

## STATE, SECULARISM, AND THE MANAGEMENT OF ISLAMIC PROSELYTIZING MOVEMENT IN TÜRKIYE: THE CASE OF HAYRÂT VAKFI ORGANIZATION

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### **Abstract:**

Da'wa (Islamic proselytizing) is not merely a movement focusing on religious rituals nowadays. It has transformed into organized groups that can mobilize people to become a pressure group in a Muslim democratic country. From several Muslim countries, Türkiye chooses secularism as a state character where religion is properly positioned far from the state. This condition makes the Islamic proselytizing movements in Türkiye differ from other religious movements in some Muslim countries that become the state's partners in developing the state. This article examines how state, secularism ideas, and Islamic proselytizing movements interplay dynamically in a free public sphere. This article also looks at the management of the Islamic proselytizing movement in Türkiye by focusing on Hayrât Vakfi (Hayrat Foundation) in Türkiye. This research employs an anthropological framework to ethnographically examine the multifaceted relationship between the state and proselytizing movements. This article finds that Hayrât, a Turkish organization, cultivates public trust by prioritizing matters related to humanity, economics, and education. Hayrât intends to show that Islam is not a contradiction to modernity.

Finally, the result of this article reveals that the management of the Islamic proselytizing movement in Türkiye shows a multidimensional relationship between secularism, political ideology, and religious movements.

**Keywords:** Islamic proselytizing movements (da'wa), Hayrât vakfi, secularism, Türkiye

## A. Introduction

Muslim people believe that *da'wa* (Islamic proselytizing) is a religious endeavor. It is the holy mission of struggling for goodness by spreading the religion of God. Therefore, as a movement, *da'wa* is a common phenomenon in many Muslim countries. As a social movement, *da'wa* has plural contexts: spreading religions, sects, *madzhab* (schools), and the propaganda of religious conversion. In several religious studies, the discussion on *da'wa* is commonly termed proselytization (Bauman, 2015; Olsson, 2014). According to this common term, Islamic proselytizing will be used continuously in the forthcoming paragraphs.

In some studies, on Islamic *da'wa*, the strategy and the management of *da'wa* become important issues to be discussed. The movement of Islamic proselytizing in Muslim countries shows various phenomena. In Indonesia, as a Muslim country adopting several Islamic values in its national system of law, the Islamic proselytizing movement has become such a kind of pressure group like many social groups in a democratic country. The proselytizing movement is one of the control units for political elites to maintain the use of power, a legitimate authority that could not be out of legal control. The Islamic proselytizing movement, in some cases, also

intertwined with the government to jointly organize social activities. Thus, Islamic (or even other religions) proselytizing movements are the government's partner in carrying out state duties in the socio-religious area.

In some cases, Islamic proselytizing movements become effective in carrying out socio-political changes. It could be an idea to revive a religion-based ideology in a secular political system, where religion is kept away from state intervention. Modern Türkiye is a relevant example of a case where religion does not get a comprehensive portion of free public political space. In this position, the Islamic proselytizing movement can be used as a vehicle to accommodate the interests of the Muslim people who feel marginalized in the political sphere. As a result, some scholars concerned with Turkish political study consider a flashback to Islam's rise, which tries to fight against the domination of secularism in Türkiye. This condition is confirmed by the victory of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP, Justice and Development Party), the ruling party in Turkish national politics (Khamami, 2015; Yildiz, 2003).

This article discusses the dynamic relationship between politics, secularism, and Islamic proselytizing strategy in one da'wa institution in Türkiye called Wakful Hairat (in Turkish termed *Hayrât Vakfı*). *Hayrât Vakfı* was founded in 1974 in Isparta, Türkiye, by Ahmed Hüsrev Altınbaşak, the successor of Imam Bediüzzaman Said Nursi as a prominent Islamic figure. Its head office is located in Küçükçekmece, Istanbul, Türkiye. The fundamental objective of this article is to find out the model of the Islamic proselytizing movement in Türkiye by focusing the object on the *Hayrât Vakfı* (hereafter written *Hayrât*) organization. Furthermore, this article will analyze

how the strategy and the management of Islamic proselytizing implemented by Hayrât to survive amid political secularism and Muslim society in Türkiye.

The starting step in discussing the Islamic proselytizing movement is to define the meaning of “proselytizing” and “da’wa” itself. In this article, the author equates the word “proselytizing” with the word “da’wa” in the Islamic religious context. In a normative religious understanding, especially in Islam, da’wa is God’s commandment contained in the Quran. The word da’wa is derived from the Arabic “*da’a*” which literary means to call/invite. Thus, da’wa terminologically means a call, the activity of calling or inviting someone to follow the path commanded by God. The word da’wa is perhaps equivalent to the term proselytization. As a Muslim, the command da’wa must be carried out wherever the Muslim is. In certain academic scopes, da’wa has become a separate discipline related to building, formulating, and processing knowledge about proselytization theories.

In its development, da’wa became a study within the framework of social movements. Like the study of social movements, proselytizing movements are one of the religious studies that utilize a political approach. Proselytizing is understood by some scholars as a religious movement, either to “support” or to “against” one particular identity, such as democracy, modernization, liberalization, and westernization. Proselytizing might be a problem for the development of a country in a pluralistic context. This probability is argued because it will impact the birth of state regulations enforced by the pressure of the proselytizing movement from the majority religion to the minority.

Meanwhile, on the other hand, the proselytizing movement shows the harmony of a nation in the face of multicultural conditions (Finucane, 2014). Moreover, in different experiences, the proselytizing movement adapted to market logic, increasing the tourism sector's economic effect (Tarocco, 2014). Thus the proselytizing movement can be considered as an activity of "supporting" or "rejecting" the idea of religious pluralism in the modern state (Finucane & Feener, 2014).

Proselytization in the discussion of this article is not termed "proselytizing" as the popular meaning in English dictionaries to call an act to induce, recruit, or invite someone to convert or to join one's faith. Proselytizing in this paper focuses on the meaning of utility, an attempt to invite others to goodness based on certain values in the context of social movements in a modern country. This simplified definition provides concrete examples of Islamic proselytizing movements in several democratic countries with Muslim-majority populations. For example, Indonesia has many Islamic proselytization movements as civil society groups. Of the many movements, some were born earlier than the formal birth of the Indonesian state. Muhammadiyah (established in 1912) and Nahdlatul Ulama (established in 1926) are two Islamic proselytizing movements born long before Indonesia's independence. These two Indonesian mainstream Islamic proselytizing movements are engaged in various fields; religious, social, economic, cultural, and even political in some cases. In Türkiye, the Islamic proselytizing movement also has various forms, goals, and motivations. Some of them take the form of political parties, foundations,

and educational institutions. Several Islamic movements that were born after the birth of the Turkish republic seem to respond to secularism applied in modern Türkiye politics.

## **B. The Genealogy of Islamic Proselytizing Movements in Türkiye**

The emergence of Islamic proselytization in Türkiye coincided with the emergence of Islamic movements around grassroots society. Some studies emphasize that Islamic movements in Türkiye emerged as a popular social organization of the urban poor in conditions similar to those giving birth to Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Jamaat-i-Islami in Pakistan. Those movements initially have a political orientation and become a manifestation of public religion (Casanova, 1994; Delibas, 2009). Thus, through the argument of the emergence of the Islamic movement in Casanova and Delibas versions, the proselytizing movement is a phenomenon that emerged as a response to global-political conditions. This argument only observes the phenomenon of the Islamic proselytizing movement from the perspective of power struggles. However, the birth of the Islamic proselytizing movement also has a theological dimension in which Islamic values become one of the factors for people to invite others to join in Islamic practices. On the other hand, the Islamic proselytizing movement is also closely related to overcoming social, economic, and educational backwardness. In some Muslim countries, traditionalist and modernist Muslims triggered the formation of a broader Islamic movement (Fealy & Barton, 1996).

In the context of Türkiye, Islamic proselytizing movements can be traced back to the early decades of the 1900s when the Islamic Nurcu movement appeared in the public space along with the journey of the modern Turkish state. Nurcu or Nurcular is derived from the word “Nur” which refers to the book “*Risale-i Nur*” by Bediüzzaman Said Nursi. The suffix “cu” then is added, meaning a person who defends an idea, opinion, or thought, “lar” is a word that shows a plural meaning from the singular “Nurcu”. “Nurcular” is sometimes also called “*Nur Cemaati*”, or “*Risale-i Nur hareketi*”. It is an Islamic movement that emerged in the early 20th century and was formed on the teachings of the book *Risale-i Nur* written by Bediüzzaman Said Nursi. They adhere to Sunni in theology and Hanafi or Shafi’i school in Islamic jurisprudence. This group tends to reject the Turkish nationalist movement identical to the followers of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This movement aims to serve the faith and the Qur’an and re-establish an Islamic state where the provisions of sharia will apply. The community’s main activities are teaching “*Risale-i Nur*”, providing humanitarian assistance, educational assistance, etc. The motto of this group is “*Hizmet-i İmaniye ve Kur’aniye*,” or “Service to Faith and the Quran.”

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi was born in 1877 in eastern Türkiye. Nursi grew and developed in his youth during the last decades of Ottoman rule (Vahide, 2012). The presence of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi brought a new chapter for developing the religious paradigm between “traditionalists” and “modernists” in Türkiye religious context. On the one hand, traditional Islamic characteristics make him firmly in holding Islam as an identity. On the other hand, Bediüzzaman

Said Nursi is not an Islamic traditionalist who rejects modernization. The characteristic of Bediüzzaman's religious thought and his organized movement makes him present a "post-modern" religious paradigm in the twentieth century (Voll, 1999).

The Nurcu movement, as an early genealogy of the Islamic movement in Türkiye, has not increased rapidly as long as Said Nursi was still alive. The Nurcu movement, which was initially only popular among farmers, artisans, and small traders through a collection of said Nursi's teachings which were recorded as *Risale-i Nur*, developed well among broader people after he passed away in 1960. This development accelerated in the 1980s with the joining of wealthy business people, students, and intellectual groups. Nurcu is a moderate Islamic movement that carries out Islamic proselytizing missions in the modern Turkish state. This movement played an important role in the revival of Islam in Türkiye after a long time under the Kemalist regime in the massive Westernization project. Nurcu is an Islamic proselytizing movement that emerged as an anti-hegemony of disadvantaged social groups due to accelerated transformation in the social, economic, and cultural fields such as urbanization, industrialization, and westernization. The emergence of the Nurcu movement is also a response to the gap in economic division and the hegemony of the Kemalist political regime (Khamami, 2015). The development of the Nurcu movement proliferated into other fields, such as the educational and social movements driven by Fethullah Gulen; Sulaimaniyah Islamic organization attributed to Sulaiman Hilmi Tunahan; the Islamic political movement by Necmettin Erbakan, and Islamic social foundations spearheaded by Ahmed Hüsrev Altınbaşak. The



proliferation of the Nurcu movement has ranged around Turkish Muslim people as an alternative movement in the public sphere against Türkiye secular state.

### **C. Hayrât Vakfı in Türkiye: Islamic Proselytizing in Political Secularism Framework**

In the beginning years of Türkiye's republic, the Turkish government extremely restricted the proselytizing movement. At that time, the most powerful Islamic proselytization was a movement led by Bediüzzaman Said Nursi. Carrying out a challenging Islamic proselytizing mission, Said Nursi implemented a persuasive, rational, dialogical strategy. This movement proselytizes mostly by entering into five fields: social, journalism, media, education, and economics (Nurhalizah & Syakirin, 2021). Of all the Islamic social organizations and movements in Türkiye, Hayrât, which is established by Ahmed Hüsrev Altınbaşak, is an intriguing topic for scholarly examination. Hayrât is one of the Nurcu Movement's proliferation, which has successfully operated in a transnational sphere of religious education, especially in disseminating Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's thoughts through Risale-i Nur.

The Hayrat Foundation has been working to achieve its Islamic proselytizing goals since 1974. Ahmed Hüsrev Altınbaşak or as known as Ahmed Husrev Efendi, the founder of Hayrât, was born in 1315 H / 1899 AD in the Senirce village, Isparta. His father, Mehmed Bey, is the grandson of one of the last governors of Isparta from the Ottoman Islamic dynasty, Hacı Edhem Bey. His father's ancestors, who were among the prominent people of Isparta, are known as the "Green

Turbans”. Their biological genealogy could be traced back to the Prophet Muhammad’s companion, Sayyidina Abu Bakar. His mother is a descendant of Sayyidina Husein RA, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. He met Imam Bediüzzaman Said Nursi in 1931.

The meeting led to Ahmed Hüsrev Altınbaşak serving as an important senior student, a fellow advisor, and assistant to Imam Nursi. Prior to completing his secondary education, he undertook the role of a lieutenant in the Turkish War of Independence. He was once taken as a prisoner of war in battle with the Greek army. After a year and a half of living in exile, he returned home. Ahmed Husrev Efendi is the student whom Imam Nursi mentions the most in his works. The Turkish Muslim people consider Ahmed Husrev Efendi as a hero of Islam who served, suffered and sacrificed greatly at the forefront of the Bediüzzaman struggle to save the Muslim people’s sacred values. The political situation led Ahmed Husrev Efendi tried together with Bediüzzaman in Eskişehir (1935), Denizli (1943), and Afyon (1947). They suffered in state prison for years. After Bediüzzaman passed away in 1960, he began directing and managing the teaching of Risale-i Nur and passing on Bediüzzaman’s spiritual legacy into the future. He was imprisoned for many years, particularly during the 1971 military coup (Hayrât Foundation, Official Document, 2015).

Hayrât is an organization that gives the highest admiration to Said Nursi and his Islamic ideas. All members of Hayrât show their respect to this noble person.

“We believe that to understand the Hayrât’s Islamic movement, the first important thing to know is al-Imam Bediü al-Zaman Said Nursi. He was the person

who initiated this Islamic proselytizing movement. He was also sacrificed himself for Islam, especially in the earliest foundation of secular republic of Türkiye. The members of Hayrât must clearly understand the life of Said Nursi; who is he, when and where he was born, and his struggle for Islam (Umit, personal communication, May 9, 2022).”

The motto of the Hayrât is “to serve the faith (*iman*) and the Quran.” Within the scope of service to the faith, Hayrât is an official and real portrait of the Risale-i Nur book. Hayrât set up facultative offices for students at the school and university levels. This organization always maintains a sustainable relationship with its members after completing their education. As a form of manifestation of faith in the professional sector, Hayrât forms various associations in accordance with the fields occupied by Hayrât members (Ridwan, personal communication, May 10, 2023). Some of the associations that we observed during our research are the *Hayrât Uluslararası Öğrenci Derneği* (Hayrât International Student Association), *Hayrât İnsani Yardım Derneği* (Hayrât Humanitarian Aid Association), Academics and Scientific Studies Association, Hayrât International Al-Qur’an Memorization Association, International Association of Medical Sciences, Hayrât Entrepreneurs Association, and *Uluslararası Eğitimciler Derneği/Uluud* (International Teaching Association).

The field of service to the Quran is realized in several strategic efforts. First, Hayrât was involved in efforts to print and disseminate the Quran. This step was taken by founding a printing company, particularly for the Quran press. Currently,

Hayrât's Quran printing is the second largest printing press after King Fahd's Quran printing in Saudi Arabia. Hayrât is actively involved in efforts to teach reading the Quran and Arabic letters. Hayrât is also promoting teaching Turkish Ottoman letters (*osmanlıca*) with Arabic nuances, which were banned in the early days of the founding of the modern Turkish Republic. In this field, Hayrât has collaborated with several organizations in Türkiye, such as Türkiye's Ministry of National Education (*Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı*), the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Türkiye, (*Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Gençlik ve Spor Bakanlığı*), Turkish Red Crescent (*Türkiye Kızılay Derneği*), and the Yunus Emre Institute (*Yunus Emre Enstitüsü*). Besides, Hayrât became an Islamic proselytizing organization by teaching the Quran through the Risale-i Nur book.

The teaching of Risale-i Nur is carried out regularly by members of the organization from the ordinary level to the organizational elites. Further, Risale-I Nur is also studied by Hayrât's sympathizer. According to our observation, the Book of Risale-I Nur is widely printed for business and proselytizing purposes (Ahmad Shadi, personal communication, 11<sup>st</sup> of May 2023). Hayrât also spread the Risale-i Nur through popular technological information media. Currently, Risale-i Nur can be accessed for free in various languages by downloading the Hayrât Library application via Playstore and Appstore.

Hayrât made diplomatic efforts to various countries, especially Muslim countries, to call for unity and peace in the Islamic world while carrying out massive proselytizing by utilizing global networks. Hayrât regularly visits various countries to build relationships with Muslims worldwide

and form branch offices worldwide for Islamic proselytizing through the *Risale-i Nur* book. In addition, *Hayrât* seeks to become an Islamic (transnational non-government organization) with this international association. Within this transnational interaction, several entities, such as intergovernmental organizations, non-government organizations, and transnational corporations, are pivotal entities in triggering fundamental changes in the globalized political structure (Baylis et al., 2011). By using those important elements, *Hayrât* plays a role in global politics, the politics of state and non-state actors within a shared global social space (McGrew, 2011).

In a constitutional context, Türkiye is a secular country where religion is not a kind of state identity. Secularization in Türkiye is one of the impacts of ‘making modern Türkiye’ which has occurred since the end of the Ottoman Islamic dynasty. Until the early decades of the 20th century, Türkiye had not shown its identity as a “Turkish nation” in a nation-state. Türkiye is still predominantly and politically occupied by the power of the Ottoman dynasty. The definition of “Turkish nation” is still close to the dynasty as the holder of power. Türkiye’s early modernization process started from 1913 to 1950 when the political regime was controlled by a group of people who are often referred to as the Young Turks. The existence of this Young Turk Group seems to be hindered by the Turkish Islamic identity represented by the Islamic Ottoman Dynasty group. Thus, the Young Turks politically considered Islam at that time as a religion that strengthened the elitism in Türkiye. Using this sentiment, Young Turks promoted secularization around 1913 to 1950. Secularization

is not only subjected to Turkish Islam but also to Kurdish Islam and other religions such as Christianity. Several studies discuss the genocide of Christian people in 1915-1916 and the deportation of ethnic Kurds, all of which occurred in the Ottoman empire's territorial, especially in East Anatolia (Üngör, 2012). To this political background, the secularization project in Türkiye will facilitate the formation of a modern and developed Türkiye to show competitiveness with developed Western countries at that time.

By mentioning the word “secular” explicitly in the Türkiye constitution, secularism has the constitutional power to be upheld as a state character. Article 2 The Constitution of Türkiye stated:

“The Republic of Türkiye is a democratic, secular and social state governed by rule of law, within the notions of public peace, national solidarity and justice, respecting human rights, loyal to the nationalism of Atatürk, and based on the fundamental tenets set forth in the preamble.”

On the other hand, the development and proliferation of the Nurcu movement in Türkiye prove that the sociological roots of Turkish society cannot be separated from Islam and the Ottoman Empire, which has brought Turkish society to the glorious era in the past Türkiye for hundred years. Along with democratization in Türkiye, the two characters of secular Türkiye and Islamic Türkiye eventually become identities that fight fairly in Türkiye's democracy.

The massive emergence of Islamic movements in Türkiye, such as Hayrât, is certainly seen as “defiance” of the secular character of the constitution by the majority of

secular Turkish people. The activities of Islamic proselytizing in Türkiye will undoubtedly face more serious counter-narratives from a formal constitutional side. This condition distinguishes Türkiye from other Muslim-majority democratic countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and so forth. These Muslim-majority democratic countries put more emphasis on a religious discussion in the constitution as freedom of beliefs instead of showing textual secularism in the constitution.

As a religious organization that lives in the nuances of secular politics, Hayrât collaborates between traditional Islamic values and modern secular character. Hayrât showed that their organization is not an enemy of modernity. Hayrât is also committed that religion should affect Muslims' daily lives in the economy, social-humanity, cultures, education, and politics. Also, Hayrât indicates becoming a civil society group with economic independence in the economic field. Hayrât built an economic sector with a profit orientation in the printing company. In addition, economic independence is also shown by the personal funding contribution they provide for the progress of the organization. They call the contribution by sacrifice (*fedakarlık*). This economic independence is really beneficial for the existence of organizations in secular countries, where the state does not interfere in providing the space for religious organizations (Ridwan, personal communication, May 16, 2022).

In the social field, Hayrât participates in campaigning for universal humanitarian issues. For instance, Hayrât has crowdfunding as a forum for solving global humanitarian problems such as hunger, natural disasters, and health.

This agency of humanitarian aid is called Hayrât Yardım. The humanitarian division of the Hayrât organization has strategic and visionary missions. Hayrât seeks to build long-term bridges between benefactors and people in need. The humanitarian division would develop services to meet the material and spiritual needs of children and youth in need and contribute to their educational lives through educational programs that are in line with the basic principles and values of Hayrât. Hayrât is improving the human resources of volunteers and professionals with high representative capabilities in humanitarian assistance, especially for youth. Hayrât's humanitarian division also intends to become a pilot humanitarian aid agency called "Türkiye Humanitarian Assistance Model" (*Türkiye İnsani Yardım Modeli*) with the support of several external institutions, organizations, and universities. The humanitarian division also brings its mission to respond to material and spiritual needs around the world by strengthening zakat institutions. Hayrât, through the humanitarian division, continues to develop itself to become a reputable international humanitarian aid organization with the fundamental principles of innovation, transparency, sustainability, agility, scalability, and wide networking.

Hayrât yardım has been starting its activities since 2013. This humanitarian aid organization has provided assistance to millions of people in need on five different continents and 70 countries, with 300 coordination centers in Türkiye and 25 countries overseas. Hayrât Yardım has several projects, including emergency assistance, orphanages, orphans funding, providing *iftar* (for fasting Muslims), food packages, zakat assistance, educational assistance, Quran distribution, Qurban meat assistance, well



water providing, assistance in the building of mosques and places of study, and health assistance.

In terms of orphan funding, Hayrât Yardim has helped care for more than 10,000 orphans spread across various countries such as Türkiye, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Palestine, Syria, Sudan, Chad, Indonesia, Somalia, Cambodia, and many more countries. They will have cared for several assisted programs with housing, food, and education until they are able to live independently. For food aid missions, creating sources of water, food, clothing, and shelter, Hayrât also assists victims of war, such as war victims in Syria, Yemen, and Palestine (Ridwan, personal communication, May 16, 2022).

In the field of education and culture, Hayrât opened centers for the study of science to study religion with the *Risale-i Nur* as a source of reference. Hayrât also teaches modern Turkish and Ottoman Turkish (*osmanlıca*). Hayat regularly holds conferences to introduce Turkish culture and history.

Hayrât opened study centers in collaboration with leading universities in several Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. In Malaysia, for example, they built a research and training center called the Nursi Research and Training Center (NRTC), located at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).

The Nursi Research and Training Center was established in January 2017 at the Faculty of Revelation and Humanities, IIUM. NRTC provides research and training services on the work of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi “*Risale-i Nur*” to IIUM students, lecturers, and academic staff to reach more comprehensive followers. In addition, NRTC also opens

modern Turkish and Ottoman Turkish language classes to introduce Turkish culture (Ridwan, personal communication, May 16, 2022).

NRTC has several objectives, including serving as a research center for academics and students of IIUM (International Islamic University Malaysia), publishing academic journals and articles on educational, social, and cultural issues, training students who will become teachers in their countries to increase capabilities of Muslims and humanity in general, holding seminars, workshops, and conferences on various issues. In Indonesia, Hayrât established an institution called the “Ayasofya Dakwah Center.” This institution collaborates with Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta. Cemal Şehin, the Chief of Ayasofya Dakwah Center stated that this institution has objectives in twofolds. As an introduction to Turkish National Culture, especially in Islamic heritage. Second, to introduce the noble teachings of Said Nursi through *Risale-I Nur* (Sehin, May 20, 2022). From this statement, the mission of Hayrât is clearly demonstrated to be the international Islamic Proselytizing Movement

In the health sector, Hayrât assists in curing cataracts, which are common in poor geographical areas, by hiring specialist doctors in countries where cataract surgery is prioritized or by providing essential equipment for surgery (Hayratyardim, 2022). Hayrât also helps wheelchairs and canes for disabled people in underdeveloped areas in certain countries. In addition to assistance for realizing physical health, Hayrât also provides services for psychological health. Hayrât helps victims of the Syrian war who migrated to border areas or other countries to find new hopes for life. Hayrât provides

psychologists or psychiatrists to heal the psychological problems of the victims of the war (Hayrattyardim, 2022).

In political fields, Hayrât was not involved in any practical politics by forming political parties. The prominent figure of Hayrât in the division of *da'wa* said (Ridwan, May 16, 2022):

“Hayrât, as a neutral Islamic organization that focus on Islamic proselytization, would never officially involve in any activities of political practices. However, we always give a great attention and support politician who is close to Islam and would serve for Islam.”

Nevertheless, Hayrât will stand on an “Islamic party” in order to keep some Islamic interest. This support could be traced to the 2018 Türkiye general elections, in which Hayrât, who has wide members in Türkiye, directed their political support to the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) led by the incumbent President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In the latest presidential election on March 31, 2023, Hayrât supported the AK Party and People’s Alliance. This support also indicates the alignment of Hayrât in Islamic practical politics.

Through these socio-political fields, Hayrât actually shows that the Islamic *da'wah* movement in Türkiye is capable of carrying out the universal mission of secularism. In this scene, Hayrât wants to prove that Islamism is an identity that deserves to have existed in a free public sphere. Hayat’s effort also indicates that the ideology of modern Islam also has the same status as secularism ideology in a democratic political field.

### **D. Managing Hayrât among Secularist and Islamist people of Türkiye**

Engaging in religious proselytization inside a secular state has several problems. In non-secular Muslim-majority countries, Indonesia, for instance, the Islamic proselytizing movement should not be afraid to face secularism arguments from nationalists or state elites. Identity and religious symbols are not an issue of public concern as a threat to the character of the state. Islamic proselytizing movement in Türkiye, especially in the early days of the republic, was met with resistance from state elites. The erosion of religion has continued for decades. As a result, the Turkish Muslim community experienced the phenomenon of the loss of religious generations within a certain period of time. This lost generation condition may uproot some of the Islamic roots of the Turkish Muslim people. As the Islamic tradition continues to erode, secularization continues to be echoed by state elites, kept by the constitution, and implemented in political decisions.

Although secularism in Türkiye is currently written in the constitution, secularization in Türkiye has various phases. Since its formation in 1923, the Republic of Türkiye has seen several stages in the interplay between Islamic and secular political ideologies. The first is radical secularism and the suppression of Islam (1923–1950). The Ataturk regime abolished the system and symbols left by the Ottoman Caliphate to realize the secularization program in the new Turkish republic. Among the abolitions carried out by the Ataturk regime were the abolition of the 1921 caliph constitution, the abolition of religious schools, the abolition of religious courts, the abolition of the Ottoman Ministry of Religious Affairs in

1924, the abolition of the traditional headgear (fez) in 1925, the abolition of the Islamic calendar and polygamy in 1926, the abolition of state religious status and the prohibition of the Turkish-Arabic alphabet (osmanlıca) in 1928, the prohibition of the Arabic call to prayer (adzan) in 1932, the prohibition of religious clothing outside places of worship in 1936.

Second, the Democratic transformation and release of Islam (1950-1970). In this phase, the government and the people's assembly decided to release strict restrictions on their religious beliefs. Third, the National Insight Movement (Millî Görüş) and the repoliticization of Islam. In 1970, Necmettin Erbakan founded the National System Party (Millî Nizam Partisi), which marked the official revival of Turkish political Islam and the Nationalism Movement. This support for political Islam appears along with the discourse on improving national social justice which is considered unimplemented. After the military coup in 1980, both military generals and the civilian government adapted their religious policies, opposing Islamic extremism on the one hand and using Islam as a tool for governance on the other hand. In order to achieve this objective, the theory of Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (Türk-İslam sentezi) is proposed to integrate Turkish nationalists and Islamists (Sunni Islam), which are equal competitors to rigid Kemalism or secular nationalism. This condition is the fourth phase of the secularization and re-politicization of Islam in Türkiye.

Finally, the new development of political Islam in Türkiye was occurred. This phase completes the struggle for political Islamization that has taken place since the 1970s. *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP, Justice and Development Party) has

an important role in this phase. Basically, AKP has a different understanding of secularism. Kemalists adhere to “assertive secularism,” which means the state has strict control over religion. However, the AKP adheres to “passive secularism” which implies the neutrality of the state to every religion. As a party that relies on voting votes, AKP strikes a balance between Islamism and secularism to appeal to voters with all political strengths. On the one hand, AKP must maintain its pro-Islamism policy to gain legitimacy. On the other hand, the AKP must win the support of nationalists, most of whom still adhere to political secularism (Chen, 2020).

The harsh implementation of secularism in Türkiye during the early period of modern Türkiye remained a broken condition for civil religious movements. Islamic proselytizing movement in Türkiye received a terrible rejection from secular nationalists. However, this resistance was only came from the political elite who controlled all state organs under the Kemal Ataturk regime. Some grassroots societies still hold religious traditions as the living norms in their lives. Muslim elite groups use this grassroots society to participate in political competition in the modern Turkish state. This condition makes Turkish society not completely secularized from religion. The process of secularization of religion in Türkiye is accommodative to religion (Islam) (Başkan, 2014). The phases of secularization and Islamization of politics indicate a variation of secularism on the one hand while capturing variations of political Islamism models on the other.

This accommodative secularization of Islam forms the Islamic movement’s method of proselytizing. In some experiences, an extreme separation between religion and the

state will create the model of an underground movement. Proselytizing activity that becomes an enemy of the state will not be present in a secular public sphere. Hayrât, as an Islamic proselytizing movement in Türkiye, still emerges in the public sphere even in the onslaught of state secularization. This condition confirms the process of secularization in Türkiye, which is accommodative to religion. Hayrât exists as an Islamic proselytizing movement by naming his organization as a foundation, or *fakvı* in Turkish. The use of the name in Turkish in religious movements indicates that Hayrât wants to emphasize the definition of Türkiye as a nation closer to an Islamic identity than any other identity.

Historical studies reveal the three trajectories of the definition of “Turkishness” identity. First is Türkiye as a nation; the Turkish nation. This trajectory is written in the Turkish constitution of 1924. The second definition is Türkiye as a religious entity. This definition became embedded in the millet (Ottoman Empire) system in the 1930s. Third, Türkiye is ethno-religious; Türkiye is a Turk nation that is Muslim. The keywords of the third definition are “Muslim Turkish”. This definition seems paradoxical for the modern secular Turkish state.

On the one hand, the ideology of the state emphasizes the separation of religion and politics. However, on the other hand, it recognizes the unification of religious and ethnic identities to identify and classify nations outside of Türkiye who live in the border areas of Anatolia (Cagaptay, 2006). This paradoxical argument is difficult to explain; the argument at the same time shows the paradigm of Turkish society, which cannot be separated from the label “Islam”. The label “Islam” as a religion has been attached due to historical factors that

have lasted for hundreds of years, even after the phase of secularization in Türkiye. In other words, Türkiye does not reject all Islamic space during its secularization time. The other experience is shown by the existence of the Imam-Hatip school. Although Atatürk carried out the secularization process, the Imam-Hatip School was left to keep operating during his reign until it had to be closed after six years of its operation due to the lack of interest among students (Nor & Ibrahim, 2020).

Sociological facts regarding the ethnic-religiousness of the Turkish people explain that Islamism is a growing ideology in Turkish society. In every phase of politics, Islamist groups always appeal to play a role in the public sphere. In modern Türkiye, Turkish Islamist groups are present in the form of political parties such as *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP, Justice and Development Party). Some scholars may call it not an Islamist but a post-Islamist (Bayat, 2013; Hasan, 2013). The emergence of AKP as a winning political party since 2002 has also brought a wind of change for the Turkish Muslim community with an Islamist ideology. In this regard, several members of Hayrât state that they were satisfied with the AKP's performance in continuing to support Islamic interests in Türkiye. The support from the majority of Hayrât's members for the AKP is certainly used by the AKP as a vote source in every general election.

On the other hand, Hayrât may not be able to stem the wave of secularism at the grassroots of Türkiye. Resistance to religious appearance in the public space is still high among Turkish people. Even though nowadays, Islamic identity appears more in public spaces than in previous decades, secular



channels have never been devoid of the reach of the Turkish people. Nightclubs, bars, and discotheques are still busy with visitors. Symbols of secularism like Anitkabir also cannot be forgotten by Turkish people. The root of secularism seems challenging to eradicate with Hayrât's proselytizing mission. Nevertheless, Hayrât continues campaigning for the dangers of secularism and "Western" domination against its members and other Islamist supporters. For example, Hayrât advised Muslims to avoid the Taksim Square location and several other "secular" areas. Through this effort, Hayrât was able to carry out religious proselytizing while continuing to restrain the pace of secularism in the Turkish grassroots society.

## **E. Conclusion**

The management of the Islamic proselytizing movement in Türkiye shows a multidimensional relationship between secularism, political ideology, and religious movements. Based on a legal outlook, Türkiye is committed to maintaining secularism according to a written constitution. Nevertheless, the development of the Islamic proselytizing movement seems to be a paradox of the idea of secularism in Türkiye. The development and proliferation of Islamic organizations like Hayrât prove that the Islamic proselytizing movement can go even in the middle of the ideological onslaught of state secularism. The important thing that must be emphasized is the pattern of the Hayrât proselytizing movement, which accommodates modernity and secularity. The same pattern is also shown by the application of secularism in Türkiye, which does not have a single interpretation. It means secularization efforts in Türkiye vary in each political phase

and regime. The rapid development of the Hayrât in Türkiye in the second-millennium era could not be separated from the role of Turkish post-Islamist political groups through the AKP party regime. The AKP's position in dualism, between secularists and Islamists, brings a direction of an uncertain definition of secularism. The context of Turkish secularism in the AKP regime does not exclude religion from the public sphere but puts religion in a neutral position. This multi-interpretation of secular political conditions made Hayrât design a sophisticated proselytizing management strategy through cross-institutional sectors. Therefore, in addition to garnering support from local-national politics, Hayrât also attempts to gain global support through various fields such as education, Quran publishing, funding, and humanitarian aid.

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