Chapter Five

Religion Textbooks

In this chapter, I turn my attention to the textbooks that were used for the religion education courses. As noted in the Introduction, religion textbooks have been under scholarly scrutiny in recent years. My analyses have been inevitably informed by those studies that have addressed the problem of religious discrimination in the textbooks, the promotion of a religious version of nationalism, and the intentional omission and biased accounts of Alevism. What differentiates the material in this chapter from these previous studies is that, I examine discourses prevalent in religion textbooks that belong to totally different eras and show continuities and discrepancies between various discourses with respect to the presentation of non-Islamic religions.

I begin with an examination of the textbooks used extensively between 1927 and 1931, those associated with the early, single party regime. I then turn my attention to textbooks dated between 1951 and 1954, belonging to the multi-party regime. Lastly, I study more recent textbooks, from the periods between 1982 to 2002 and from 2002 to 2009. Specifically, I aim to identify the implicit/explicit arguments and assertions in the textbooks which tend to marginalize non-dominant groups (the Alevi and non-Muslims), while justifying the values, beliefs, and ideologies of the dominant (Sunni) groups. By looking at textbooks that belong to four different eras, I show how the state functionalized religion, using it as a terrain to legitimize other ideologies and more importantly, to consolidate the ilmiyah approach that governs religion textbooks.

It is important to consider how textbooks, including religion textbooks, are prepared in Turkey. There is clear evidence of state control at every step of this process. The first step in the preparation of the textbooks begins with a request from the Ministry of Education to relevant universities to write draft programs. After this, program development specialists, field specialists and advisers from universities prepare curricula on the basis of these draft programs. All the textbooks must strictly follow the curricula.

In Turkey, the textbook sector functions according to free-market principles; any publisher, including the Ministry’s own publishing house, can have a textbook written without any restrictions—although this does not mean that the book will be approved. According to the regulations, publishers have to submit for approval three ready-to-publish copies of their proposed textbooks to the Publication-Culture unit of the Ministry. This special unit then
organizes a commission. The commission should have at least two field specialists (teachers or bureaucrats), a language specialist, an art teacher and a pedagogue/educationist. The commission then prepares a report on the textbook submitted for approval. If the textbook does not meet the criteria of the curriculum, it is sent back for revision. The commission can repeat this revision process three times. After the approval of the commission, the textbook is submitted to the relevant members of the Board of Education and Training (Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu) for final approval.¹

After securing approval, any textbook may be used in schools. Thus, the schools have the right to determine which textbook they prefer. In Turkey, the number of students is very high, making the textbook market a vibrant one. According to some estimates, the revenue from textbooks sales constitutes more than half of the total revenue of book sales in Turkey. Despite the large number of textbooks produced, there is little diversification in terms of content. This is due to the strict structure of the curriculum, which does not allow any changes in the content and methodology of the textbooks. Hence, all the approved textbooks of the same subjects approved are repetitions of one another. Given this situation, there is almost no autonomy for writers. Although there have been some attempts to write alternative textbooks, the likelihood of Ministry approval is slim, and if by chance such a textbook is approved, the difficulties in distribution have continued to block diversification.²

All of these factors had implications for my methodology in this chapter. Because of the structural curricular alterations made to the religion course, including its change in status from voluntary to mandatory, and the extension of primary education from five to eight years, it has not been possible to trace one particular book and its evolution through the years. Therefore, I have opted to look at a range of religion textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education. As mentioned above, because there is no autonomy for writers, most of the time the textbooks repeat each other word by word rendering the dominant voice in the textbooks always constant. It is this voice that I aim to examine, in order to demonstrate how it operates to reproduce biased accounts of non-Islamic religions.

5.1 The importance of Religion Textbooks in the education system

Despite the existence of newly developed teaching tools, textbooks remain a key medium in education. Both the fact that they are widely distributed seem to play up to key

¹ It should be noted that for supplementary books, the approval of the Training Committee is not required.
social issues and that they carry the weight of official approval renders textbooks to be reference for the more general understanding of society.  

3 Remarking on the preparation and content of textbooks, Kaplan argues that “those in positions of authority mandate and canonize a selective reading of society that transcends indeterminacy and contingency, just as alternative perspectives are consigned to silence”.  

4 State officials and policymakers work to mold the collective consciousness of children by linking didactic methods to a monologic voice in the texts. As such, the textbooks appear to embody truth-values, while a particular world-view sets the parameters of what is taught at school and how.  

5 In addition, what makes textbooks so effective is that there is little semantic space to question privileged representations. The simple and straightforward language, clear-cut definitions, and unambiguous narratives constrain interpretations to a predetermined field of associations. Thus, in the classroom, pupils (and, for that matter, instructors) rarely challenge the framing and wording of ideas, or scrutinize the ‘knowledge’ constituted in the curriculum. In other words, textbooks are critical sources to examine the cultural politics of a society as the texts within them are deeply entrenched in the political culture of that society. Whether intended or not, “such authoritative texts not only represent politics in their contents but also set up the terms of citizenship in the nation”.  

6 All of the above comments are valid for the Turkish context where, in fact, it is rather easy to see how the content of social science textbooks has altered with the changing times and political climate. As particular constructions of knowledge, textbooks provide evidence of “whose knowledge is of most worth and what is counted as ‘legitimate and truthful in a country”.  

7 In the last twenty to thirty years, there have been various studies of curriculum programs and textbooks. Most scholars now agree that neither curriculum nor textbooks can be viewed as neutral or value-free. Indeed, state education systems and schools are among the significant institutions that contribute to the reproduction of society. As such, they are directly involved in “legitimizing the ideological forms necessary for the recreation of inequality”. Because these new perspectives have gained greater prominence, scholars in

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4 Ibid.  
5 Ibid.  
6 Ibid.  
8 See works of Zeki Uyanık, MustafaÇapar, Sam Kaplan, Etienne Copeaux for a more thorough information on the subject.  
9 Kenan Çayır, “Preparing Turkey for the European Union: Nationalism, National Identity and ‘Otherness’ in
various countries have scrutinized textbooks, especially in the field of social sciences, with a view to producing more unbiased accounts of disciplines such as history and religion.

In Turkey, the endeavor to improve school textbooks from a human rights perspective is relatively new compared to other EU countries. Several scholars have produced significant works that explored the ideological character of national education in Turkey. These works focused on different aspects of the topic, but they regularly converged on the problem of nationalistic material in textbooks, finding that it was both widespread and harmful. Some of them specifically examined the discriminatory content of school textbooks, especially of history textbooks used in teaching religious minorities. However, scholarly attention to religion education curricula and textbooks has remained peripheral. There has been little interest shown in the question of how non-Islamic religions should be treated and presented in religion education in Turkey. While this has been the case regarding Christianity and Judaism, numerous recent works scrutinized religion textbooks from the Alevi point of view, showing how Alevi voices were absent in religion textbooks.

Beginning in 1976, compulsory religion education provided a certain place for teaching non-Islamic religions, and in line with this, textbooks included the presentation of Christianity, Judaism and other non-Islamic religions. Because of their extensive use, I consider the textbooks for religion education to have an influential role in shaping perceptions and attitudes about any religion. Textbooks containing distortions and prejudices may add to negative perceptions of particular groups and intensify conflict, while factual, sympathetic

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10 An initiative titled “Improvement of the Balkan History Textbooks Project” was completed in September 2002 under the auspices of the History Foundation. The main objective of the project was to prepare a final report on the history textbooks and the teaching of history in the five Balkan countries; Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Romania and Turkey. The project aimed to bring together academics and history researchers from the Balkan countries to review primary and particularly secondary level history textbooks and to propose alternative ways of reflecting the political, social and cultural history of these countries. A second initiative again came from History Foundation, but this time not only history textbooks but all kinds of textbooks were examined from a human rights point of view. The project has created a platform for the discussion and evaluation of human rights issues in relation to textbooks and the educational process as a whole.

11 The works of İsmail Kaplan and Mehmet Çapar are good examples of this work. See: Kaplan, İsmail. The Ideology of National Education in Turkey and Its Implications for Political Socialisation. Dissertation submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences, Boğaziçi Univ, 1998; Çapar, Mustafa. Türkiye’de Eğitim ve ‘Öteki Türkler’ [Education in Turkey and the ‘Other Turks’]. Ankara: Maki, 2006.

12 Especially Mustafa Çapar’s book, mentioned above.

13 One exception to this is the Education Reform Initiative, an Istanbul based NGO. The Education Reform Initiative (ERI) has been one of the most vocal projects working to formulate the need for reform in religion and schooling through a participatory process with different stakeholders including non-Muslim and Alevi scholars. In March 2005, they published the principles and policy recommendations that emerged from these discussions. They argued that confessional religious education should be optional and organized within the framework of formal education, although there have been different recommendations on how and where to conduct the optional confessional courses.

14 Scholars such as Recep Kaymakcan, Zeki Uyanik and Kenan Çayır from whose works I draw, conduct detailed discussions of religion education in Turkey with respect to Alevi identity.
texts may help to create a more positive image and lessen conflict. In the Turkish context, there is a need for more research exploring the presentation of Christianity and Judaism, as well as Alevism, in the textbooks.\textsuperscript{15} Thus my overall aim in the chapter will be to indicate the patterns of omission and exclusion of religious minorities, in both textbooks and curricula.

5.2. İlmihal approach and religion education in Turkey

It is my contention that the particular language used in teaching Islam was inherited from Ottoman times and continues to shape the religion textbooks of today. This is an important point, particularly because the marginalization of Alevis and non-Muslims operates within this same set of discourses. Scholars of religion describe the traditional teaching of Islam, both inside and outside the Turkish school system, as the ‘ilmihal-centered approach’.\textsuperscript{16} This understanding of teaching Islam, developed within the context of Turkish-Islamic cultural history and has had a great impact on religion education in schools.\textsuperscript{17} An ilmihal is a book written in response to the practical needs of ordinary Muslims. It usually aims to provide knowledge in terms of three dimensions of Islam: faith (iman), worship (ibadet), and ethics (ahlak). The language used in ilmihals is usually simple and straightforward because they are generally written for a wide range of Muslims.\textsuperscript{18} In Turkey, among many ilmihals, ‘Büyük İslam İlmihali’ (Great Islam İlmihal), has been the most influential one; it was written by the famous Republican Muslim scholar, Ömer Bilmen, in 1949.\textsuperscript{19}

There are specific qualities of the ilmihal-centred approach that have affected religious understanding in Turkey. First of all, the ilmihal approach stresses, through its selection of content; faith, worship and ethics. Thus, it ignores the social and political dimensions of Islam. Secondly, it adopts a confessional approach for teaching religion. As noted in the preceding chapters, the term “confessional approach” refers to the overt teaching and strengthening of a particular religion, its doctrines and its way of life. It begins with the assumption that the aim of religious education is intellectual and cultic indoctrination. Thirdly,

\textsuperscript{17} The word “ilm hal”, derived from the Arabic language and literally meaning ‘knowledge of circumstances’, refers to ‘a book written to teach principles of religion’ according to the Turkish language dictionary (“İlmihal.” Türk Dil Kurumu Sözlüğü [Turkish Dictionary]. 1988 ed., p. 232)
ilmihal emphasises nurture in faith, assumes a common faith (Islam) as a point of departure, and is authoritative in its claims.\textsuperscript{20} Fourthly, in the ilmihal, the teaching of one particular legal school is used to present Islam. This tends to assume a consensus among Muslim scholars that the four Sunni schools of law are the only true and legitimate ones. Bilmen, in his ilmihal, assumes that Turks are followers of the Hanafi legal school, and so he explains religious issues in terms of its methods and interpretations. There is total disregard for other Islamic sects, such as Shia. Therefore, the ilmihal gives the impression that there is only one legitimate interpretation of Islam.\textsuperscript{21}

When the history of religious education during the Ottoman era is examined, one can see the presence of the ilmihal-centred approach. The ilmihal discouraged the development and production of new comments and criticism in religious matters. As Atay has argued, the pedagogy of the late Ottoman madrasas meant that any given issue would be approached from a single perspective, gained from one selected book. There was little room for other opinions or genuine discussion.\textsuperscript{22} Different ideas about a particular issue might only be introduced so that they could be refuted, in order to consolidate the approved opinion.\textsuperscript{23}

In the last years of the Ottomans, ilmihal became a name for a school subject, one that was generally included in the newly established primary school curriculum. For instance, ilmihal (as a subject) could be seen in the primary school curriculum (iptida-i mektepleri) in 1892 and 1904, where it was used to refer to teaching Islam. Ziya Gökalp, the ideologue of modern Turkish nationalism, provided a place for ilmihal in his proposed school curriculum. As a result, the ilmihal approach has a deep and strong historical base, both in Turkish religious culture and in school education.\textsuperscript{24} I believe that it is the legacy of this profound ilmihal understanding that is behind the Turkish religion education, and thus behind the language found in textbooks, especially with regards to the treatment of beliefs other than Sunni-Islam.

5.3 Textbooks of the Republican Era: 1927-1931

This section considers textbooks used in primary schools, specifically for grades three

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 457.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 452.
through five, and belong to the early Republican era. Muallim Abdülbaki authored the books, along with various other textbooks in the same era. At this time, compulsory education lasted five years, while religion education was voluntary and given one hour per week. Titled “Religion Courses for Republic’s Children”, the books first came out in the Ottoman language in 1927-1928, but from 1929 to 1931 they were translated into modern Turkish. The textbook was prepared in line with the principles of the ‘1926 Curriculum for Primary Schools’. In the curriculum, the aim of the religion course was “to arouse children’s feelings of gratitude toward Allah, to make them love Islam and to inform them of the benefits of unity in the beliefs of all Muslims”. Moreover the teaching program included the following points.

1) In the religion courses, every time an opportunity arises, superstitious beliefs about religion should be eradicated.
2) Children will be made to like the religion of Islam and Islamic leaders, while at the same time the high value placed on good behavior in Islam will be stated.
3) The children should be made aware that despising and belittling the worldly life and therefore indulging oneself in laziness do not have a place in true Islam. Children should be made aware that being a wealthy person (or a prosperous nation) does not conflict with Islamic laws.
4) Children should be told that it is better to donate the fitre and zekat to state institutions such as hospitals, darulaceze (Alms house), and himaye-i etfal (Society for the Protection of Children).

Thus, these aims appeared to have more to do with society, the state and social cohesion than with individual aspirations. This was very much in keeping with the social and political climate of the time. In fact, at those times, there was a common perception among the ruling cadres that argued that Turkey lagged behind other nations because of the prominence of religion and religious beliefs in society. Therefore, these beliefs needed to be altered in the early republican era through state education. Thus, these textbooks were used as ideological tools to legitimize the official discourse of the Republic, which was still in its formation. More specifically, they gave the larger discourse its ‘religious imagination’. In them, categories such as ‘state’, ‘nation’, ‘national hero’ were turned into religious subjects and/or Islamicized. By means of various metaphors, Atatürk was sacralized and portrayed as a miraculous, almost god-like figure. Since being a good Muslim was equated with being a Turkish nationalist/etatist, the major theme seemed increasingly to be nationalism, instead of

26 Turkey. T.C. Maarif Vekaleti. İlk Mekteplerin Müfredat Programı (1926) [Curricula for primary schools]. 2nd ed. İstanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1927, pp. 45-46.
27 Ibid.
religion. In the same vein, it is also astonishing to see the language used in the textbooks to describe the Caliphs that came to power after Mohammed. A passage in the textbook for 3rd graders and titled ‘Prophet’s Last Pilgrimage and His Death’ states the following:

After the death of the Prophet, all Muslims gathered and chose themselves a prime minister. After this, the Republican age started. The names of the first prime ministers are: Ebu Bekir, Ömer, Osman and Ali. Since the Prophet loved these four personalities, they are sometimes called ‘Four Chosen Friends’.

This passage is absurd in the sense that it uses the terminology of the Republic through referral to ‘Prime ministers’ who are ‘chosen’ while trying to explain the immediate political situation after Mohammed’s death. This shows that only national figures were sacralized, but also its opposite was made, that religious subjects were turned into national ones and thus they were rendered devoid of their religious content. As the above passage illustrates, in the textbooks it is possible to find useful examples of this strong nationalist/etatist mentality that governed religion education. The kind of nationalist propaganda purveyed by the textbooks specifically attacked the irtica (reactionary Islam) movements active in the Republic at that time. Although the chauvinistic language of the textbooks was not intended to offend religious minorities directly, such offence was an inevitable byproduct of the language used.

Turning to specific examples, there is a section in Abdulbaki’s textbook that addresses Turkish feasts. Although it is a religion textbook, priority is given to National Feasts and Holidays, such as the 29 October (Republic Day) or 23 April (National Sovereignty and Children’s Day). It is only after these days that religious holidays such as Eid ul-Fitr (Şeker Bayramı/Sugar Feast) or the Eid ul-Adha (Kurban Bayramı/The Feast of the Sacrifice) are mentioned. Ramadan, which ends with the ‘Sugar Feast’, is not mentioned anywhere in the book. Again regarding the Sugar Feast, in the section titled ‘What is done at the Feasts?’, the following account is provided:

“During the Sugar Feast, poor people are given donations. These donations will not enable the poor to live for a whole year. Therefore we should not donate our money to individuals, but we should give it to state institutions involved in charity works, such as Hilal-iAhmer, Himaye-i Etfal, Darulaceze and Tayyare Cemiyeti. If we do so, then our donations are useful and the works of these institutions made easier.”

30 Hilal-iAhmer (Ottoman Version of the Red Cross), Himaye-i Etfal, (Society for the Protection of Children), Darulaceze (Alms house) and Tayyare Cemiyeti (Turkish Aeronautical Association).
As can be seen from the passage, the word “donation” is used much in the same way as words such as *fitre* (alms required to be given at the close of Ramazan) and *zakat*[^32], which obviously have exclusively religious connotations. As for the Eid ul-Adha (*The Feast of the Sacrifice*), the textbook states that we should refrain from sacrificing animals and it is better to give money to the institutions mentioned above. The book goes even further, claiming that Allah would be more content with this kind of act. These examples clearly reflect the climate of the late 1920s, when the state worked to diminish Islam’s overtly religious presence in society, in favor of a broad ‘cultural’ expression of Islam. By instructing people how and where to make their donations, the textbook reveals a degree of state control over people's relation with religion.

In the textbook, the fifth section is allocated to explaining the concept of faith (*iman*)[^33], which has six conditions according to mainstream understanding of Islam. In the book, these conditions are not mentioned at all and only a superficial explanation of the term *iman* is given. The author then proceeds to develop his own concept which he calls “National *iman*”:

> We also have a national *iman*. We are Turkish. Turks are civilized. Our nation will always go forward and defeat its enemies. When the word Turk is mentioned, I become proud of myself. I like people who do good things for my country. I do not like people who give harm to my country. We got this national *iman* with the help of the Republic, with the help of Atatürk and his patriotic friends. We are very enthusiastic now. Our hearts are strong. We will keep this Republic alive. This is the biggest national duty for all of us, for the children of the Republic. Long live the Republic and Atatürk![^34]

[^32]: *Zakat*: The Muslims’ wealth tax: One must pay 2.5% of one’s yearly savings above a certain amount to the poor and needy Muslims. The Zakat is compulsory for all Muslims who have saved (at least) the equivalent of 85g of 24 carat gold at the time when the annual Zakat payment is due. Zakat is also due on other things such as silver, animals, crops, etc. For a full explanation of Zakat, see Qur’an, Al-Baqara (2):43,110,177,2 77, An-Nisa (4):162, Al-Ma'idah (5):58. See Bukhari. See also the Muslim Book of Zakat. Zakat is one of the Arkan of Islam. See Arkan (“Zakat” Glossary of Islamic Terms. Online Dictionary).

[^33]: Having faith and believing in:
> Allah Ta'ala. To affirm with the tongue, believe in the heart and confirm through action the following:
> 1. His Existence.
> 2. His Lordship.
> 3. His Worship.
> 4. His Names and Attributes.
> 5. Belief in His angels.
> 7. Belief in His messengers, without making any distinction between them.
> 8. Belief in the Hour and the Judgement and the Fire and the Garden.

The author sacralizes the Republic and Atatürk, while the religious concept of iman is projected onto this newly introduced notion of national iman. Alongside the apparent etatist perspective, there is also a strong association of Turkish nationality with Islam. The textbook language also makes clear that when the author mentions “Turkish children”, he means Muslim children. Thus all the religious minorities are ‘othered’ by this equation.

In this textbook, there is some direct discussion of religions other than Islam, but it is limited at best. In several places, Muallim Abdulbaki compares Christianity unfavorably with Islam. He argues that in Christianity, even the concept of god is ambiguous. In a chapter titled “In Islam logic supersedes everything”, Abdulbaki states:

In Islam, there is nothing that contradicts the logic. In Islam, unlike Christianity, there is no place for a prophet whose character is ambiguous, nor for a person or a god, irrational stories, angels with golden wings.35

In another chapter titled “There can be no one between God and his subject”, the writer emphasizes that in Islam everybody is equal. But to make this point, he chooses to discredit Christianity, making a biased comparison of the two religions:

As you know, in Christianity you have the priests; if there are no priests around, one cannot exercise worship. On the other hand, a Muslim can pray wherever he wants whether in his house or in a mosque. If an imam is not present and a few people want to pray, one among them takes the role of the imam and thus they are able to pray. As you understand, in Islam you do not have a certain class of people called “man of religion”, like the priests in Christianity. All Muslims are equal...

These passages were clearly seen as uncontroversial at the time, as the book had state approval. Moreover, the examples show that the book was clearly written according to the confessional approach, or ilmiyah understanding, as noted earlier.

The absence of religions other than Islam in the course content might be explained by the fact that during those years, there were many minority schools and nearly all minority children attended these schools, in order to study their own religion. Thus, it is arguable that the state saw no obligation to teach Christianity or Judaism to children of Turkish origin. The result was that pupils in state schools had little knowledge of these, or any other religions.

5.4 Textbooks of the multi-party regime: 1949-1980

For this era, I propose to examine textbooks used in the 1951 and 1954 academic

35 Muallim Abdülbaki, Cümhuriyet Çocuğunun Din Dersleri Sınıf 5 [Religion Courses of the Republican Child]. Vol. 5. İstanbul: Şirketi Murettiye Matbaası, 1930-1931, p. 84.
36 Ibid., p. 92.
years. The religion education courses were re-introduced in 1949, after a sixteen-year hiatus. As noted in earlier chapters, the late 1940s saw the state move to incorporate religion courses into the education system, despite the growing discontent of some intellectuals and MPs. After the 1940s, as part of its liberalization program, the CHP relaxed its religion education policies, mainly in response to conservative, rural discontent with the existing situation. The regime’s attitude towards religion had become extremely repressive in the 1930s and 1940s. It was only after the introduction of multi-party politics in 1946 that both parties started to court the Muslim vote. During this period, it became obvious that there was a growing public demand for properly conceived religion education. Some MPs in the CHP declared that if they did not implement some kind of religion instruction in schools, they would not win the next elections. Other MPs thought that religion courses were needed to prevent society from becoming communist. In Parliament, there were fierce debates on religion education and its compatibility with the secularism principle. These debates resulted in differing proposals about how to teach religion without compromising secularism. As we have seen, the moral courses devised at the beginning of 1940s now transformed into religion courses. The motive behind the re-introduction of the course was connected to the political climate of the time. There was the perceived threat of Communism and also the newly arrived DP (Demokrat Partisi/ Democratic Party), a more populist party, which spoke to the religious sentiments of ordinary people and not just the ‘elites’.

Finally, in February 1948, Parliament agreed that an optional religion course should be introduced in schools. However, because textbooks for the course were not ready, the implementation of this decree was postponed for one year. According to the decree, religion courses would be taught on a voluntary basis for fourth and fifth graders in primary schools. The intention was to schedule the classes in the middle of the day, thereby guaranteeing good attendance. We learn from the memoirs of Banguoğlu, Minister of Education (1948-1950), that some members of the Ministry of Religious Affairs strongly disliked the textbooks, which, in their view, contained revolutionary/communistic themes and the influence of dervishism.37 The books also included poems by Pir Sultan Abdal, the spiritual leader of Alevi of Anatolia. This dissatisfaction with the books delayed the introduction of the course. Finally, Banguoğlu commissioned the Minister of Religious Affairs to write a new textbook.

37 Here, by arguing that the textbooks contained traits of dervishism (a dervish is someone who is treading a Sufi Muslim ascetic path or tarikat), there is a reference to mysticist language being used in the textbooks. This was viewed unfavorably because it implied a return to the past, where Sufi Muslim ascetic worship in lodges or in tariqats (brotherhoods) were common in Ottoman lands. Following the passage of a 1925 law, all monasteries (tekkes), their lodgings (zaviyes) and the use of nomenclature associated with those brotherhoods were banned. This was a move that aimed to secure the secular character of new republic.
The government decreed that the textbooks should not touch on denominational differences, which basically meant that there would be no information on Alevism and no revolutionary traits. With these terms set, the textbooks were written and ready for use by the 1949 academic year. While the topics for fourth graders covered general information about Islam and Islamic views of morality, the fifth grade course dealt more with the specific teachings of Islam, including the memorization of prayers to be able to practice namaz (ritual prayer).

The specific textbooks I examined for this section belonged to the Ministry of Education's own publishing house, and were the most commonly used books of the time. The new textbooks abandon the kind of commentaries on Christianity and other faiths that appeared in the previous generation of religion textbooks. More emphasis is given to a detailed account of Islam, while there is an evident decision to continue to omit Alevism from the texts. The textbook for the fourth grade (1951) opens with a poetic piece titled “I am Muslim”:

Thank god I am Muslim; I have been born a Muslim and will live like a Muslim. My mother, father, my grandfather and my ancestors are Muslims... Every person who is a Muslim is born clean; bad people deviate towards badness afterwards. My God, you created me as a Muslim, make me live as a Muslim...

The piece suggests that non-Muslims are deviants from Islam and therefore, on the “wrong path”. However, this issue recedes somewhat in the later chapters. In fact, in a chapter titled “Islam and Human Brotherhood”, the text opens with a statement that all Muslims are brothers/sisters, regardless of their nations and cultures. However, this is followed by a remark that all people are brothers and sisters, since humans came from the same parents. This, according to the text, necessitates that Muslims should behave well towards all people. In sum, the book contains some contradictory messages as to how to assess non-Muslims and non-Islamic religions.

With regards to the representation of Christianity and Judaism, one can argue that there are two methods used in Turkish religion textbooks. The first is to present Christianity/Judaism as a separate subject, an approach first taken in the 1976 textbooks for the eighth grade (orta 1) and twelfth grade (lise 3). The second method is to provide some information about Christianity and Judaism under different topics, in order to explain certain aspects of these religions or to make comparisons. As will be seen, this second approach does

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39 İlkokul Kitapları, Din Dersleri Birinci Kitap [Primary school textbooks, religion lessons]. Vol 1. Istanbul: Maarif Basimevi, 1951, p. 3.
not develop substantive material on these two faiths, but works to clarify the position of Islam and its superiority.\textsuperscript{40} Up until 1980, when the course was still optional, Christianity and Judaism only appeared within the framework of this second method.

Again, until 1980, in the books for the fifth grade, there was nearly always a section on the important prophets, providing a brief biography of their lives and good works, and typically including Jesus and Moses. In these passages, the language is rather distanced and the prophets are portrayed as of secondary importance to Mohammed. For example, unlike the representation of Mohammed, there is no title “Hz” (abbreviation for the word ‘Hazreti’) put before the names Jesus and Moses as a mark of respect. More importantly, they are depicted as prophets without contemporary followers. A person who reads these pages could be forgiven for thinking that neither Christianity nor Judaism exists today. This is mostly achieved by implying that every new religion annexes its predecessors, making Islam the most important contemporary religion.

In addition to the above, the presumed superiority of the Koran over other religious books is regularly presented. For example:

God has given various qualities to the Koran which are non-existent in other books. The ayets talk about the greatness of God, and his unity and uniqueness are so strong and so alive that in no other book can you come across this. In a short, one line sure, the highest truths have been offered with respect to iman, faith, worship and morality.\textsuperscript{41}

There is a huge misconception in the majority of textbooks which operate with the assumption that the Gospel (İncil) was revealed to Jesus by God, as the Koran was revealed to Mohamamad, and then after Jesus it was forgotten and corrupted by people. It is likely that the use of ‘Gospel’ in the singular in the Koran is an important factor in shaping the Muslim understanding of the Chrisitian scripture as being like the Koran.\textsuperscript{42} This of course illustrates how an Islamic understanding to Christian scripture is offered in a very misleading way.

In fact, since the Gospel (İncil) that was sent to Jesus was never preserved, various books have been written in the name of it. Some of these historical books recorded the great qualities of Jesus. Yet none of these books matched one another. In 325 AC, a commission of religious people gathered in İznik and abolished these books, leaving only four of them. Those four books are the ones in existence today.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{İlkokul Kitapları, Din Dersleri İkinci Kitap} [Primary school textbooks, religion lessons]. Vol. 2. İstanbul: Maarif Basımevi, 1954, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{İlkokul Kitapları, Din Dersleri İkinci Kitap} [Primary school textbooks, religion lessons]. Vol. 2. İstanbul: Maarif Basımevi, 1954, p. 25.
This same section finishes with the following argument:

After some time, just like the religion of Moses, Jesus’s religion was corrupted by people and its essence was forgotten; people followed wrong paths. They worshipped stones, trees and other people. After Jesus, people became more and more deviant every day. The world awaited a new savior. In such a time, 571 years after Jesus’s birth, Mohammed, God’s most loved subject, was born.44

All these passages provide clear evidence of a brief and limited interpretation of Christianity in the textbooks produced for Turkish children. Moreover, the examination reveals the explicit influence of the confessional approach in Turkish religion education. Consistent with this attitude, non-Islamic religion are generally externalized as religions. Thus, Christianity and Judaism are marginalized and primarily treated from an Islamic perspective.

5.5 Textbooks of 1982-2002

As will be recalled, the entire structure of the course changed when it was made compulsory in 1982. The name of the course also changed, from “Religion Courses” to “Religion Culture and Morals Course”. This move, which shifted the emphasis from religion to culture and ethics, was intended to make the course inclusive of all students, regardless of their religion. However, the change in name was not accompanied by a significant change in content. The religion textbooks had an additional chapter titled “Atatürk’s thoughts about our religion and about Laicism”. This material was clearly aimed at dismissing the discussions that revolved around the course as to whether these courses constitute a compromise from Kemalist secular ideals or not. This chapter included the following sub-topics: “The Principle of Secularism”, “Atatürk’s views about Secularism”, “Atatürk's views about our religion” and lastly “The Republic of Turkey and Secularism”. It is significant to see that the secularism principle is appropriated to Islam and to Turks specifically. One of the textbooks asserts that: “As the Koran informs us, God has created everybody from the same essence and rendered them honorable beings. No one has superiority over others, based on nation, race, beauty, powers etc.”45

The Koran and Islam are referred to in order to assert and legitimize principles of equality, as can be seen in the following passage:

Sometimes citizens of a state do not belong to the same religion. In this case, if the

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44 Ibid.
state forces these people to believe in Islam, or if Muslims look down upon them as if they are second class citizens, then this kind of a behavior does not suit the principles of Islam.\textsuperscript{46}

To strengthen the importance of aptness of secularism for Turkey, the textbook associates it with Turkishness. It says:

Turks have always been respectful of freedom of religion and conscience in the places they ruled. They have come to understand this principle of Islam as they have become Muslims. They have applied this principle and set a good example for other civilizations. It has been difficult, and often come late, for other countries and nations to apply this principle.\textsuperscript{47}

Despite its conceptual and practical complexity, secularism is reduced here to a fairly simple separation of religion and politics. Moreover, it is presented as a principle of Islam under the guise of freedom of religion and conscience.

In religion education textbooks, each chapter opens with a few questions, described as “preparatory questions”. The idea is that before coming to class, each student should think about these questions and be able to reflect upon them if the teacher asks them. My personal experience is that these questions remain largely unread. In the specific textbook examined for this section, one of the preparatory questions is as follows: “Do you have any people among your friends and neighbors who belong to religions other than Islam? How are your relations with them?” This question raises the possibility of fruitful discussions about relations between followers of different religions. However, it is somewhat lost in the textbook’s larger discourses, which are generally less open to difference.

After 1982, because the course was supposed to be inclusive, the compulsory religion education curriculum provided some space for teaching non-Islamic religions. In line with this, textbooks have incorporated presentations of Christianity, Judaism and other non-Islamic religions.\textsuperscript{48} However, until 2002, when the textbooks underwent a major transformation, world religions were classed as divine (\textit{semavi dinler}) and non-divine (\textit{semavi olmayan dinler}).\textsuperscript{49} The textbooks for the first year of upper secondary school included sections on these non-divine religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism. The textbooks

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{49} “\textit{Semavi dinler}” is used to describe monotheistic faiths, emphasizing and tracing their common origin to Abraham. In Turkey, the word ‘\textit{semavi}’ and to a lesser extent, the word “\textit{Abrahamic}” are used in religion textbooks. In Turkish, the word ‘\textit{Semavi}’ means ‘related/belonging to the sky’ designating that Judaism, Christianity and Islam have come from God, via the sky. ‘\textit{Sky}’ may be the equivalent to how ‘heaven’ is conceived in other faiths.
presented these religions in a descriptive way, providing brief information about their emergence, doctrine, scripture and worship, without making any reference to their contemporary forms. There was no apparent criticism of these religions from a Muslim or any other perspective. In this sense, the books took what might be described as a phenomenological approach to these religions. However, as Kaymakcan argues, this is an inaccurate representation because they are defined as non-divine religions by the Turkish textbook classification of religions. The other possible reason for this approach is the lack of direct reference to these religions in the Koran, this in contrast to the case for Judaism and Christianity. As for the ‘divine religions’, this group was divided into two categories: undistorted (bozulmamış) and distorted (bozulmuş) religions. In this classification, Christianity and Judaism fell under the second category, disadvantaging both religions from the start.

This kind of a classification of religions as divine and non-divine can be seen as the legacy of the ilmihal approach that Bilmen wrote that was mentioned earlier in the chapter. According to Bilmen’s account, religions were divided into three groups which the textbooks exactly used: divine religions, distorted divine religions and non-divine religions. For him Islam was the only true divine religion, because other divine religions, such as Judaism and Christianity, had lost their original forms and become distorted divine religions. Judaism and Christianity aside, Bilmen evaluated other religions apart from Judaism, Christianity and Islam as non-divine, arguing that they had been fabricated by human beings.

As noted above, these textbooks devote separate sections to explanations of Christianity and Judaism. In order to explain the various aspects of Islam, a certain number of explicit and implicit references to Christianity and Judaism are added, so that comparisons can be made. In the textbooks, one can see that more space is allocated to explain Christianity especially via the implicit references to it. These discursive methods suggest that Islam is an appropriate religion for human nature and superior to Christianity and, in some cases, to Judaism. In this context, special attention is given to two concepts in Christianity. These are the priesthood and Confession (Penance). As may be recalled, these are actually the same concepts that Muallim Abdülbaki’s book have talked about in a derogatory manner. This shows us that after many decades, the textbook treatment of non-Islamic religions has remained more or less the same.

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Kaymakcan argues that Turkish textbooks try to find a connection between priesthood and Confession and because of this they usually deal with them both in the same context.\textsuperscript{52} It is important to note that textbook material on Christianity is usually confined to Roman Catholicism, rather than Protestantism. For instance, the practice of Confession (penance) and some other features of Christianity (which are criticized by the textbooks) have been rejected by the Protestants, but the textbooks do not take this into account.

The textbooks for the last year of upper secondary school include a topic called ‘There is no priesthood in Islam’. The (Roman Catholic) priesthood is described as follows: “It is a way of life in which priests avoid worldly affairs and do not marry”.\textsuperscript{53} There is criticism of the role of priests as confessors, and as mediators between God and people: and introducing some new religious commands is criticized. The following Islamic argument is put forward in response to this Christian understanding. “There is no confession in Islam. However, there is forgiveness from God. No one has the right to mediate between God and people.”\textsuperscript{54}

Again, the majority of textbooks focus on the four gospels, the issue of their originality and when and how they gained prominence in the Christian religion. Some textbooks still offer an inaccurate information on the subject that was seen in textbooks of previous periods. For example, one of them begins with the following description to explain the Christian Scripture:\textsuperscript{55}

The name of the book which was revealed by Allah to Jesus is the Gospel (İncil). This holy book was corrupted by religious scholars, as happened to the Torah. Four centuries after the birth of Jesus, due to the existence of a number of Gospels which contradicted one another, Christians were unable to decide which one should be followed. So, the Council of Nicaea was convened in 325, and the number of Gospels reduced to four.\textsuperscript{56}

This passage suggests, again, that attitudes to Christianity and Judaism had changed little since the late 1920s. In this period, the number of Jewish and Christian students attending state schools increased due to the closing of their own minority schools. As will be shown in the next chapter, a series of arbitrary decisions and practices meant that many of these children had to sit in the religion courses. At the same time, the increased mixing in state

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Recep Kaymakcan. “Christianity in Turkish Religious Education.” \textit{Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations} 10.3 (1999), p. 289.
\item \textsuperscript{53} İ. Çelebi, A. Bebek and N. Bozkurt, \textit{Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi, Liseler için Ders Kitabı [Religion Culture and Morals Course for High Schools]}. Vol. 1. Istanbul: Salan, 1994, p. 58.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
schools meant that Muslim children had more Christian and Jewish friends, yet were given no opportunity to learn about their friends’ religions.

5.5.1 Alevism in the textbooks of 1982-2002

As argued extensively in the previous chapters, starting with the establishment of religion education, Alevism has always been non-existent in the course curricula. The reason for this negligence was not only due to the dominance of Sunnism in Turkish society, but also government policy which took as given that Sunni Islam should provide a set of common values for all segments of society and contribute to social integrity and cohesion. Especially after the coup d'etat, when the ideological formulation of the Turkish Islamic Synthesis gained credibility among the elites, the religion courses were seen as a panacea for social unrest and political instability. During the turbulent years preceding the coup, many young Alevis belonged to leftist groups and were inspired by socialist and Marxist ideas. Thus Alevis were also held responsible by the Generals for much of the disorder and anarchy throughout the country. These factors contributed to (and legitimized) the ongoing invisibility of the Alevis in the compulsory religion education courses.

As told before, the Alevis’ point of view concerning the Islamic history, Islamic rituals and principles, all of which differ considerably from the Sunni perspective, was disregarded in textbooks. Thus diverse understanding or interpretation of the Alevis from the orthodox Islam (Sunnism) concerning the history, principles of belief and worshipping were systematically avoided being discussed. Until the end of this era, the only place that Alevis could associate themselves in the textbooks with was in the place where the leader of Alevis, Hz. Ali, was mentioned in the textbooks as the follower of Hz.Mohammad and as the fourth caliphate. I believe that it would not suffice here to only maintain that Alevism was non-existent in the textbooks. There is a strong need to reflect on this negligence in order to grasp in what ways Alevism is disrespected in the textbooks. In the light of this endeavor, I would like to examine an eleventh grade textbook published in 1982, written by Mehmet Aydn, and which was mandated by Ministry of Education and remained in use until 2005.57 Zeki Uyanik, has also conducted a discursive analysis of this book, comparing it to another textbook published in 2005, and considering all the material from an Alevi perspective. Some of my analysis below is informed by his important work.58

This specific religion textbook contains various topics/issues, of which four will be considered in detail. First of all, the textbook states that “the god is the absolute creator of the universe, and his existence is separate and independent from the universe/creatures. God is separate from everything, and he does not resemble any of his creatures, including human beings.” As Uyanık has argued, the dominant view of the relationship between God, universe and human being is based on the belief in tevhid (unity), which does not correspond to Alevi views of this relationship or indeed, of the story of creation. While explaining the principles of belief in Islam, the book is silent about the Alevi view that god, universe and human being cannot be imagined separately, and that the human being was created as an appearance of God and is therefore, a divine creature.

As a second issue, the textbook maintains that daily prayers (namaz), hajj (hac), fasting (oruç), and alms (zekat) are the main acts of worship in Islam. The textbook includes several discussions of these acts of worship, making reference to the Koran and to sayings of the prophet. Daily prayers, fasting in Ramadan, hajj and alms are presented as required religious duty (farz) for all Muslims. Yet, in practice, most Alevi do not follow daily prayers or perform fasting at Ramadan; they do not go to Makka for hajj. Alevi acts of worship, such as ayini cem (congregational or assembly meeting), semah (ritual dance of the Alevi) and fasting in Muharrem are not mentioned in the book. Indeed, the book neglects to mention any form of Islamic worship that falls outside practices recognized by Sunni Islam. Moreover, the textbook claims that “all the Muslims recite besmele (with the name of God the most beneficial and merciful) before starting their work.” But we know that at the beginning of ayini cem, and in some other instances, the Alevi use the expression “with the name of Shah”, instead of “with the name of God”. The book ignores these differences, choosing instead to identify all Muslims with Sunni practice.

A third issue concerns places of worship. The textbook claims that mosques also serve educational functions in society. Moreover in the textbooks, mosques are presented as

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61 Muharrem is the first month of the Islamic calendar. The Muslim month of Muharram (or Mâtem Orucu) begins 20 days after Eid ul-Adha (Kurban Bayramı). Alevi observe a fast for the first twelve days. This culminates in the festival of Ashura (Aşure), which commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Hussain at Karbala.
places of worship for all Muslims. The issue of congregation houses (cemevis, Alevi places of worship) is not mentioned. The book’s illustrations continue this pattern of neglect. For example, there are two pictures of a mosque (Sultan Ahmet Mosque) and Konya İnce Minareli. In addition, there is a picture that shows Mustafa Kemal praying during Kurban Bayrami (Sacrifice festival). There is no picture of a congregation house; and no picture showing an act of Alevi worship. A caption refers to “the importance and centrality of mosques in Turkish social life”, another slight to the Alevis, because many of them regard congregation houses, rather than mosques, as main places of worship.

Finally, under the title “Muslim-Turkish scientists and thinkers”, the textbook mentions “important personalities” of Turkish Islamic civilization, including Hacı Bektaşi Veli, Yunus Emre, Fuzuli, Ahmed Yesevi, İbni Sina, Fatih Sultan Mehmet, Farabi, Mimar Sinan and Atatürk. Although some of these names are also the spiritual leaders of Alevis (such as Hacı Bektaşi Veli and Yunus Emre), these personalities are presented as important figures of Sufi literature. Their roles in the formation of Alevism and their importance to the Alevis remain unmentioned. Instead, they are situated within the context of Islamic literature, while the connections between these figures and their Alevi followers appear to be systematically ignored.

The Alevi perspective is neglected not only in the sphere of worship, but in the presentation of personalities of Islamic history. In Alevism, according to the principle of tevella and teberra (cherishing and glorifying Ahl al-Bayt (Ehli-Beyt)), family of the prophet respected by the Alevis, and disliking and contempting the ones who oppose Ehli Beyt, Ömer (the second caliph), Ebu Bekir (the first caliph) are among the person who should be held in contempt. The textbook glorifies these persons and presents them as models for all Muslims: “Glorified Ömer and Ebu Bekir were among the great Muslims; they always followed the prophet”. In this same issue, the prophet Mohammed’s famous Sermon of Farewell (Veda Hutbesi) is presented in the following terms:

I leave behind me two things, which are the book of God and doings of the prophet. If you follow them, you will never go astray.

Yet, we know that there is more than one version of the Sermon of Farewell. The most

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64 Ibid., p. 107.
65 Ibid., p. 95-125.
66 Ahl al-Bayt is an Arabic phrase (Ehli Beyt in Turkish) literally meaning People of the House, or family. Within the Islamic tradition, the term refers to the family of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. There are differing interpretations of the scope and importance of Ahl al-Bayt. In Alevism, the Ahl al-Bayt are central to Islam and believed to be the true successors of Mohammed.
important difference between the versions occurs at the end of the sermon, where the prophet Mohammed states what he leaves behind. For example, in contrast to the version cited above, another version has this statement: “I leave behind me the Koran and Ehli Beyt”. Although both versions appear in authentic hadiths, the textbook authors opt for the first version (which does not mention Ehli Beyt), omitting the second version. While the Sunnis generally accept the first version, Alevi as well as the other Shiis (who believe in the holiness and leadership of Ehli Beyt) accept the second version of the sermon.

5.6 Textbooks of 2002-2009

As noted in the previous chapter, after 1998, the Ministry of National Education began to redefine the vision, mission and basic values of religion education. This revision was prompted by a fundamental change in the primary education system, when it moved from five to eight years in duration. In response to this change, the Ministry of National Education started an intensive process of program development for religion education, and prepared teaching programs by establishing direct cooperation with the Ankara University Faculty of Theology and partial cooperation with other theology faculties. As a result, a program known as the “Ankara Model” was utilized in İmam-Hatip schools in 1999, and in other primary schools starting in 2001. In the context of this model, there were improvements to the religion textbooks and course structure due to a new understanding in the instruction of religion education. According to this model, there was a need for religion education that underlined the importance of educational pedagogy, and of the need to promote of tolerance and respect between different cultures.

It was in this larger context that religion education in Turkey gained a new momentum. Teaching programs, guidebooks for teachers and students were developed and new textbooks were prepared, as well as in-service training for teachers. The Ministry of National Education claimed that the new program and textbooks would aim to give students correct information about religion, rather than making them devout followers of Islam. It further claimed that “no matter what the preference is, it must be based on correct learning and individuals must not be religiously exploited.” Given that Turkey is a democratic, secular state, the new model required that the new curriculum more accurately reflect these

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68 The choice of name derived from the extensive involvement of the University of Ankara in developing the new religious education curriculum.
features. It understood religion education as ‘inclusive religious teaching’, meaning that it should be non-denominational and include material on non-Islamic religions.\(^{71}\)

Various scholars have argued that the new primary religion education curriculum and textbooks constituted an important step towards the implementation of non-confessional religion education. The presentation of Christianity indicates that the traditional Islamic perspective on *ahl al-kitab*\(^{72}\) has been limited, with priority being given to the common points between Islam, Christianity and Judaism, and an objective approach was attempted to be applied throughout. As a result, the aforementioned bias towards Christianity and Judaism was abandoned. In the textbook for sixth graders information about the Old Testament, Bible and Koran is presented under the section entitled “Holy Books”.\(^{73}\) However, the space allocated to this section amounts to only three pages in the 130-page textbook and includes small pictures of the Old Testament and the Bible. In the textbook for eighth graders, there is a section entitled “Let us get to know the big contemporary religions living today”. This indicates a shift from the previous decades, where non-Islamic religions were given little place and labeled “distorted” or “non-divine”. The new textbooks underline the common points in all divine religions, and the addition of pictures of synagogues and churches is a new development. The questions in the textbooks encourage children to explore non-Islamic religions, but this may serve another purpose. Questions in the textbook include: “Compare the belief in Allah in Islam to the belief in God in Judaism” and “What differentiates Islam from other religions?” These questions pertain to a comparison between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and are often made at the expense of Judaism and Christianity.

In these textbooks, there is clear evidence of a new attempt to present non-Islamic religions in an objective manner, pointing out shared perspectives, especially ethical ones. However the followers of these religions in Turkey are not mentioned at all, and the carefully chosen language creates a palpable a distance in relation to non-Islamic religions. Despite these shortcomings, there is more information about non-Islamic religions, a positive development in terms of Muslim students becoming acquainted with these religions. However, the course is still some way from living up to its title as a Religion Culture and Morals Course. In the book for sixth graders, the *namaz* is explained in detail, with each

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\(^{71}\) Recep Kaymakcan, 'Religious Education Culture in Modern Turkey', in M. de Souza et al. (eds), *International Handbook of the Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions in Education*, p. 458.

\(^{72}\) (Arabic: “People of the Book”). In Islamic thought, those religionists such as Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians who are possessors of divine books (i.e., the Torah, the Gospel, and the Avesta), are distinguished from those whose religions are not based on divine revelations.

movement accompanied by a picture of a young boy and a young girl performing it. This is in marked contrast to the larger revision process that aims to render religion education non-confessional. Although the actual practice of namaz inside the classroom was forbidden during the 1980s and 1990s, many teachers did not abide by this restriction and just showed pupils how to do the movements. Some commentators have seen this as ultimate proof that the course was a confessional course and not a religion culture course.

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Resim 19

Dualar bitirilince baş soğa çevrilip “Esselâmü aleyküm ve rahmet-tullûh.” demişerek selam verilir (Resim 20).

1. Esenlık ve Allah‘ın rahmeti sizin üzerinde olsun.

Resim 20


Resim 21


Illustrations showing the movements of the namaz.
5.6.1 Alevism in the textbooks of 2002-2009

In 2005, the Ministry of Education decided that the new curriculum for grades nine to twelve should include information about the Alevis. The eleventh grade curriculum includes material on the Caferi sect (İmami Shiism), along with the other four Sunni sects. These appear under the topic titled ‘The Commentaries on the Islamic Thought’. Also at the same level, the topic ‘Love for the Ehl-i Beyt in our culture’ appears in a section titled ‘The model Muhammad’. In the twelfth grade, Alevism is treated under the topic ‘Sufistic Interpretations of Islamic Thought’, together with Sufistic thoughts, Bektashi order, Yesevism, Mevlevism and Ahism. Thus it is clear that Alevism and the Bektashi order now form a small part of secondary religion education. Although the new curriculum still does not accurately represent the pluralism of Islam, this limited inclusion of Alevism can be considered a positive step. Yet as some Alevi intellectuals rightfully pointed out, the Ministry of Education angered Alevi leaders by not consulting them when these changes were made.

In this section, I will examine a textbook written by a commission to meet the requirements of the new curriculum program. In this book, Alevism is introduced and evaluated together with Bektashism. Thus, grouped together, Alevism-Bektashism is defined as one of the “Turkish mystic thoughts” in Islam. By means of this expression, the text denies both the ethnic and religious qualities of Alevism. Although the content and basic principles of some other Islamic groups/understandings (such as Hanefilik, Malikilik, Şiilik, Caferilik) are discussed in the 2005 textbook, there is no information about the content and principles of Alevism. None of its principles of belief and forms of worship feature in the book. Instead of indicating particular characteristics of Alevism, the textbook emphasizes the common elements that unite Alevism and mainstream Sunni thought in Turkey. Treated from a Sunni perspective, Alevism is thus portrayed as a ‘legitimate’ Sunni mezhep in Islam, with controversial issues glossed over. The larger objective seems to be to incorporate Alevism into Sunni Islam. For instance, the book asserts:

In the Vilayetname-i Haci Bektaş Veli, in Decrees (buyrukarda) and the sayings of ozans are the main sources of Alevism and Bektashism....In decrees, the Koran is emphasized and it is said that in order to show people the way to God, one has to know the Koran and behave accordingly. This issue is explained as ‘The words of the

76 Ibid., p. 207.
78 Ozan means poet in Turkish. However in contemporary usage the word şair is more widely used. The works of ozans are generally associated with folkloric culture.
pir\textsuperscript{79} who doesn’t consult the Koran and its verses are not respectable. The things told must comply with the Koran.\textsuperscript{80}

In the textbook, some important Alevi religious exercises are described as “traditions”. The Alevi act of prayer, the “cem”, is described as a “ceremony” and not as a religious prayer. By omitting these practices and selecting Alevi statements that fit the premises of Sunnism, the textbook succeeds in presenting Alevism as a thought. For example:

In the major sources of Alevism-Bektashism, worship is also mentioned. The leader of this thought, Haci Bektas Veli, has enumerated the basic principles of Alevism as ‘Namaz, zekat, fasting, and attendance at hajj, if possible’.\textsuperscript{81}

In addition, the book includes some poems by leading Alevi/ Bektäşi figures on the love of the prophet Mohammed. This was a clear attempt to indicate Alevi respect for the prophet. Thus there is almost no information about what makes Alevism different from the other Islamic schools of thought. Thus it can be argued that while in the textbooks of 1980s Alevis were completely absent, in the newer textbooks the Alevi existence was recognized to some extent. However, this recognition is not harmonious with the expectations of the Alevis. “In other words, the changes in the official discourse concerning the Alevis do not correspond to a complete acceptance of the Alevi identity with its social and religious content.”\textsuperscript{82} Claims of the Alevis for religious and cultural authenticity and diversity are not completely recognized by the state.” Like the new curriculum program, the new book claims to pursue a neutral, supra-sectarian (mezhepler üstü) approach. In reality, these stated objectives have not yet been fulfilled.

\textsuperscript{79} Pir literally means ‘old person’ in Persian. In Sufism/Alevism it is the title for a revered master whose role is to guide and instruct his disciples on the Sufi path.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, p. 68.

\textsuperscript{81} OrtaÖgretim, Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi 12, MEB Yay:Ankara, 2009, p. 70.

In this page, cemevleri of Alevis, equivalent to mosques of Sunnis, are described as ‘places’ where ‘ceremonies’ take place. Taking into account of the broader context of the textbook, it would not be wrong to conclude that the religious aspect of this ritual is totally omitted.

(Turkey. MEB [Ministry of Nat’l Educ.]. Ortaöğretim, Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi 12 [Secondary education, religion culture and morals course 12]. Ankara: Devlet Basmevi, 2009, p. 71)
In the textbooks for seventh, ninth and twelfth graders, there are specific chapters/sections devoted to defining and legitimizing the provision of religion courses in the state education system. For instance in a textbook for seventh graders, in the chapter “Our Culture and Religion”, there is a section titled “Secularism is the guarantee of Freedom of Religion and Freedom of Belief”.\(^8\) In the ninth grade textbook, an entire chapter is dedicated to these issues, under the title “Religion and Secularism”.\(^4\) Finally, in the twelfth grade textbook, the name of one chapter is “Atatürk and Religion”. It consists of the following subsections: “The importance Atatürk gives to the understanding of religion”; “The importance Atatürk gives to religion education in schools”; and finally, “The importance Atatürk gives to religious scholars”.\(^5\) As the titles indicate, this material serves an important function. Religion education has remained controversial in Turkey and has many opponents; the textbooks serve to identify and validate state support for these courses.

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Atatürk, din ile dinin yorumunu ve uygulannı biçimini arasındaki ayırma dikkat çekmiştir. Bu yüzden din ile tarih içerisinde ortaya çıkmış dinin yorumların birbirine karıştırılması ve tarih uygulamalardaki yanlışlıkların düzeltilmesi hususunda önem vermiştir.

Bu konudaki düşüncesi de şu şekilde ifade etmiştir: ‘...İslam dünyasına giren birtakım kavimler, İslam olduklarını hâlde yoksu düşmeye, yıkmaya uğradilar. Geçmişlerinin sağlam veya cırkın olasılıkları ve inancayla İslamiyeti karşılarak için kendilerini düzenlerini eser yapmalıdır...’

Atatürk’e göre zaman içinde şartlara göre olusan dinin düşünce ile dinin özünün birbirinden ayrı edilmişse gerekir. Sosyal hayatın bütün alanlarında ortaya çıkabilecek her türlü olumsuzluğun önüne geçmek için dinin doğru bir şekilde anlaşılması ve toplumun bütün bileşenlerinin doğru bir şekilde öğretimi gerekir. Bunun içinde, bilimsel metotlar uygulan olarak görülmeli ve öğretimden geliştirilmelidir.

“Nasil ki her hususta yüksek meşlek ve ilhımsa sahipleri yetiştimek gerekli ise diniminin gerçek felsefesini inceleyene, arastıracak, bilimsel ve teknik olarak telkin kudretine sahip olacak, seçkin ve gerçek din ilim adamlarını yetiştirir, yüksek öğrenim kurumlarını sahip olmalıdır.”’ diyen Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, dini doğru anlayacak ve anlatacak din bilgilerinin yetiştmesi için yüksek öğrenim kurumlarının gereğini dikkat çekmiştir. Bu konudaki sorununun devlet presidente de düşünümüş, 1 Mart 1924 tarihinde Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu’nu çıkarmıştır. Bu Kanun çerçevesinde toplumun dini yönden ayrıntılı olarak yüksek din öğrenimi görmüş elemanlar yetiştirmek üzere ilahiyat fakültesi ve dini hizmetlerin yerine getirilmesiyle görevli memurların yetiştilirilmesi için de imam hatip okullarını açılması istemişti.


Atatürk, dinin özünün şekilde korunup yaşamasının önem vermiştir. Dinin, geçmişin yanıtı olarak bilinir ve inançlarına dayalı yaptırılması hoş karşılamamış, baraf ve batıl inançlarından arındırılarak insana doğru bir şekilde sunulmasını istemişti.

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1 Guzi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’ün Yurt İçi Gezileri (1922-1938), s. 141.
2 Atatürkçülük, C III, s. 230.

In the previous page, Atatürk's thoughts about Islam are explained. In the photograph, we see Atatürk praying with an İmam. Most likely the picture is inserted here in order to refute the once commonly held idea that Atatürk was not on good terms with Islam.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I critically analyzed the textbooks used to teach religion education courses and showed how the deployment of specific discourses tended to marginalize non-Islamic religions and Alevism. I tracked changes in the textbooks across four periods: the early Republican era, the multi-party regime, the time period between 1982 to 2002 when the course became compulsory and between 2002 to 2009 when new approaches were introduced in the religion education arena. I found that despite various changes in form and content, the dominant ‘voice’ in the textbooks remained constant. It followed the ılmihal-centered approach that did not encourage students to learn different religions and cultures. On the contrary, the textbooks maintained an inherent understanding that Islam is the only true religion in pursuit of God. I examined specific passages in the books in order indicate some of the ways in which Christians and Jews have been intentionally or unintentionally marginalized. As for the Alevis, who were not included in the textbooks until very recently, I tried to show how this ‘silence’ may have impacted on Alevi experience and responses to religion education. In the next chapter, I turn directly to members of religious minorities, creating space for their own reflections on the course, as a means of lending greater ‘voice’ and depth to my larger arguments.