Türk İslamı'nın COVID-19 Pandemisine Yönelik Politikaları: Sağlık ve Selamet

Deniz AŞKIN* iD

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de resmi dini söylemin pandemiye yönelik politikalarını ve virüsü Müslümanların gözünde anlamlandırma sürecini ve çabasını analiz etmektedir. Türkiye'de dinin ve siyasetin yoğun bir iş birliği içinde olduğu pandemi dönemi politikalarında resmi Türk İslamı, bireylerin DİYANET ile irtibatın devamını sağlamak cemaatin dağılmasını önlemek ve devlet bünyesinde alınan kararları dini referanslarla desteklemek ve zeminde meşrulaştırmak noktasında önemli bir işlev görmüştür. Bu süreçte ise önemli oranda "İslam salgın kültürü"nün ve deneyimlerinin referans alındığı görülmektedir. Bu yönüyle çalışma, pandeminin Türkiye'de resmi İslam penceresinden tanımlanması, bireyin konumlandırılması ve hareket alanının belirlenmesi, fetvaların yayınlanması ile yeniden düzenlenen gündelik hayat ve inşa edilen bilincin yeni boyutlarını betimsel bir yöntem ile ele almayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: COVID-19, Türk Islamı, İslam Salgın Kültürü, DİYANET, Din Sosyolojisi.

The Responses of Turkish Islam to COVID-19 Pandemic: Health and Salvation

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the discourse and the policies of the official religion, Islam, in Turkey about the pandemic. Understanding the attempt to explain and interpret the virus in the eyes of the Muslims, and the process followed by that discourse throughout the pandemic are the focus points of this study. There has been intense cooperation between religion and politics in Turkey in terms of the policies regarding the recent pandemic in the country; the official Turkish Islam has a great function in legalizing the decisions of the government by refering to religious sources and provide continuance of the indivuduals' belonging with DİYANET. It is observed that "Islamic plague culture" and the previous experiences about similar disasters have been taken as references throughout the pandemic. In this respect, this study aims to define the pandemic through the eyes of the official Islam in Turkey, to locate the individual and define his/her elbow room, and to analyze the reorganized daily life and new dimensions of the reconstructed conscious based on new fatwa with a "qualitative descriptive" method.

Keywords: COVID-19, Turkish Islam, Islamic Plague Culture, DİYANET, Sociology of Religion.

1. Introduction

COVID-19 has radically affected the social institutions on the local and global scale. One of the areas seriously affected by pandemic is religious institutions. These institutions have attempted to explain and interpret the extraordinary period in the eyes of the believers and consolidate the communities. COVID-19 has caused a variety of changes in the rituals and practices of all religions around the world; Islamic communities are one of these religious groups deeply affected by this pandemic (Hasan et al, 2020a; Hasyim, 2020; Pabbajah et al, 2020). This impact is especially visible in the public prayers and it has necessitated producing new practices and strategies. Muslims' interpretation of the pandemic, legalizing the political decisions on the religious background, production of a fatwa by the authorized body, understanding the "Islamic plague culture" from the modern viewpoint are the issues analyzed in this study. At this point, the most important strategy developed by Turkish Islam during the pandemic is to explain the pandemic and its possible cure on a "divine" ground.

Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, the highest authority in terms of religion in Turkey, delivered a khutbah (talk or sermon delivered in mosques before the Friday prayer) during the week (March 13, 2020) the virus spread in Turkey. The title of the khutbah was "the Muslim shall take precaution, Allah shall determine the fate". The relationship between the believer and the virus was thus established according to the norms of Islam. COVID-19 was interpreted in the frame of "punishment, perseverance, a religious test" by the Muslim community in Turkey. At this point, it is important to mention that

Turkish Islam pioneers acted strategically in managing the increasing religious orientations during the pandemics.

Pandemic, which had different kinds of reflections in Turkish Islam geography, has a supranational dimension as it affects public prayer locations and hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca), due to the fact that Saudi Arabia closed the gates to the pilgrims who wanted to visit Mecca and Al-Aqsa Mosque was closed to visitors, which limited the international religious practices. This situation necessitated the reorganization of religious decisions on a country basis (Thurston, 2020, p. 15; Wildman et al, 2020, p. 116). It is seen that the authorized religious body in Turkey has an important role in administrating the prayer places in the country and legalizing political decisions. On the other hand, suspending the public prayers during the pandemic and continuing religious educations online necessitated the religious institution develop new policies. However, at this point, it is important to note that this institution highly benefits from the culture of Islam and the decisions frequently gave references to the Islamic plague culture. In this context, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs emphasized human life in its statements and the institution mentioned that the precautions were taken according to *sedd-i zerai* (forbidding the acts that may lead to harm) (Kaan, 2020, p. 3). Sedd-i zerai is a concept used in Islamic law; the acts or behaviors that may harm individuals are banned in Islam and the concept is used in this frame. Closing the prayer places, preventing socialization, taking quarantine precautions, forbidding public prayers in Turkey and other countries with dense Muslim population are some of the examples that can be included in the concept of Sedd-i zerai (Abouzzohour, 2020; Ibrahim, 2020; Pabbajah et al, 2020; Rahman et al, 2020; Thurston, 2020).

In this context, the management and production of politics throughout COVID-19 by Turkish Islam should be understood and evaluated in the frame of Islamic plague culture. The boundaries set by the government should be well-analyzed and the analyses should be carried out in this respect. This approach will enable an understanding of how Turkey acts, how its elbowroom is, and what are the reference points used by the government in Turkey.

The relationship between religion and politics in Turkey is the subject of a different, more extensive study. However, the subject will be briefly mentioned in this study to set the equation of pandemic and clarify the issue. The authorized religious institution in Turkey functions according to the government; this fact prevented any possible conflict between two authorities. This cooperation enabled the government to take precautions to prevent the spreading of the virus with the support of the religious body and the process has been managed accordingly. There has been a consistency between politics and religion in this respect. The government and religious bodies have convinced the public about not using religious places for prayer and other practices; the process and the precautions have been legalized by taking references from verses and hadiths. The Islamic understanding presented and analyzed in this study is based on the practices followed by the Turkish Islamic institutions and political bodies. Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs is the authorized institution that produces the official Islam discourse in Turkey (Cornell, 2015; Göle, 1997; Keyman, 2007; Ulutas, 2010). Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs is the ultimate institution responsible for religious affairs and life. The institution thus has played a significant role in convincing the public about the precautions, declaring the political decisions about the pandemic in the frame of Islam. The institution was established under Law number 429, on March 3, 1924. The frame of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs' works is shaped around the belief and services of Islam. In this context, in the first article of Law number 12038, the framework of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs is described as such: "Carrying out the processes about the beliefs, services, and moralities of the religion of Islam, enlightening the society about religion, managing the places of prayer are the duties of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, functioning under the service of the Presidency" ("Diyanet İşleri Başkanliği", 1965). This description of the service and the connection of the institution to the Presidency indicate the responsibilities and elbow room of the institution at the corporate level.

In the context of the above-mentioned discussions, this study aims at analyzing the policies of Turkish Islam throughout COVID-19 in general. The focal point of the study in this frame is to analyze Turkish Islam's search for legitimacy in Turkey during the pandemic, to present and understand the policies adopted throughout the process, and to analyze how Islam uses the culture of plague with data.

The study, on the other hand, focuses on how the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, the authorized religious institution, functioned in conveying the political decisions about the pandemic to the public and how these decisions are legalized. The policies made for protecting and expanding the official religious authority are the other focal points analyzed in this study. It should be mentioned that today's practices, bearing the basic traces of Islam pandemic culture, are shaped by modern institutions like nation-states. At this point, it is important to note that, Islam, which has a rich culture of the pandemic because of the previous experiences, is the resource of pandemic policies practiced in Turkey. In this respect, this study primarily focuses on the relationship between the culture of the pandemic in Islam and how Turkish Islam analyzed pandemic. The purpose is to reach an understanding of the policies and practices analyzed in the scope of this study by the qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative analysis ensures having a deep understanding of a phenomenon or process in a historical period (Colorafi and Evans, 2016; Nassaji, 2015, p. 130). Moreover, it is possible to understand how attitudes and behaviors are formed according to the incidents and the context of the analyzed incident is presented in detail with this method (Sandelowski, 2000; 2010). In this context, the social dimension of the decisions made by the Turkish religious institutions during the pandemic and the policies accordingly followed will be analyzed with the qualitative descriptive method.

2. Islamic Culture of Plague and the Basis of Interpreting COVID-19 Pandemic in Turkish Islam

Islam is a significant guide for the attitudes in case of contagious diseases and it supports and directs the ones who caught such diseases. The Muslim world is experienced about contagious diseases; a plague culture has been formed in time in Islamic understanding. Besides the functionality of culture, verses, hadiths, acts of the companions of Prophet Muhammad are the guides used in today's Islamic understanding in coping with diseases. Policies adopted for preventing the spreading of the disease in Turkey have been legitimized on this basis. It is unacceptable for a Muslim to stop his relationship with a mosque or public prayer under normal conditions and this relationship is supported by religious institutions. However, in today's conditions, this situation has changed and religious references have become important in making Muslims understand the new conditions (Thurston, 2020, p. 15). The authorized institutions in Turkey have taken the support of the religious literature in this respect (Hopley, 2010, p. 58).

Before the spreading of the virus in Turkey, the Friday sermon (March 6, 2020) in mosques focused on hygiene and different policies that prevent the pandemic. "Purify your garments. Continue to shun idols. Do not do a favor expecting more in return and persevere for the sake of your Lord" (74/4-7). These verses are in line with the message that should be given during a pandemic. This is why; they were specifically chosen to warn Muslims before the virus arrived in Turkey. Religion and pandemics have a close relationship throughout history. Pandemic, besides the worldly causes, has been identified with the sin that humanity is related to (Cunningham, 2008, p. 29). Pandemics, in this frame, have been interpreted as divine punishments for the wicked course of events caused by humanity. Religious institutions frequently warn their believers during such hard times and pandemics are usually related to "social wickedness" and "social sin" rather than personal sins. Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (2020f) interprets pandemic as a test, endurance, punishment and this discourse is supported by verses and hadiths. "Whatever affliction befalls you, it is because of what your hands have earned…" (42.30). "We will certainly test you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth and lives and fruits (earnings); but give glad tidings to the persevering and patient…" (2:155). "Do people think that they will be left to say, 'We believe' and they will not be tried?" (29:2) These verses have been the basic references in interpreting the pandemic in Turkish Islam.

There are various hadiths about leprosy, a significant contagious disease in the Arabian Peninsula during the time of Prophet Muhammad. The hadith "Run from the leper as you would run away from a lion" (Imam Bukhari, 2008, p. 1006) represents the specific attitude of Prophet Muhammad about contagious diseases. Omar Ibn Al Khattab's travel to Syria is an example of hadith; Omar decides to go back to Medina and not entering Syria, where there is an epidemic. Omar, his soldiers, and his followers

go back to Medina and he was criticized for his decision. He says: "We are running from the fate decided by Allah to another fate decided by Him" (Imam Nevevi, 2013, p. 656). This is a living example in Islamic literature and is used as a significant reference. In this context, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (2020f; 2020d) used this understanding to form a basis for its discourse in terms of warning people not to go out when they are sick, or not visiting a sick person. It can be said that the other practices adopted by Turkish Islam throughout the pandemic are generally based on this understanding in the reference.

Evaluating and trying to understand Turkish Islam policies only based on this example would be insufficient and misleading. Islamic communities that experienced similar diseases throughout history ensured the development and continuation of this culture. The epidemic called 'black death' affected Europe during the 14th century. During this period, the vizier of Granada Islam Emirate acted according to the hadith of Prophet Muhammad and declared that all Muslims shall stay where they are (Ullman, 1997, p. 95). During these harsh times that Europe had gone through, the Muslim leader tried to prevent the spreading of the disease. Ibn Lubb (1302-1381) from Granada and Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani (922-996) from Tunisia are important Islamic Lawyers. They declared that individuals who caught the disease should be taken under quarantine, they should be specifically careful in obeying the orders of Allah, they should continue self-cleaning as mentioned in Qur'an. These are important indicators showing that there has been a rooted culture in Islam in terms of epidemics (Hopley, 2010, p. 54-55). Not entering any place with the disease is a common way of protection in Islamic literature; these precautions/quarantine practices ensure raising social consciousness and thus preventing disease. Moreover, through such precautions, it becomes possible to psychologically support individuals who caught the disease (Imam-ı Gazali, 2017, p. 2775). This understanding in Islam is logically similar to the precautions taken in today's world (Hasyim, 2020, p. 3; Gezer, 2020, p. 628). On the other hand, the existence of ideas and suggestions in hadiths, highly important reference points in Islam, show us how Islamic authorities and Muslims acted during such harsh times. Based on a similar understanding, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (2020d) announced that individuals who caught COVID-19 positive shouldn't participate in public prayers. The practice of Prophet Muhammad is the reference point in this announcement. This situation broadened the elbow room of the authorized institution and believers were more easily convinced.

One other important rule that religious institutions referred to is the statement of "imperative circumstances make unfavorable situations permissible" according to Kaan (2020, p. 12). Participating in public prayers, visiting Mecca for hajj prayer, going to mosques are the significant religious duties of Muslims; however, Muslim leaders mentioned that it is now dangerous to participate in these duties because of the pandemic. This understanding is based on the idea that social contracts should be minimized to prevent the spreading of the disease. Protection of human life is the main purpose of such actions. These radical decisions were made in Turkey in parallel with the whole world. Islamic plague culture was the reference point of most of these decisions, which is attention-grabbing (Hasyim, 2020, p. 3) as these religious authorities, under normal conditions, used to support and encourage those who participate in public prayers in mosques. They used to refer to various verses and hadiths in their speeches. "…and bow (in the Prayer, not by forming a different community or congregation, but) together with those who bow (the Muslims)" (2:43) is one of these verses in the Qur'an. However, during the pandemic, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs had to make some radical decisions about public prayers to slow and control the rate of spreading in Turkey as a result of the consultations with the Ministry of Health. In the scope of the decision (Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, 2020f) the Institution announced that starting from March 16, 2020, public prayers in all mosques and prayer rooms are temporarily suspended.

There have been some reactions to this decision as the community hasn't experienced such a practice; some groups mentioned that mosques should at least be opened during Friday prayers or other important religious dates for public service. The most important reason for these reactions is that the authorized religious institute didn't benefit from the Islamic plague culture at the start of the pandemic and believers were emotionally affected by this radical change. Some individuals tried to enter mosques, pushed the locked doors, especially during Friday prayers (Hürriyet, 2020). However, it can be said that there has been no extensive or organized reaction in Turkey. On May 29, 2020, a new decision was announced; mosques

were opened during Friday prayers, noon and afternoon prayers on the condition that a "limited" number of believers pray. There are some conditions about the prayers in mosques; some specific mosques are open during Friday prayers while all the other ones are closed, individuals who want to go to mosques should perform ablution at home. On the other hand, social distance and wearing masks are the other precautions. These are all new to the Muslim communities.

After opening mosques and prayer rooms for prayers according to a circular, some individuals attempted to perform prayer with the crowd in mosques. Imams warned these people to protect social distance and wear masks but unfortunately, discussions (Sözcü, 2020a) and fights (Sözcü, 2020b) occurred. The azan was changed in Kuwait during the first time of the pandemic to prevent Muslims from gathering and coming to the mosque; however, this change in the azan wasn't practiced in Turkey. Closing the mosques as a precaution and some other decisions made for preventing people are the precautions in Turkey that are similar to the precautions practiced in other Muslim countries. The Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs made various announcements during these harsh times; the institution emphasized that COVID-19 is a disease affecting thousands of people around the world and there has been no specific cure. One of the basic reasons for this emphasis in announcements is that the discourses supported by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs before the pandemic was that people should come together and pray as a part of the community. A hadith was frequently mentioned before the pandemic (Imam Nevevi, 2013, p. 421; Imam Bukhari, 2008, p. 250; El-Askalani, 2012, p. 158) and it was stated that Prophet Muhammad gave importance to public prayers and he always emphasized that people should go to the mosque for prayer whenever they hear the azan. Besides, groups who come together for prayer used to be warned to close the ranks, supporting the hadith of the Prophet (Imam Nevevi, 2013, p. 2013); in other words, Muslim communities had always been encouraged to come together, share what they have and pray in the mosque if possible and Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs used to support this understanding. However, putting a social distance, warning people who come together, and most importantly closing the mosques –and even sometimes forbidding the public prayers- caused platforms of discussion. People living in the modern world didn't experience such an incident and no specific data is showing the authorities exactly what to do. Imams and muezzins are responsible for warning their communities and taking precautions, which caused new discussions. The perception of the ministers of religion has always been kept apart from this task definition. In other words, while "imams" had been pioneers and guides during public prayers, they now have different responsibilities; this situation caused incomprehensibility. According to the Turkish Language Society, the first meaning of imam is: "The person who guides the community during prayer in the mosque". It should be mentioned that imams had to perform some different roles, which contradicted their basic role in societies. The traditional religious values they supported changed throughout the pandemic and the society was disturbed by the new responsibilities of imams.

Some new political decisions had to be made as the impacts of the pandemic haven't finished yet. These decisions were presented by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs on religious ground and steps were taken in line with these new procedures to convince the public. After the government prohibited people over the age of 65 from going out, the High Commission of Religious Affairs announced that people in the risk group can perform the noon prayer at home, and Friday prayer is no more fardth during the pandemic. In addition to this, the institution announced that people who caught the virus shouldn't go outside; it is unacceptable in terms of religion (Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, 2020a). The purpose of this decision is to keep the risky group away from the crowds; at this point, it is important to note that this message is given based on "unacceptable in terms of religion" and a specific responsibility is given to individuals. It is mentioned that besides having a social responsibility, people are responsible in terms of religion for one another's health.

The emphasis of "martyrdom" is also important as a basis of legalization and interpreting the social crisis. According to the hadith mentioned by Bukhari (2008, p. 1006), Prophet Muhammad stated that a person who stays where he/she is with perseverance during an epidemic will earn the reward of martyrdom. This statement is an example of the quarantine practices of today's world and associated death with religion. In this context, Islamic belief places the idea that the good and the bad come from

Allah, and perseverance is important throughout the pandemic. Even under these harsh circumstances, the principle of "Allah doesn't create without a purpose" can be a door of "opportunity" for Muslim believers. Ali Erbaş, the Head of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, attended a TV program about Covid-19. He emphasized the hadith of "There are seven martyrs besides one who is killed in the way of Allah: the victim of plague is a martyr, the one who drowns is a martyr, the one who dies of chest pain is a martyr, the one who dies of stomach infection is a martyr, the one who burns to death is a martyr, the one who is crushed under something is a martyr, and the pregnant woman who dies giving labor is a martyr." (Haberler.com, 2020) This hadith is mentioned in different Islamic resources; by mentioning the hadith (Sahih-i Müslim, 2013, p. 1173; Imam Nevevi, 2013, p. 500) in the program, Erbaş associated martyrdom with COVID-19. Based on this statement, it can be said that the religious authorities in Turkey use Islamic literature to understand and interpret the pandemic. However, the important point here is that a possible social crisis and depression are prevented and religious arguments are used to interpret death. The statement that people who died because of COVID-19 are martyrs created a new argument, but it is important as it makes the culture of plague in Islam observable and enables Muslims to make sense of the disease. On the other hand, as mentioned by Hopley (2010, p. 54) perceiving pandemic as an instrument of grace demolishes the idea that Allah puts Muslim in a difficult position and it creates a more positive perception about the disease.

Finally, the decision on November 20, 2020, changed the practice of the places of worship. According to the decisions of the Presidential Cabinet ("Koronavirüs Salgını", 2020), some limitations in the activities in daily and working life were limited; individuals under the age of 20 and over the age of 65 could now go out at some specific hours. Individuals who wanted to participate in Friday prayer could go out according to the new decision as an exception. On the other hand, places of worship were opened with some limitations. It can be said that the presidential cabinet made these decisions according to the structure of Turkish society and the parameters that occurred throughout the pandemic. The number of young individuals who participated in the religious rituals decreased during the pandemic while globalization's impacts increased; these are the parameters that affected the decisions of the cabinet. However, it is necessary to wait for the end of the pandemic to understand the impacts, tangible manifestations of this process.

3. Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs and Protection of Religious Centrality

Religious organizations have been significantly affected by the pandemic. Religious authorities haven't been able to band their followers together; they couldn't produce a collective culture or understanding and couldn't prevent the changing religious perception in societies. The decisions and acts of Turkish Islam to prevent or minimize such disorientation are worth attention. The Friday prayers had been entirely suspended during the first period of the pandemic; after a while, some specific mosques were symbolically chosen and Friday prayers were allowed in these mosques. Following this period it was decided that it is free to attend Friday prayers in mosques all over the country under the precautions of the pandemic. The purpose of these changing decisions was to protect the mosque-community pattern. On the other hand, the religious authorities were worried about the idea that the mental distance, resulting from the physical distance, between believers and mosques, would increase in time; this is why they decided to end the prohibition and let people attend prayers under the condition of social distance. The Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs aims to protect the religious relationship between Muslims and mosques, although they are aware of the difficulties and possible damages. It is compulsory to wear a mask, protect social distance, and give importance to hygiene during prayers. Besides these new rules during prayers, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs suspended the educational activities within its body. These important changes necessitated producing new strategies. Most of the educations has been completed online (Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, 2020b) which is aimed at preventing students feel distanced from religious education. Such practices necessitated the use of the function of legalization of religion on the organizational level on one hand, while they aimed at protecting the collective identity on the other.

It is specified that at the center of the discourse of religious authority, there is the perception that the individual belongs to a group and that group is "special"; this method, which is the basic arguments of the theory of social identity (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Billig, 2002; Tajfel, 1966; 1982), places the individual in a specific group. Following this step, the group identity is formed within the scope of the external "dangers and obscurities". Public prayers acted based on the group attachment in the context of religious identity (Freyer, 1964, p. 36; Werbner, 2010; Wright and Young) and group identity is thus established. However, under the harsh conditions brought by the pandemic and because of the risk of infection, Turkish Islam had to find a new method to ensure this process of establishing and protecting a religious identity.

In this context, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs gave importance to be a part of the projects in which the Institution workers are active and visible. Especially when people over the age of 65 and the ones with chronic illness couldn't go out (March 21, 2020), Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs workers actively worked in Loyalty Social Support Group. They not only supported people financially but also worked to assist the people in need in terms of religion (Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, 2020e); the institution thus was able to broaden and strengthen the authority of religious belief. On the other hand, a specific telephone line named ALO 190 Fatwa was established to mentally help people who were unable to go to mosques. The legalization and attainability of Islamic discourse were thus protected. People could ask religious questions to religious authorities and feel connected to Islam and their community. According to the study by Çıtırık and Zengin (2020, p. 611), individuals asked questions about basic Islamic rules and practices to authorities through this telephone line. Through this practice, different religious groups were no longer able to issue fatwa and the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs could reach believers of Islam in person through technology.

DIYANET TV, within the body of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, broadcasted lessons for individuals of all ages; the programs are called "Time for Religious Education". Basic religious education and information about prayers were the programs broadcasted. Consolidation of the public was the basic purpose of this practice. These programs, which are the basic lessons, ensured broadening the borders and frame of the religious discourse. Besides, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs reported that its field service should benefit from technology and reach the public (Dinihaber.com, 2020). While different groups and communities were able to inform individuals about religion and the fatwas issued by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs were criticized before the pandemic, it can be said that these negativities were decreased thanks to these new practices used by the institution.

Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs made decisions and put them into practice in the frame of religious discourse through the technological instruments it has. The discourse it used is legalized throughout this process. Using different technological instruments (Madianou and Miller, 2013) determined according to the necessities of individuals and choosing the correct media resources (Miller and Slater, 2000) enable institutions to reach their goals. In this process, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs staff used technological instruments professionally and actively; on the other hand, new types of activities and technological instruments were constantly analyzed and used according to the changing needs of Muslims (Çıtırık and Zengin, 2020). Based on all these, it can be said that Turkish Islam used technology strategically during the pandemic.

4. Turkish Islam, Khutbahs and "Gloomy Friday"

The Pandemic had legally been accepted as an issue on agenda by Turkish Islam approximately one week before the virus arrived Turkey khutbahs were specifically used to take precautions about the virus which spread all around the world. In this context, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs issued a khutbah on March 06, 2020, stating that "*God is pure, God favors cleaning*" (Dinhizmetleri, 2020a). The topic of "hygiene" was brought to the agenda with this statement. The important point here is that the institution is associated with God in the frame of a precaution and the public is warned at the same time. Two days after the first Covid case in Turkey, on March 13, 2020, during the Friday prayer, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs sent a specific khutbah to imams/mosques; the title of the khutbah was "The Muslims take precaution and rely on Allah for his discretion, (Dinhizmetleri, 2020b)". This khutbah

indicated that Allah decides illness and disease, Muslims should take precautions properly. The Islamic plague culture was emphasized with references. Wearing a mask, social distancing, and hygiene, which are the most important precautions of coronavirus, were specifically mentioned in the khutbah. On the other hand, it was mentioned that Muslims should stop some habits and practices for a while and this necessity was associated with Islam. For instance, Muslims used to come together and embrace each other after circumcision and made special celebrations; it was suggested that they should stop this tradition during the pandemic. Additionally, hadiths and verses were used as references to stop Muslims visit their relatives, which is an important tradition for believers. However, as the warnings and decisions weren't sufficient, Friday prayer on March 20, 2020, wasn't practiced. Shortly after this decision, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs issued a new notice (2020c) and defined that Friday as the "Gloomy Friday". The institution announced that "Friday prayer, one of the most important practices of Islam, shall be practiced in our heavenly country Turkey, one of the most significant geographies of the Islamic civilization and the mark of Islam. The prayer shall be practiced by taking all necessary precautions and the prayer shall be representatively continued" (Diyanet İşleri, 2020).

Closing the mosques during the pandemic was the first experience of Turkey in terms of a religious limitation. The emphasis on "motherland", "Islamic civilization" and "the mark of Islamic communities" were the important points in this announcement. The emphasis on a "national" identity established a basis for making this decision about the Friday prayer. There were a few top government officials during the prayer on March 27, 2020, performed by Ali Erbaş. The title of the khutbah performed by Erbaş was "Muslim under difficulties" (Dinhizmetleri, 2020c). The speech was based on the examples and hadiths of Prophet Muhammad and the main purpose was to convince believers to take necessary precautions. After mentioning the advice of Prophet Muhammad about contagious diseases (Imam Bukhari, 2008, p. 1006), this hadith was shared: "You shall not enter a place when you hear that there is an outbreak of a contagious disease. Don't leave wherever you are when you hear that there is a contagious disease around you" (Imam Nevevi, 2013, p. 657). This idea was supported by the hadith that the one with the disease and the one who is healthy shall not be in the same room (Imam Bukhari, 2008, p. 1009). At this point, the purpose was to legalize the basis of Islamic plague culture through verses and hadiths; on the other hand, there was the emphasis that Muslims should take precautions. "Stopping good deeds, religious test and perseverance" were the points emphasized in the khutbah, aiming at presenting the basic reasons why believers had to stay away from public prayers and drew a frame for religion-logic and rationality. This approach, placing the traces of Islamic plague culture at the center, warns Muslims to "stay where you are"

Conclusion

Islamic literature presents a rich knowledge about the plague experiences; additionally, there are numerous verses and hadiths, which are the basic resources of Islamic knowledge, about what Muslims should do in case of such disasters. Turkish Islam has considered all these significant resources and developed a path that has been guiding and supporting Turkish believers throughout harsh times. In this context, each topic mentioned in the khutbahs, determined by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, has been associated with COVID-19. The order of Islam about hygiene rules has been frequently mentioned in these speeches; according to the khutbahs, the individual has the responsibility not to spread the virus to others and it is important to obey the precautions determined by the government. When the process administered by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs is generally analyzed, it can be said that Turkish Islam has been carrying out a significant function in conveying the religious decisions made by politicians to "Muslims". Besides, it is observed that Turkish Islam has benefited from the Islamic plague culture while conveying these decisions to the public. Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs used this culture in convincing people about not going out of the house, not participating in the public prayers, and not entering crowds. On the other hand, the institution attempted to protect the collective culture by establishing a telephone line called ALO 190 fatwa and preparing television programs making broadcasts about online religious education. All these new practices, which are the parts of the modern Turkish Islam strategy throughout the pandemic, contributed to the consolidation of Turkish Muslims and prevented possible separations from religion.

Turkish Islam has taken some important steps for consolidating its believers through the opportunities given by communication technologies and with the support of political channels. However, it is estimated that the collective identity which Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs wants to protect, will be one of the fields that should be carefully observed and controlled by Turkish Islam after the pandemic. Although Turkish Islam has taken various important steps to protect and control the elbow room during the pandemic, it can be said that new parameters of religious perception will emerge after the pandemic. Though it is difficult to foresee the social outcomes of the pandemic in the long term, there may be new topics of discussion about belief and identity. It can be said that especially in the context of Turkey, collective identity and relationships with prayer places will have some new dimensions and there will be new types of "normal".

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