

# A Synthesis of Muslim Faith and Secularity: The Anatolian Case

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## Historical Background

Anatolia gradually became a Muslim peninsula after the arrival of the Turks in the eleventh century. Seljuk and Ottoman Turks ruled Anatolia over a period of 800 years and produced a distinctive civilisation. The synthesis of the spiritual and physical potentials of the East with those of the West gave birth to impressive results in the arts and architecture. The achievements of this civilisation are reflected in the grandiose institutional buildings of the large cities of the Empire, such as mosques, madrasas, külliyes, caravanserais, covered bazaars, bath-houses, tombs and, to a certain extent, Sultans' palaces. This monumental character was not, however, applied to residential architecture, which was rather humble, spontaneous and informal in nature, originating perhaps from modest economic resources, as well as from the guiding ideas of Islam, social norms and values prevailing at that time: "This world is a temporary home where individuals must prepare themselves for the other world (heaven): hence they must live a humble, simple life avoiding the unnecessary frivolities and luxuries of this world" (Imamoglu, 1992, 207).

Following continuous military defeats and the deterioration of many social, economic and judicial institutions, internal conflicts destroyed the Empire. A new state, the Turkish Republic, was established in the twentieth century, ending the theocratic monarchy of 600 years. The new Republic introduced many drastic social changes, taking mainly Western developments as a model. The State became secular; religious Islamic laws were replaced by European civil and penal codes. Judiciary, legislative and governmental powers were separated and redefined. Arabic script, which was unsuitable for the Turkish language, was abandoned and the Latin alphabet was adopted. A silent revolution changed the nature of an empire in order to keep pace with the fast-developing West.

One of the most fundamental changes wrought by the Republic was, of course, the abolition of the caliphate and the acceptance of secularism in 1924. Although the great majority of the population was Muslim, secularism helped to break the ties with the religious conservatism and led the way to a new mentality and spirit resulting in an increased literacy rate, economic development and a change to the modern face of

Anatolia. Changes were also reflected in increases in number and size of cities, transportation development, a high level of industrialisation and in the mechanisation of agriculture.

### **Public spaces and religious buildings**

Particularly in urban areas of Turkey the traditional role of religious buildings, especially of mosques as the organiser of public spaces and society gradually disappeared. Separation of activities concerning religion and government has led to a different understanding of life and to a different understanding of the physical organisation of towns. Islam, instead of being the main form-giver, is now only one of the major factors in the society; consequently the mosque, as its most important element, is just another building element in the cultural unity of the secular society.

Although the mosque continues to have a central position in villages, towns and cities, central and local government buildings with their formal town plazas or squares replaced the mosques and their courtyards. Not only in their prominent locations, but also in number and size, secular buildings, like schools, offices, hospitals, hotels, and railway stations gradually dominated in the towns. The image of a secular, modern society was clearly and consistently reflected in the organisation of fast developing urban centres.

Since Turkey became a secular State governments have not spent much money on building mosques. Compared to the Ottoman period, the importance given to the construction of mosques decreased in the Republican period. Some of the apparent reasons for this change can be stated as follows:

- 1) The proportion of mosque-attending population has decreased with the acceptance of secularism. Citizens of the new society were psychologically freed from state-imposed religious practices, hence the frequency and intensity of their public religious activities diminished. Secularization led the way to regarding religious faith as a personal and private issue that concerns Allah and the individual. Such an understanding de-emphasised public attendance and the practice of the religious rituals.
- 2) The new State did not allocate resources for construction of mosques, except in very few cases; relatively modest resources from private or communal financing had to be utilised.
- 3) The mosque no longer served as the central means of personal and social identification. If secularization is one reason for this, another is the increasing complexity of urban lifestyles and the intense use of the city for many economic, social, cultural and welfare activities independent of religion. Muslim rules and regulations no longer have a central position in everyday life.

As the State did not assume responsibility for mosque-building, it was generally local neighbourhood associations, rich individuals or pious foundations which undertook this task. For the first three to four decades of the Republic, the number and capacity of existing mosques in the country were sufficient for religious practices. However,

owing to fast urbanisation, people in newly developed parts of urban centres and communities living in squatter settlements on the peripheries of large cities demanded new mosques. The number of mosques increased in parallel to the urbanisation which started in 1950's and exploded after 1970's.

### **Types of mosques built**

Mosques built during the Republican times in Turkey are generally traditional in character. Although a few architects like V. Dalokay, C. Bektas, B. Cinici, and T. Uyaroglu attempted to break with the traditional line and designed mosques with a contemporary interpretation - which would be more consistent with the new secular state - they formed only a minority group (Öz, 1992). The reasons for traditional preference can be attributed to several factors, one of which is the composition of local mosque-building associations. Generally such groups are formed by religiously conservative people, mostly old in age, agrarian in origin and relatively less educated, who strongly associate themselves with Ottoman traditions and who want to hold to this tradition to gain respect and power for their new communities on the periphery, or less popular portions of the city.

As the mosque prototype is well represented in the traditional Ottoman mosque design, the proper choice for such a group would be traditional. It is a safe choice because this type of a mosque has all the well-established symbolic elements and an impressive architectural background; furthermore it is an obvious model to reflect the conservative thought and attitude of the religious people<sup>1</sup>.

As leaders in the Muslim world, Ottomans contributed much to the development of mosque form. A centrally organised mosque type, unifying the structure and form, synchronising building materials and decoration in an architectonic manner gave way to a high level of building form (Serageldin, 1990, Khan, 1990). The classical Ottoman mosque with its arches, domes, minarets, courtyards served as a model for a long time. However, this type of building form was a product of a masonry construction developed hundreds of years ago and needs to be re-evaluated in the light of new technologies, new materials and programs. It would be quite unfortunate if the Islamic world put aside a progressive search for new possibilities for the expression of contemporary Islamic communities (Kuban, 1990). One may speculate that such progressive attitudes toward mosque design might require a parallel progressive conceptualisation of religious issues corresponding to the contemporary life styles.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aysen Öz's Masters thesis on mosque design in Turkey in the Republican Period gives useful information about the mosques in Ankara. She classified the mosque designs into three groups as traditional, modern and popular. The majority of mosques built in Ankara were traditional, most of which were constructed between 1980 and 1990. "The classical mosques of the past were taken as models, but none of traditional mosques are alike, or exact copies of the past, except for the certain existence of symbolic elements... Plinth, minaret and dome are the symbols that are still used in mosques. Plinth also serves the purpose of gaining one more storey to be used as rentals beneath the praying hall. In this way, the maintenance of the mosques can be done by the associations" (pp.214-219).

<sup>2</sup> Here I would like to refer to Dogan Kuban's comments on Hasan-Uddin Khan's Chapter titled "The architecture of the mosque" in the "*Expressions of Islam in Buildings*":

## Residential architecture

The most important effect of secularism on housing design was probably the abandonment of gender separation in dwellings. The traditional Islamic practice of separating women and men had resulted in two sections in houses: harem and selamlik. Although this separation was not very strict in rural areas and practically impossible for the low income group houses in cities, it was accepted as a general convention in residential architecture in Anatolia. After the establishment of the new Republic and acceptance of secularism, physical separation of women and men in houses, as well as in public settings gradually disappeared. However, the changes in behavioural patterns of the society, especially in conservative towns and rural areas were relatively slow, and men and women insisted on keeping a domain of their own. For example, traditional Turkish coffee houses used only by men are quite widespread in urban and rural areas. In addition, the public domain allocated for men is much larger and more influential in the country. Women to women gatherings and visits are prevalent; in small towns, men and women are entertained separately; and sometimes film shows or concerts are held for "women only" sessions.

A research project carried out with elderly in various parts of Turkey indicated that males not only had larger social networks, but generally had more frequent social interactions than females (Imamoglu & Imamoglu, 1992 a & b). Relative to males, females interacted more frequently with their children, parents and neighbours, whereas the males interacted more frequently with their co-workers and other close friends (Imamoglu, E.O. et al., 1993).

In the case of dwellings, Turkey seems to be in a transitional period: the harem-selamlik separation of traditional Ottoman house now continues in a transformed way. The majority of dwellings in urban settings, no matter how small they are, have two living rooms; one for the family, the other for the guests. The family room, called "sitting" room, is informal in nature including a traditional type "divan", few comfortable chairs, a TV set, etc. If the house is heated by stove, the major stove is located there. The rooms allocated for guests take two forms: one is the "guest" room, the other is "sala". The lower and middle socio-economic-status (SES) families keep a traditional guest room restricted to the entertainment of guests. It may include sofas, show cases and valued belongings and is heated only when there are formal visitors. The "sala", the largest room in all of the upper and most of the middle SES houses, is furnished in western style. It is used for entertaining and dining with guests and for living. This room and the guest room are the better furnished formal parts of

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"... secularism should not be seen as the agent of destruction of the traditional mosque design. Indeed, in secular Turkey, we are building mosques almost unequivocally traditional, mostly hopeless imitations. Whether built by individuals or by public agencies, the decisive factor is the cultural policy of the client or the power-holder" (p.129).

"... The preference for traditional forms in mosques is the expression of radical Islam's attachment to traditional and the surviving symbolical value of the old forms" (p.132).

"... To stick to old forms is a clear confession that Muslims are unable to create, to renew, and therefore to survive. Their old material order will be unable to defend itself against the onslaught of a Western system" (p.132).

the house; the difference lies on the restricted use of the latter for visitors only (Imamoglu, 1985, 1988, 1993, Imamoglu & Imamoglu, 1990).

The division of family living and guest entertaining seem to be the continuation of historical harem-selamlık division. Women and children use the small, traditionally furnished, modestly decorated, easily maintained "family" room corresponding to the "harem" room of the past; while formal guests (usually males or husbands and wives) are entertained in better furnished, carefully decorated "sala"s or "guest" rooms, corresponding to "selamlık" room or "basoda" (meaning the major room) of the traditional Anatolian houses.

### **Indoor cleanliness**

A Muslim can pray anywhere, what s/he needs is only a clean surface and the knowledge of the direction of Mecca. Turks generally pray on a prayer rug, but the maintenance of clean floors is important. The custom of taking off the shoes upon entering a house is quite widespread. This seems to be functional partly because of unsatisfactory street maintenance, as well as the sitting posture of individuals on prayer rugs, divans or floor dining tables, a practice which continues in houses of different strata throughout the country (Imamoglu, 1986, 1988).

The obligation of bathing after sexual intercourse is another cleanliness requirement of Islam. In traditional houses special built-in cubicles called "gusülhane" provided the possibility of washing one's body without going out of the room. It was a recessed cubicle designed like a cupboard. As a continuation of this custom, the majority of houses built today possess a (parents) bedroom with a shower or a small bathroom.

### **Continuation of physically separated, socially extended family type**

Muslim religion demands close-knit interpersonal relationships among family members and encourages strong love and support among relatives (Serageldin, 1989). Grandparents and grandchildren are considered as equal family members and all kinds of (psychological, social, economical) support are expected to be given to all members of the family. This, of course, may lead to an extended type of family structure. However, this was never widespread in Anatolia. Faroqi (1987, 20) argues that in the 17th century "...the relative smallness of the houses themselves can be taken to indicate that it was not common for extended families to live under one roof. More probably it was customary for a newly married couple to move to a separate house, preferably in the same town quarter that other members of the family already inhabited". This kind of arrangement in most parts of Anatolia probably enabled the young couples to continue to function as if within the network of an extended family.

After secularization, the number of nuclear families increased, but "... support and sacrifice of parents toward their children, and obedience and responsibility of children in caring for their parents in old age, are strong, widely accepted values" (Imamoglu & Imamoglu, 1992 a). For this reason old age is not regarded today as a

problem in Turkey as respect and support for the elderly by their families are still important values (Imamoglu E.O. et al., 1993).

Within the close-knit interdependent social system, children get the full support of their parents during their education and live at home until they get married. It is not the age of adulthood (which is 18 in Turkey), but the marriage that gives the freedom or obligation to leave the family house and to establish one's own. The Turkish word for getting married "evlenmek" also means to get his/her own house. This trend is more or less independent of the family SES.

The support of families for their youngsters is not confined to the material world, because even when material interdependencies of family members decrease, as in upper SES groups, emotional interdependence and relatedness are still considered very important (Imamoglu, E.O., 1987). In a cross cultural study of the elderly, a strong cultural difference was observed in terms of preference for living next door to one's children and their families, in contrast for example to the Swedes and English (Imamoglu, E.O. et al., 1993). This attitude is quite common in Turkey and one can find relatives living in the same neighbourhood, on the same street or even in the same apartment building.

Although the prevalent family structure appears to be of a nuclear type in physical terms, functionally and psychologically it has an extended nature (Imamoglu & Imamoglu, 1992 a). Owing to such close-knit interpersonal relationships, families often require larger houses. Relatives pay occasional visits, the frequency and duration of which may vary according to local customs and SES level of families. On important occasions like funerals or weddings, when the family members and most of the close kin get together, a large house with extra guest bedrooms may be very convenient. Insistent demands of families for larger houses with more rooms is a common finding in almost all housing research in Turkey, and reflects the remnants of deep rooted family ties (Imamoglu, 1986, 1988, 1993, Imamoglu & Imamoglu, 1990).

### **Love of nature**

Order and balance in cosmos and on earth is highly respected in Muslim religion. This point of view leads to the need for environmental protection, including that of wild life and greenery (Serageldin, 1989). Heaven is described as full of trees and plants, hence greenery is highly valued in Islam. Planting trees and taking care of vegetation is considered an important obligation of good Muslims. Sayings such as "Plant the tree you hold, even if it is the doomsday" are held in high esteem.

Despite the cultural/traditional desire to be close to nature, the majority of urban families live in apartment flats with limited greenery, due to economic, climatic and social reasons and constraints. However, the desire for greenery is still as an ideal. Research carried out in the last 15 years indicated that the great majority of families living in metropolitan Ankara expressed a desire for gardens and stated that a house

surrounded with a garden would be their ideal dwelling (Imamoglu, 1988, 1993, Imamoglu & Imamoglu, 1990). With increasing economic prosperity, more and more families seem to move to such houses and there appears to be a rapid growth of suburbs around large cities with prospective greenery.

The traditional type of living close to nature can still be seen in the medium or small sized cities of Anatolia, where the custom of moving to a nearby summer resort house still prevails. Houses built for this purpose are generally simple and provide basic space for a Spartan-type of living, but give the opportunity to live close to nature for few months. Orchards and vineyards surrounding these houses provide fresh fruits and vegetables to be eaten, or to be dried and kept for winter usage. More important, these kind of settings provide the opportunity for family members, especially children and the elderly, to interact with nature and enjoy being part of it (Imamoglu, in press). This custom is continues in many cities like Konya, Kayseri and Tokat, despite the fast urbanisation and western type of apartment living in Anatolia.

### **Conclusion**

The Muslim religion is embedded deeply in the structure of Turkish society and has become part of the Turkish culture in Anatolia. The general style of living, the prevalent ethics, social and economic support systems, family ties and daily language carry the influences of the religion. The acceptance of secularism ruptured the formal ties of the state with religion and gave way to a more liberal type of living. The apparent conflict between secularization and religion as part of cultural continuity seemed to be resolved by a reinterpretation of the relationship between conventional religion and other domains of life, which gradually produced transformations in the continuity of familial and extra familial social relations. Such transformed understandings and lifestyles were then reflected in the design and usage of dwellings and their surroundings.

It appears that secularization, rather than producing a dissonance, led to a privatisation of religious faith, and to changes in the design and use of private spaces; however, the change towards "privatisation" of religion did not lead to parallel changes in mosque design which continued the traditional prototypic form. The reason for this might be that the privatised understanding of religion was followed by a de-emphasis of the public practice of religious rituals; leading to a weakening of the significance of mosques as central, indispensable places for prayer, as well as, social, political and cultural activities. Being freed of obligations for public religious attendance and social interaction, the individual felt free to pray anywhere. Mosques, however, continued to serve as indispensable places for the practice of religious rituals for the more traditional segments of the society whose understanding of religious issues, and hence of mosque design, did not allow any changes. In the near future, as the internal consonance between religion and secularization is assimilated by larger portions of society, perhaps neither will be seen as a threat to the other by the respective repre-

sentatives of each group, and we could then expect progressive attitudes to be reflected in future mosque design. Such an outcome would be an inevitable consequence of human evolution.

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