given element – situation, action, or whatever – and its meaning. But this is not to say that they are physically separable. Rather we are dealing with two descriptions of the element, in one of which it is characterized in terms of its meaning for the subject. But the relations between the two descriptions are not symmetrical. For, on the one hand, the description in terms of meaning cannot be unless description of the other kind apply as well; or put differently, there can be no meaning without a substrate. But on the other hand, it maybe that the same meaning may be borne by another substrate – e.g. situation with the same meaning may be realized in different physical conditions. There is a necessary role for a potential substitutable condition. There is a necessary role for a potentially substitutable substrate; or all meanings are of something.

Rejimi 1980-1989 [Turkey’s Political Regime 1980-1989] (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1993); Taha Parla and Andrew Davison, “Secularism and Laicism in Turkey”, in *Secularisms*, eds. Janet R. Jacobsen and Ann Pellegrini, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Taha Parla and Andrew Davison, *Corporatist Ideology in Kemalist Turkey: Progress or Order?* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004).

- (3) Things only have a meaning in a field, that is, in relation to the meanings of other things. This means that there is no such thing as a single, unrelated meaningful element; and it means that changes in the other meanings in the field can involve changes in the given element.⁴⁸

From this hermeneutical angle, the discussion on meaning is at the same time a discussion on “institutions” and “practices,” because man is a self-understanding, self-interpreting animal and ideas are constitutive of action, practice and institutions.⁴⁹ This passage is very rich for a critical discussion, and I would like to start by pinpointing some of its parts. Part (2) claims that the relation between meaning and action is not symmetrical, because one meaning “may be borne” by more than one action, situation or institution. One cannot help but notice the missing analytical possibility here; namely, is it possible that more than one meaning “may be borne” by one action, situation or institution?

For Taylor, ideas are constitutive of practices, because “...self-understandings are the essential condition of the practice making the sense that it does to the participants.”⁵⁰ And “the social imaginary is not a set of ideas; rather, it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society.”⁵¹ In his work he has focused on ideas in various scopes, “intersubjective meaning,” “social imaginary,” “social theory.” What lies behind his distinction between social imaginaries – as pertaining to the relation an ordinary subject establishes between ideas and action –, and social theory – as pertaining to the relation the (political) elite establishes between ideas and action –, is the limit of the epistemology of “ideas are constituted of action,” a limit which Taylor himself openly expressed in his exchange with Quentin Skinner in his article, “The Hermeneutics of Conflict.”⁵² Without getting into the details of the Skinner-Taylor debate, it is possible to underscore this limit. Taylor sums up all

48 Charles Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” p. 41.

49 Charles Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” in *Interpretive Social Science A Second Look*, eds. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 58.

50 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 212.

51 Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 1-2; “Modern Social Imaginaries,” in *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

52 Charles Taylor, “The Hermeneutics of Conflict,” *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. James Tully (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988).

the particulars of his critique of Skinner into the “thesis of hermeneutical theory;”⁵³ that is,

confronting one’s own language of explanation with that of one’s subjects’ self-understanding... We can meet it by asking what our language of explanation entails about the truth of our subjects’ beliefs. Or we can get at the same issue via another route by asking how we ought to describe their action and thoughts.⁵⁴

Taylor argues that the non-hermeneutical thesis would be granted, “only if we could show that the relations of domination, and the strategies which create and sustain them, have totally invaded the world of everyday self-understanding could we... make all dominant ideas the outcome of conflicts which centre on war and the struggle for power”; in other words, if “Michel Foucault [‘s] strong case for the invasion of everyday understanding by relations of power... could be made good.”⁵⁵ And finally, he juxtaposes Clifford Geertz with Skinner to underscore how self-understandings cannot be factored out from an understanding of conflict, hence his title “the hermeneutics of conflict.”⁵⁶ Taylor’s reach for Geertz against Skinner is quite a surprise for many reasons, but the least being that Geertz actually goes out there and studies “the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings,” whereas Taylor never does that, while “the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings” is all that grounds his work.

Taylor’s *A Secular Age* has been defended as not a historical but a phenomenological account, which, as the argument goes, is just another type of pursuit. It seems to me that there is a dilemma here, which is manifested through the critiques as well as through Taylor’s defense. Taylor could not be talking about “living in a secular age” and I would even say that he is trying to avoid such a claim, by trying to drive a wedge between “experience” and “conditions (or context) of experience.” For instance, in *A Secular Age*, he remarks: “In order to place the discussion between belief and unbelief in our day and age, we have to put it in the context of this lived experience and the construals that shape this experience.”⁵⁷ The distinction between the conditions (or background or context) of experience and experience is also explicitly stated in the definition of secularity III: “It is this shift in the background, in the whole context in which we experience and search for fullness, that I am calling the coming of a

53 Taylor 1988, p. 227.

54 Taylor 1988, p. 226.

55 Taylor 1988, p. 226

56 Taylor 1988, p. 227.

57 Taylor, *Secular Age*, 13, emphasis added.

secular age, in my third sense.”⁵⁸ In this sense, the book is not about lived experience in the first degree, but rather its conditions (context); however, Taylor himself often loosens the pressure on the wedge. In restating his definition of “social imaginary” in response to his critiques, he remarks, “I am thinking rather of the ways in which they [ordinary people] imagine their social existence.”⁵⁹ If one also recalls the beginning of the book; “What does it mean to say that we live in a secular age? Almost everyone would agree that in some sense we do: I mean the ‘we’ who live in the West,”⁶⁰ Taylor from the start, through the book and in his later remarks, has claims on both the lived experience and its conditions (or context, or background), while the material of the book can only imperfectly fit under a claim on the conditions. His reference to Geertz, however, raises even further questions. I would like to continue with a focus on “change,” from where Taylor bases his arguments on Geertz, because my account of the 1961 Turkish constitution, among many other things, was an account of change.

One place Geertz explicitly problematizes the question of change is in “Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example.”⁶¹ Geertz marks a moment with his ethnography when a burial ritual’s meaning multiplies and the ritual attains two meanings, a secular-political and a religious meaning:

The disorganization of the ritual resulted from a basic ambiguity in the meaning of the rite for those who participated in it. Most simply stated, this ambiguity lay in the fact that the symbols which compose the slametan had both religious and political significance, were charged with both sacred and profane import. The people who came into Karman’s yard, including Karman himself, were not sure whether they were engaged in a sacralized consideration of first and last things or in a secular struggle for power.⁶²

How can we even recognize and narrate such a moment when one practice has more than one meaning? Geertz clarifies that he takes “meaning” and “action” as “independently variable mutually interdependent factors,” and not one as a reflection of the other, and explains as follows:

58 Ibid, p. 14.

59 Charles Taylor, “Afterword: Apologia pro Libro suo” in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, eds. M. Warner, J. VanAntwerpen and C. Calhoun (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 307.

60 Ibid., p. 1

61 Clifford Geertz, “Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example,” *American Anthropologist* 59 (1957).

62 Ibid., 49-50

A revision of the concepts of functional theory so as to make them capable of dealing more effectively with “historical materials” might well begin with an attempt to distinguish analytically between the cultural and social aspects of human life, and to treat them as independently variable yet mutually inter-dependent factors. Though separable only conceptually, culture and social structure will then be seen to be capable of a wide range of modes of integration with one another, of which the simple isomorphic mode is but a limiting case – a case common only in societies which have been stable over such an extended time as to make possible a close adjustment between social and cultural aspects. In most societies, where change is a characteristic rather than an abnormal occurrence, we shall expect to find more or less radical discontinuities between the two. I would argue that it is in these very discontinuities that we shall find some of the primary driving forces of change.⁶³

And, in his analysis of the conflict over a young boy’s burial in Java, Geertz differentiates between “culture” and the “social” following Talcott Parsons, and we know that he regards “religion as a cultural system”⁶⁴: “Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their actions; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations.”⁶⁵

Geertz’s narrative reminds one that even if we epistemologically take humans to be a “self-interpreting animals,” we still have to make an attempt to discover the individual’s “interpretation” case by case, and rest it besides his/her actions to see if at the least the “interpretations” and the “actions” are parallel, sometimes diverging, non-corresponding or absolutely contradictory. This is of course not a sufficient but a necessary condition to be able to make any sense of the deep term of man is a “self-interpreting animal” in research, and not only in philosophy. We may even decide that it is so “deep” that it is better to reserve the term for philosophical discussions only, because in research the only way to reach subjects’ self-interpretations is either through history or ethnography. Even when we are hermeneutically committed, all we have as plots on a graph are speech and action that we can pick from ethnography or documents. And regardless, one can always claim that despite what any research finds between a subject’s meaning and action – convergence or divergence –, we have not reached the self-interpretation of the subject, because after all, all we

63 Ibid., p. 33.

64 Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *the Interpretations of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 87-125.

65 Clifford Geertz, “Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example,” *American Anthropologist* 59 (1957), p. 33.

have is expressed interpretations, and there is no way to assume that people publically express the deeper meanings that actually guide their actions; therefore what we find in documents or in ethnography can always pass by meaningful action. If that is the case, then let us as researchers also pass by this discussion, because we are risking replacing research too quickly with epistemological discussions, giving concepts for research too hurriedly and too often. In “the Hermeneutics of Conflict,” Taylor at one point uses the term “self-description” instead of “self-understanding.”⁶⁶ I suggest we distinguish between the two: let the latter stand for the deeper epistemological and even ontological matters, and the former for what we can gather from research. I also propose that we ask as an open-ended question: Do these self-descriptions have clues to inter-subjective descriptions or vice versa? Do the self-descriptions of a subject correspond to his/her actions?

Mapping self-descriptions against actions (or institutions) systematically, heading in the direction of documenting all possible permutations in a given context, is a simple methodological prerequisite for detailed description. It is also a necessary condition for any work which claims Taylor’s or Weber’s meaningful action, because for there to be a constitutive relation between an idea and actions, we need to ascertain at the least, 1) whether they are parallel; 2) whether they have an “if and only if” relation. I would like to give one example here on France before I move on with the discussion, because this is a simple, important and often forgotten matter. Taylor himself, in his 2011 book, qualifies the French term *laïcité* as a “social imaginary,”⁶⁷ and he evaluates the recent decade of restructurings in France – the headscarf ban, the new Muslim high schools, and the French Muslim Council – as a reassertion of this social imaginary, in other words, as an idea constitutive of action. Yet, such a narration of French politics completely misses how the recent restructurings in France are discontinuous with the practices of *laïcité* of the Third French Republic; in other words, how the social imaginary is now underwriting different practices which do not “purify” public space of “religious difference,”⁶⁸ but rather fragments the public space and promotes religiously differentiated institutions. The discontinuities foregone in Taylor’s reading of French politics cannot be deemed as just a minor matter of difference in interpretation, it is because he is singling out what Geertz called isomorphic modes rather than first drawing the map of what people say and

66 Charles Taylor, “The Hermeneutics of Conflict,” p. 227.

67 Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 306.

68 Ibid., p. 306

what they do as I suggested above. The scarfed girls walking into school (action) received at least two meanings in France, and these two meanings did not correspond mutually exclusively to a French laïc subject and a Muslim immigrant subject. There were French *laïc* and Muslim immigrant subjects who were for the law, as well as French *laïc* and Muslim immigrant subjects who were against the law. I am tempted to say that the missing possibility in Taylor's 1971 article, namely, Geertz's competing meanings over an action, are still here in his comments on France.⁶⁹

Yet all this is not even the most interesting part in Geertz's Java article. The most interesting part is a turn Geertz takes in answering to the presence of competing meanings of the same action:

However, the appearance after 1910 of Islamic modernism (as well as vigorous conservative reactions against it) and religious nationalism among the economically and politically sophisticated trading classes of the larger cities strengthened the feeling for Islam as an exclusivist, antisyncretic creed among the more orthodox element of the mass of the population. Similarly, secular nationalism and Marxism, appearing among the civil servants and the expanding proletariat of these cities, strengthened the pre-Islamic (i.e., Hinduist-animist) elements of the syncretic pattern, which these groups tended to prize as a counterweight to puristic Islam and which some of them adopted as a general religious framework in which to set their more specifically political ideas. On the one hand, there arose a more self-conscious Moslem, basing his religious beliefs and practices more explicitly on the international and universalistic doctrines of Mohammed; on the other hand there arose a more self-conscious "nativist," attempting to evolve a generalized religious system out of the material – muting the more Islamic elements-of his inherited religious tradition. And the contrast between the first kind of man, called a santri, and the second, called an abangan, grew steadily more acute, until today it forms the major cultural distinction in the whole of the Modjokuto area.⁷⁰

.....

As emphasized earlier, the present severity of the contrast between santri and abangan is in great part due to the rise of nationalist social movements in twentieth-century Indonesia. In the larger cities where these movements were born, they were originally of various sorts: tradesmen's societies to fight Chinese competition; unions of workers to resist plantation exploitation; religious groups trying to redefine ultimate concepts; philosophical discussion clubs attempting to clarify Indonesian metaphysical and moral notions; school associations striving to revivify Indonesian education; co-operative societies try-

69 Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," in *Interpretive Social Science A Second Look*, eds. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), first published in 1971 in the journal *Review of Metaphysics*.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

ing to work out new forms of economic organization; cultural groups moving toward a renaissance of Indonesian artistic life; and, of course, political parties working to build up effective opposition to Dutch rule. As time wore on, however, the struggle for independence absorbed more and more the energies of all these essentially elite groups. Whatever the distinctive aim of each of them – economic reconstruction, religious reform, artistic renaissance – it became submerged in a diffuse political ideology; all the groups were increasingly concerned with one end as the prerequisite of all further social and cultural progress-freedom. By the time the revolution began in 1945, reformulation of ideas outside the political sphere had noticeably slackened and most aspects of life had become intensely ideologized, a tendency which has continued into the post-war period. In the villages and small town kampongs, the early, specific phase of nationalism had only a minor effect. But as the movement unified and moved toward eventual triumph, the masses too began to be affected and, as I have pointed out, mainly through the medium of religious symbols. The highly urbanized elite forged their bonds to the peasantry not in terms of complex political and economic theory, which would have had little meaning in a rural context, but in terms of concepts and values already present there. As the major line of demarcation among the elite was between those who took Islamic doctrine as the overall basis of their mass appeal and those who took a generalized philosophical refinement of the indigenous syncretic tradition as such a basis, so in the countryside *santri* and *abangan* soon became not simply religious but political categories, denoting the followers of these two diffuse approaches to the organization of the emerging independent society. When the achievement of political freedom strengthened the importance of factional politics in parliamentary government, the *santri-abangan* distinction became, on the local level at least, one of the primary ideological axes around which the process of party maneuvering took place.⁷¹

I quoted at length not to subsume under technical methodological terms Geertz's powerful narration, which is also technically speaking very well equipped. In short, his "ethnographical material" of multiple meanings of one action forces Geertz out of the "field" to narrate a wider context of nation-state policies. He looks for a means of weighing the sovereignty of self-descriptions, and the immediate scale he finds is the sovereignty of the context. Geertz actually ends up with a narration that answers quite well to some of his Marxist critiques.⁷² The ethnographer who stepped into the field, I am guessing because he read Max Weber's introduction to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* on the limits of bridging ideas (as read from the

71 Ibid, p. 50-1.

72 Bob Scholte, "The Charmed Circle of Geertz's Hermeneutics: A Neo-Marxist Critique," *Critique of Anthropology* 6: 5 (1986). In this article, Scholte criticizes Geertz for taking praxis less seriously than meaning, failing to wed Marx to Weber, context to text and praxis to interpretation, and not looking at the maintenance and production of meaning. Asad also makes this point on how meaning is created.

texts of elites) and sociology closely, now, committed to the narration as he is, steps out of the field due to the necessities of narration. Weber's self-criticism in the introduction to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which probably was one of the inspirations for Clifford Geertz, is nearly forgotten. Although the book is often cited as an example of research on the role of ideas and change, Weber himself had expressed hesitance about drawing a straight line between religious doctrine – in the book there is precisely only that, we are presented nothing from any (ordinary) Protestant – and capitalism without linking evidence from ethnography:⁷³

We are concerned with the influence which *their* conduct [religious ethics of the classes which were the culture-bearers of their respective countries] has had. Now it is quite true that this can only be completely known in all its details when the facts from ethnography and folk-lore have been compared with it. Hence we must expressly admit and emphasize that this is a gap to which the ethnographer will legitimately object.⁷⁴

Geertz's narration of Java is how Taylor's (3) caveat for a hermeneutical approach (p. 4) would look – “things only have a meaning in a field”; yet Geertz's commitment to narrating the “material” calls for even stepping out of the Parsonian framework and attributing much less sovereignty to “self-descriptions” than Taylor's. In the Java article, “culture” both guides action and is guided by it.

Besides double inscriptions, there is the question of change in the positions of people. There were such examples in the 1961 narrative above if one paid attention in detail, but let me just present a new change in position. One of the ten professors who drafted the 1961 constitution, Professor Vakur Versan, recounted to me in 2009 the following conversation from the last session of the Ten Professors' Commission, between Siddik Sami Onar, the head of the Commission, and a member, Muammer Aksoy:

The Constitution was finished. We made it. Outside, an army major is waiting. He will take it to Ankara. Muammer Aksoy hesitated for a moment. I tell you historical matters which nobody knows, it is very correct that you record them. Siddik Sami [Onar] turned to Muammer, and said, “Muammer what happened? Something worries you.” Indeed, we have agreed and finished, we will give it to the Army Major, he will take it to Ankara, and

73 Some even claim to be Weberian and then assume the autonomous power of ideas rather than demonstrate it and hence become Hegelians. Ahmet Kuru, *Secularisms and State Policies Toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.22.

74 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 1992 [1930]), p. 30.

there it will be approved and become the constitution. “Yes, I have, Professor,” he said, “in the second article we say that Turkey is a laik state, and after when we come to the section on the administration, we put in the constitution the Directorate of Religious Affairs; an institution which has nothing to do with laiklik, and engages in religious affairs.”⁷⁵

Onar’s book, *Public Foundations of Administrative Law*, first published in 1952, nine years before the aforementioned conversation took place, defined *laiklik* as the institutional separation of religion and state, and strictly pointed out that religious services are not public services and that the existence of the Directorate of Religious Affairs⁷⁶ cannot be reconciled with the principle of *laiklik*, therefore its presence is better explained by political principles and regarded as a temporary “policing [*zabita*] precaution necessitated by the particular time and context of the revolution (*inkilap*) [he is referring to the 1920s].”⁷⁷

From a position of an academic observer of the contradictions of *laiklik* in 1952, in 1961 Onar turned into one of the subjects who institute such contradictions in practice. In response to Aksoy’s critical remarks during the drafting of the 1961 constitution, he responded, reaffirming what he saw as the continuing particularities of the Turkish context:

Muammer; we discussed all these and reached this point, since you still have a concern, let’s go over it. Now, you are right, there are articles in contradiction with the statement of *laiklik* in article two, but these emerge from the necessities (*zaruret*) of Turkey... Even if today religious affairs are under the control of the state, we still cannot prevent reactionism [*gericilik*]. And if we leave it [religion] free, it [religion] will all together act against *laiklik*. In Turkey, in this society, it is still necessary to keep it [religion] under state control (Recounted by Vakur Versan, interviewed on 28 October 2009, my emphasis).

This conversation between Onar and Aksoy narrated by Vakur Versan drew my attention because the position expressed by Aksoy in this commission contradicted the position he took later in the lower chamber of the constituent assembly, which I read from the *Records of the 1961 Turkish Constitution*. In his speech to the lower

75 From the interview with Vakur Versan [one of the ten professors who wrote the first draft of the 1961 Turkish constitution], October 28, 2009.

76 The Directorate of Religious Affairs is an institution established in 1924 within the state administration. It receives its budget from the state and its major expense is the wages of the imams who have civil servant status under the Directorate.

77 Sıddık Sami Onar, *İdare Hukukunun Umumi Esasları* [General Principles of Administrative Law], volume I (İstanbul: İsmail Akgün Matbaası, 1960 [1952]), p. 590-2.

chamber, he no longer found any contradictions with the Directorate of Religious Affairs:

When we take into consideration the circumstances in our country, we have witnessed individuals who want to give very general and dangerous meanings to *laiklik*, such as, “State under the control of religion”... Obviously *laiklik* does not mean being without religion. However, if the concept of *laiklik* in the West, where a different social and political development and different conditions exist, is accepted 100% in our country, the result will not be scientific/positive (*müsbet*) but completely contingent/negative (*menfi*). Separation of religion and state is sufficient for *laiklik* in the West to reach its end. But for us it never serves the end. If religion, even when it is organized, is left outside the control of the state, because of particularities of this country which I will express in a short while, it can become a political force and it has done so from time to time. Finally, in a country where the principle of general elections has been accepted but the level of literacy and education is really low, it is possible to take advantage of the heedlessness of the people and reach “theocracy.” In other words, in the final analysis freedom of conscience and the principle of *laiklik* can end all together. It is exactly with this idea that some individuals ... some so-called ulema ... have come forth with the motto, the complete separation of religion and state, and under the guise of western appearing “allegedly complete *laiklik*,” have in reality wanted “to place the State under the complete control of religion.”⁷⁸

Here we have, among others, a story of change in positions – both Onar’s and Aksoy’s positions have changed –, as well as contested meanings of an institution, once more a moment beyond an isomorphic mode. It also attests that some meanings and institutional possibilities were eliminated during the writing of the constitution. If we are to turn the presupposition that “meanings are constitutive of action” into an open-ended question – “how and which meanings constitutive of actions?” –, then we need to study and document both meanings and actions in all their respective contested multiplicity. Taking this multiplicity seriously is precisely a sign of taking “self-understandings” seriously.

Multiple Modernities and the Question of Secularism

A focus on the writing of the 1961 Turkish constitution addresses yet another set of questions on the “making of modernity outside the west,”⁷⁹ and the traveling of

78 Kazım Öztürk, *Türk Anayasası* [Records of the Turkish Constitution], 3 volumes, p. 1386.

79 Timothy Mitchell (ed.) *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000), p. vii.

“ideas and institutions” across contexts. This path of inquiry provides a new angle for evaluating the rising “multiple modernities”⁸⁰ approach, and the many works that place themselves within this approach for different reasons, e.g. Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*. Yet, Taylor’s presentation of the West’s secular age as one among multiple modernities has been criticized for being a closed and introspective reading, and Nilüfer Göle has pointed out that “an introspective reading of Western secularity can lose sight of the cultural powers of the secular,”⁸¹ and of moments of interactions⁸² and interpenetrations.⁸³ My 1961 narrative both embraces and parts with Göle’s distinction between “inward” and “outward”: The multiple inscriptions on European secularity in Turkey in 1961 is not only a narration of the “outside” vis-à-vis Europe, but a narration of “interactional history,”⁸⁴ which also embodies the (re) discovery of the multiplicity of the inside on the outside, because the multiple inscriptions of meaning attributed to the “west” by the 1961 constituent elite, is not a “figment of their imagination.”⁸⁵

The main argument of the multiple modernities thesis offers “the idea of multiple modernities” in challenging the “end of history” and “clash of civilizations” theses, “as the best way to understand the contemporary world—indeed to explain the history of modernity.”⁸⁶

One crucial aspect of the original thesis as formulated by S.N. Eisenstadt highlights the moment of the “continual reinterpretation of the cultural program of modernity; the construction of multiple modernities; attempts by various groups and movements to reappropriate and redefine the discourse of modernity in their own new terms.”⁸⁷ In other words, read from this angle, the multiple modernities approach is not an exercise in listing different, “bounded,” and non-interacting modernities side by side,

80 In *A Secular Age* and *Social Imaginaries*, Taylor explicitly places his work within the framework of “multiple modernities.”

81 Nilüfer Göle, “The Civilizational, Spatial, and Sexual Powers of the Secular,” *Varieties of Secularism in A Secular Age*, eds. M. Warner, J. Vanantwerpen, C. Calhoun (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

82 Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

83 Nilüfer Göle, *Interpénétration: L’Islam et L’Europe* (Paris: Galaade Éditions)

84 Peter Van der Veer, “Smash Temples, Burn Books: Comparing Secularist Projects in India and China,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, eds. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

85 Arjun Appadurai, “Putting Hierarchy in its Place” *Cultural Anthropology* 3: 36-49 (1988).

86 S.N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus* Winter 2000 v. 129. Issue 1, p. 2.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

but rather requires precisely a focus on the interaction and unbounded nature of each modernity to pin down and articulate the moments of “reinterpretation.”

Eisenstadt acknowledges the ambivalence in western modernity when he writes that “the original western project constituted the crucial (and usually ambivalent) reference point.” Yet, “western modernity” is still established as the “singular.” It is “ambivalent” but an “original western project”, rather than “western projects” rearticulated in various directions in different contexts as “reinterpretations of “the meaning of modernity” “depriving the West of its monopoly on modernity,”⁸⁸ and lived “as the result of the ongoing dialogue between modern reconstruction and seemingly ‘traditional’ forces.”⁸⁹

Putting the 1961 debates on *laiklik* in the writing of the 1961 constitution as a debate “outside” Europe misses the important point that the conceptual world of the Turkish elite exposed the multiple secularities of Europe.

88 Ibid., p. 24.

89 Ibid., p. 25-6.