MODERNIZATION, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND THE PERSISTENCE OF TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF RELIGIOUS LEARNING: THE CASE OF DIYARBAKIR *MADRASAHS*[*]

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Abstract

Some of the leading nineteenth century social scientists and philosophers-theorised that religion and religious institutions would lose their function both at the public and private spheres of life as a result of rationalization, urbanization, and advancement in science and technology. Although this theory may explain, at least to some extent, the status of religion in some of the Western societies, it, nonetheless, is from being a universally applicable theory given the persistence of religion and religious institutions in some Western and non-Western societies such as Turkey. This article, therefore, attempts to answer specifically the question of why after such an intense modernization program, traditional religious learning institutions, *madrasah*s, are still active in Turkey.

Key Words: *Madrasah*, tradition, modernization, *saydah*, Diyarbakır, Tillo, Turkey

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Introduction

Modernity, as a theory of social change, predicted that the Enlightenment spirit and its inevitable consequences would eradicate traditional institutions in the West and elsewhere, replacing them with new ones. What we are witnessing today in various parts of the world does not fully support this modernist narrative although there are societies in which various social institutions have apparently lost their traditional values and functions.

However, this is not the whole story. Social institutions that constitute social structures such as family, the economy, the military, and education still remain traditional to a great extent in certain other societies. This is especially true with regard to religion and religious institutions. For example, religious practices within a Sufi brotherhood (*tariqah*) certainly maintain – to certain extent – their original context as a religious institution. Despite these traditions, certain changes definitely occur even within the internal structure of a *tariqah* and the way it organizes itself, while religious and spiritual practices remain almost the same for generations. A similar argument can be put forward with regard to traditional educational institutions. Certain institutions related to religious education are still conservative and traditional in terms of teacher-pupil interaction, curriculum design, and the organization of daily life. This fact deserves the attention of social scientists studying traditional and modern social and religious institutions.

The Turkish case is interesting for many reasons, but the most important is that unlike Pakistan, Afghanistan and other parts of the Muslim World, madrasahs[1] in Turkey are prohibited *de jure*, as reflected in the constitution. However, the fact that madrasahs are still active in Turkish society in general, and very active in the southeastern parts of Turkey in particular, makes the case worthy of interest. Therefore, this project attempts to analyze the reasons for the survival of traditional madrasahs within Turkish society, which has been experiencing a massive modernization process since the end of the Ottoman state. To accomplish this, we focus on the madrasahs in the Diyarbakır region.

The target population of this study consists of the madrasahs throughout the southeastern parts of Turkey, popularly known as "Şark Medreseleri" or

[1] *Madrasah,* variously transliterated as *madrasah, medrese, madrassa*, *madraza* etc. is defined as a school, a college or any centre for religious/Islamic learning throughout the history of Islamic education in the Muslim World. The courses offered at a madrasah include the Qur'anic studies, Prophetic tradition, Arabic, ilahiyyat/theology, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and medicine. However, the study of Islamic law (*al-fiqh* or *shari'ah*) provides the core of the madrasahs' intensive curriculum.

"Madrasahs of the East" in Turkey, while using the so-called Diyarbakir and Siirt madrasahs as a representative sample group. For this study, we visited some of the leading traditional religious institutions, madrasahs, based in Diyarbakır, Norşin and Tillo in the province of Siirt. In 2015, we visited six madrasahs of various sizes and carried out in-depth interviews with fifteen people who were well-known religious/spiritual leaders in the region. We interviewed two sheikhs, seven Saydahs[2], two academics, one Saydah-academic, two schoolfellow muftis, and one NGO representative. Since this institutional structure is still officially prohibited in Turkey, our study reveals the names of neither the madrasahs nor the interviewees. While the survey data relies mainly on the observations and interviews of the researchers, this research is also supported by the limited number of relevant academic studies.

Structure and Physical Status of Eastern Madrasahs

During the Ottoman era, "madrasahs" were higher educational institutions where religious sciences were taught together with natural sciences. They were usually established by charitable trusts (*waqf*) or the Sultan, and education, supervision, and the appointments of teachers were subject to official procedures.[3] Whether the same was true for madrasahs far from capital and central authority is unknown. It is almost impossible to gain a retrospective view; in fact, it is unclear whether the name "madrasah" can even be used for the organizations in the east under Ottoman rule. Indeed, the current education system, the so-called "madrasah" in Eastern Anatolia, is quite different from the madrasah structure of the Ottomans in terms of administration, curriculum, economic sources, and so on .[4] Moreover, the madrasah is known as a

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2 *Saydah* (or *Seyda*) is an honorific title given to those who are responsible for managing the madrasah's daily affairs as well as creating its curriculum. A saydah is a person who is a graduate of a madrasah. People in the region, with whom we carried out in-depth interviews, call any person saydah who is a madrasah graduate, and is regarded as a religious and social leader regardless of whether he is actively teaching or not. (See Bala, 2012, 98).

3 Cahit Baltacı, *XV-XVI. Asırlarda Osmanlı Medreseleri*. Istanbul: İrfan Matbaası, 1976. p. 15, Also see Ahmet Cihan, *Osmanlıda Eğitim,* Istanbul: 3F Yayınevi, 2007, p. 18; İsmail Doğan, *Türk Eğitim Tarihinin Ana Evreleri Kurumlar, Kişiler ve Söylemler*. Nobel Yay. 2010, p. 83; Hasan Akgündüz, *Klasik Dönem Osmanlı Medrese Sistemi Amaç, Yapı ve İşleyiş*. Istanbul: Ulusal Yay, 1997, pp. 248-261

4 For a comparative table, see Sabahattin Bala, "Bir Eğitim Kurumu Olarak Şark Medreseleri (Mardin Yöresi Örneğ)i." *(*Postgraduate Thesis, Dicle University Institute of Social Sciences), Diyarbakir, 2012, p. 69.

"cell" (*hujra*) in Eastern Anatolia.[5] Today, these cells no longer teach the natural sciences. Instead, the emphasis on essential religious disciplines, such as exegesis (*tafsir*), hadith, and especially elocution (*tajwid*), is gradually on the decline, while the lessons increasingly concentrate on syntax (*sarf*) and grammar (*nahw*). At the cell in Tillo, still an important center [and extant today], Erzurumlu Ismail Hakki [d. 1870] carried out experiments in astronomy and other natural sciences, as revealed by both his works and his family museum. However, Ismail Hakkı obtained this knowledge during his education in Istanbul.[6] Therefore, eastern cells should not be identified with madrasahs in İstanbul and other notable cities. Apparently, eastern madrasahs were independent structures supported by the assistance of locals in so-called Kurdistan where the central authority was relatively weak. [7] Accordingly, diplomas granted by these madrasahs are not considered official[8]even though there are conflicting examples.[9]

Within the borders of modern Turkey, Mesudiye Madrasah, completed in 1223, is the first example of the classical architectural structure of the "madrasah" in Islamic architecture .[10] Active madrasahs, which we observed, belong to the "cell" type; therefore, they vary significantly in terms of physical status. Some operate in an apartment or the basement of a mosque, while others comprise multiple buildings. Nevertheless, it is unanimously accepted that the madrasahs, whether in the form of an independent block or a complex, date back only 10-15 years. Until recently, madrasahs consisted of a building with a few rooms, especially in the countryside.

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5 Muhammet Sadık Hamidi,. "Doğu ve Güneydoğu Medreseleri Mahiyeti ve Ders Müfredatının Islah Önerisi". *Medrese Geleneği ve Modernleşme Sürecinde Medreseler*, Muş: Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2013, (pp.313-328), p. 314.

6 Mustafa Çağrıcı, *İbrahim Hakkı Erzurumi*. İstanbul: *DİA,* Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları., v. 21, 2000. (pp. 305-311), p. 306, 308.

7 M. Halil Çiçek, *Şark Medreselerinin Serencamı*. Istanbul: Beyan Yayınları, 2009, p. 28.

8 Şerif Mardin, *Türkiye'de Toplum ve Siyaset, Makaleler 1. Derleyenler: Türköne, Mümtaz'er/ Önder, Tuncay. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları,* 2003, *p.12.*

9 Müfit Yüksel, "Medresetu'z-Zehra Projesini Bugünden Okumak: Bölge/Kürt Medreselerini Din Eğitimi Merkezli Olarak Islah ve Geliştirme İmkanı ve Bunun Toplumsal Barışa Katkısı". *Medrese Geleneği ve Modernleşme Sürecinde Medreseler*, v.2, Muş: Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2013, (pp.189-213), p. 190.

10 Mehmet Şimşek, *Amid'den Diyarbekir'e Eğitim Tarihi*. İstanbul: Kent Yayınları, 2006, p. 43; Also see Ali Öngül,. *Selçuklularda Eğitim Faaliyetleri ve Yetişen İlim Adamlarına Genel Bir Bakış*. Celal Bayar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler, v.1, 2003, (pp. 67-78) p.71.

Cells have been forbidden throughout the Republican period; consequently, they initially operated in villages as far as possible from city centers.[11]Later, they moved to cities not because of a well-planned strategy but as a result of PKK-Government conflict during the 1990s. From our interviews, we understand that during the conflict, these cells supported neither side, leading them to be suppressed by both. However, from their current statements in the media, we understand that these madrasahs and their religious leaders either side with the Turkish Republic or at least sympathize with it, or remain silent, especially after the so-called peace process was interrupted for various reasons. Additionally, upon village evacuations, cells had to keep operating either downtown or in habitations near the city center. These institutions have transformed from cells into madrasahs, although they still prefer to stay away from city centers.

Madrasahs have new, larger buildings, but since they want to maintain a traditional structure, education essentially continues in a one-on-one manner on the floor.[12] There are some halls that are called classrooms; however, a madrasah education is not based on a classroom system. Madrasahs bear the official sign of "Quran Course," which identifies it as an official religious teaching institution recognized by the state. Although many of the madrasahs we visited had established classrooms with desks, these desks were hardly used; for using a desk was considered to be a sign of moving away from the authentic/traditional way of teaching. In a similar vein, saydahs teach their pupils and greet their guests while sitting in front of their lectern, which also serves as a kind of seat. Even in the meeting halls of greater madrasahs, there are no desks. Sofas are placed next to walls in the hall, and there is only a carpet in the middle. In some madrasahs, although tables are set for meals, people usually prefer to eat on the floor as a sign of being committed to traditional practices. During our survey, we observed an IWB (interactive whiteboard) in a Quran classroom in only one madrasah. Computers, projectors, etc., are not used in teaching. Dormitories use a bed or bunk system. The larger complexes do not have any areas allocated for sports. However, we were informed that playgrounds and gyms would be established eventually. It was clear to us that the saydah tried to operate a madrasah in a traditional manner not only in the

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[11] Fethullah Ayte, "Medreseler," *Medrese Geleneği ve Modernleşme Sürecinde Medreseler,Edited v.1. Muş:* Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2013, *(pp. 61-64), p. 63.*

[12] Bayram Kayhan, *Klasik Medreselerin Kurumsal Yapısı: Tillo Medresesi Örneği*, Postgraduate Thesis. Isparta: Süleyman Demirel University Institute of Social Sciences, 2014. p. 86; Bala, ibid, p. 150-151.

terms of the content of the curriculum but also with regard to physical conditions.

How Madrasahs Survive

At first glance, traditional institutions appear to survive in modern society pursuant to a classical sociological approach. Indeed, classical sociology often treats history in a linear manner and assumes a situation in which an era ends and is replaced by a new one. Nevertheless, no historical-social period completely comes to an end and leaves a new one fully formed. There are remarkable transitions between different historical eras. Instead of Comte's separation of social static and social dynamic, there is a new formulation, which can be explained as, "continuity and change" or "permanence in change." This new form of analysis can also be applied to the separation of traditional society and modern society. Indeed, against all claims and expectations, modernization could not totally annihilate all traditional institutions. As Giddens explains, modernization brought notable changes, particularly in terms of government and economic institutions; however, traditional structures remained mostly intact in many other fields.[13] Therefore, it is not strange that a traditional institution, such as a "madrasah," could survive in modern Turkey despite all the modernization projects imposed upon Turkish society by the modernist elites of the Republic. Nevertheless, such an institution should have completely disappeared given the disadvantageous conditions, such as the official bans, alternative official institutions, lack of job security, severe economic struggles, and difficulties of living in rural areas. However, madrasahs have remained almost entirely intact and have even started to grow stronger. Therefore, we have to consider certain religious-social motives behind the survival of these institutions and the strategies they employ to survive in a rapidly changing religious landscape. These factors, which ensure the continuity of madrasah institutions, can be identified as commitment, organization, religious-social support and function, political, adaptation to new conditions, and family tradition.

Commitment

A madrasah is essentially a religious institution rather than an educational one. Whoever studies at a madrasah believes he is fulfilling a religious act as valuable as (or even more valuable than) worshipping. Indeed, according to a

[13] Anthony Giddens, *Elimizden Kaçıp Giden Dünya.* (çev. Osman Akınhay). İstanbul: Alfa Yayınları., 2000. p. 56.

great majority of Muslim scholars, "knowledge" is the most important foundation of spiritual and material world. In addition to teaching about knowledge/science, the madrasah provides education concerning worship, morals and manners in part to strengthen the dignity of the educated. Therefore, a madrasah teacher (*mudarris*) fulfils his duty for Allah's sake above all, while also expecting the same of his student. However, the teacher does not impose this attitude as a prerequisite. A madrasah graduate is expected to train others at the madrasah rather than obtaining an earthly title. This notion of commitment, passed from teacher to student, becomes much stronger when supported by a Sufi Order (*tariqah*). This type of support is very strong and widespread in eastern madrasahs when compared to the madrasahs that are not supported by Sufi orders in that region or elsewhere.[14]

When the modern republic was founded, the objective of establishing madrasahs and training students evolved from raising individuals with a high level of knowledge to saving the faith. Indeed, as religious education was prohibited and schools began to provide a Western-style education, madrasahs had a different objective than they had during the Ottoman era. Madrasah teachers now had the new task of saving the faith of the people. In this new situation, the teacher both invites people to Islam and educates them while sacrifices himself against all odds. Even today, this type of spirit is said to be substantially present. According to a field study on Mardin madrasahs, half of the students indicated that they wanted to become imams after graduation, while one-third of the group had a strong desire to establish a madrasah.[15]

Obviously, the feeling of commitment is not the only reason behind the survival of madrasahs. They could have passed from generation to generation over many years, resisting all existential threats and difficulties without other factors. However, commitment, which was mainly kept alive by the Sufi orders, plays a central role – probably more than anything else – in the survival of the madrasahs.

Religious and Social Function

During the Ottoman era, madrasah graduates provided services not only in religious fields but also in education, law and other significant bureaucratic areas. With the modernization process, education underwent a restructuring,

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[14] Mehmet Sadık Elçi, "Medrese ve Modern Öğretim Kurumları Arasında Bir Mukayese (Cumhuriyet Dönemi Şark Medreseleri Örneği)". *Medrese ve İlahiyat Kavşağında İslâmi İlimler.* Bingöl: Bingöl Üniversitesi Yayınları. v.2, 2013. (pp. 85-97), p.87, Also see Bayram, ibid, p. 104-108.,

[15] Bala, ibid, p. 96.

and the resulting specialization deprived madrasah graduates of many of their former employment opportunities. However, madrasahs maintained their former roles to a certain extent in regions where the hand of the government (and thus of public schools) did not reach. Above all, madrasahs remained a basic educational institution in regions with a lower rate of schooling. Religious functionaries, such as imams, preachers and muftis, were still trained at madrasahs. Saydahs, who taught at madrasahs, often assumed the role of arbiter in social and legal disputes.[16] They became remarkable mediators, especially in disputes such as blood feuds. Today, locals in Eastern Anatolia still use the expression "going to *Shariah*". More precisely, whenever a legal dispute occurs, people come into presence of a sayyid, which is like going to the law, and agree to abide by the decision of the sayyid. Claims taken to saydahs include issues concerning commercial law, criminal law or civil law. Therefore, a religious law actually operates in the region alongside the official law. Of course, people tend to "go to *Shariah*" less and less frequently for legal issues. Under the government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), saydahs are granted the status of "opinion leader," and they are asked to have an active role in the solutions of Kurdish problems.

Madrasahs served local people as institutions of religious education[17] during a period when official religious teaching was banned and restricted and there was a serious need for "men of God"[18] These prominent figures were involved in services as imams, preachers, and Quran teachers; taking on duties that included the solemnization of marriages, shrouding bodies, performing the mawlid ceremony, the complete recital of the Quran, and the preparation of amulets. Since they were often unofficial public servants, their livelihood was provided by their "clientele," the local people. In addition, madrasah graduates took on important posts, such as that of a mufti. Today, there are still many religious officials in Eastern Anatolia who graduated from madrasahs and are employed by the state. Moreover, madrasah teachers provide voluntary courses as extracurricular activities to students at the Imam Hatip Schools and Faculties of Theology who do not study at madrasahs. These courses reinforce their knowledge regarding classical Islamic sciences.

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16 Mehmet Yalar, "Seyda, Mela ve Feqilerin Bölgenin Dinî ve Kültürel Hayatındaki Yeri," *Medrese Geleneği ve Modernleşme Sürecinde Medreseler*. Muş: Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi Yayınları. v. 1, 2013, (pp.459-470), 464.

17 Hamidi, ibid, p. 324; Yalar, ibid, p. 466-468.

18 Mustafa Öcal, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi*, İstanbul: Düşünce Kitabevi Yayınları, 2011. p. 158-169.

Another significant function of madrasahs relates to the schools of Islamic jurisprudence, or the law schools (*madhhab*). While most of the locals in the region are Shafi'ite, the majority of the people in Turkey belong to the Hanafi School, which is backed tacitly by the Turkish Republic and reflects that country's official positions. Therefore, a local religious official, such as an imam who has just graduated from the Faculty of Theology or Imam Hatip High School, is not usually knowledgeable enough to serve people with a Shafi'i background. Madrasahs, which are connected with the Shafi'I madhhab and Naqshbandi order[19] via their founders and teachers, are trying to fill that gap. Moreover, the Presidency of Religious Affairs also educates those who are to serve in regions which have a Shafi'i majority. As indicated above, madrasah graduates serve as voluntary imams together with their official colleagues. Our study made it clear that the public has greater confidence in madrasah graduates compared to the official religious "civil servants" because the latter are both servants of the government in every sense of the word and represent the official ideology of the state, which makes them suspect. Additionally, they may have insufficient religious knowledge. Even today, respect for madrasah graduates in that part of Turkish society is incomparably higher than that for graduates of the Faculty of Theology who maintain a traditional understanding of religion, culture, and society.[20] In that region, officials such as muftis, preachers and imams also owe their reputation to being madrasah graduates. However, those muftis, imams, and university professors with whom we spoke stated proudly that they graduated from both the Faculty of Theology and a madrasah. It is clear from our interviews and observations that there is a "tacit collusion" between those who only graduated from a university theology program and those who only graduated from a madrasah. This "collusion" implies that one type of education is not enough to handle the problems posed by modern or post-modern times because of the plurality, diversity and complexity of the challenges.

Organization Method

Traditionally, madrasahs have often been managed by independent scholars throughout the Islamic history. However, larger madrasahs engage with

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19 Mehmet Yalar, "Şark Medreselerine Analitik ve Eleştirel Bir Bakış" *Mederese ve İlahiyat Kavşağında İslami İlimler*. Bingöl: Bingöl Üniversitesi Yayınları. v.1, 2013. (pp.83-94) p. 90

20 Ali Özenç, "Dinî Statü Sahibi Medrese Seydalarının Ve İlahiyat Fakültesi Öğretim Elemanlarının Birbirlerine Bakışı (Diyarbakır Örneği)" *Journal of International Management and Social Researches (* 2): 5, 2014.

and depend on the state, which began with the Nizamiyah Madrasahs and has continued throughout history.[21] During the premodern era, the state did not have command of all institutions and organizations. Consequently, many smaller madrasahs were only able to survive on their own in an independent manner. As mentioned above, eastern madrasahs have traditionally been less dependent on the central government. This fact, which was cemented during the Ottoman era, remained mostly intact after the foundation of the modern republic. Using one or two rooms (cells), madrasahs have operated in an independent manner, particularly in rural settlements away from city centers. In the early days of the republic, madrasahs deliberately refrained from getting any official title, unlike today. Since these village madrasahs were not a part of any greater network, they were hard to monitor. Indeed, madrasahs did not seek to become schools or have branches in the past. Each graduate could establish a madrasah wherever he wished.

Evidently, these micro level and independent organizations did not create madrasahs totally in a vacuum. Teachers and students were somehow informed of the establishment of a new madrasah; moreover, student exchange was common between them. As there was no official correspondence at madrasahs, any student who was discontent with his tutor or sought a change could come into the presence of a sayyid and make those changes, resuming his education at the same level at which he stopped it. A simple exam was sufficient to determine this level.

Sufi orders (*tariqahs*) were the only relatively concrete forms of organization between madrasahs. Most madrasah teachers were members of an order.[22] Because of this, they took it as their religious duty to aid their students as a result of which the teacher-student relationship was transformed into a sheikh-disciple relationship. Once a disciple was allowed to teach somewhere else by his sheikh, a Sufi hierarchy started between him and his teacher. However, this was an immaterial relation. More precisely, a teacher who bore the status of sheikh could not appoint his disciples, pay his salary, meet madrasah requirements or interfere with madrasah functioning as if there were a central organization. The younger man, who was now a disciple or an order caliph, fulfilled his duty under the spiritual supervision of a saydah-sheikh.

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[21] Nesimi Yazıcı, *İlk Türk-İslam Devletleri Tarihi*. Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2002. p. 333.

[22] İmran Çelik,. "Geleneği Olan Medreseler ve Tarihî Kökenleri (Tillo ve Nurşin Örnekleri)." *Medrese Geleneği ve Modernleşme Sürecinde Medreseler,* Muş: Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi Yayınları. v. 2, 2013, (pp. 105-125), p. 119.

Science and Sufism often go together at madrasahs in eastern and southeastern Anatolia. In other words, saydahs are often connected with an order. This is crucial to ensure the survival of madrasahs. Indeed, a devout person can seek Allah's mercy in other ways, such as becoming a philanthropist merchant, rather than teaching in a difficult, officially forbidden and underpaid environment. Nevertheless, the commands and motivation provided through the sheikh spiritually compels the disciple to teach. Without this stable Sufi structure, eastern madrasahs could never have been as strong.

The positive influence of order organization on madrasahs is not restricted to the fact that the disciple prefers teaching. Disciples enroll their children in the madrasah and provide financial assistance. While no institution without sustainable human resources (teacher and student) can survive, financial sources are also needed. Today, all greater madrasahs in Diyarbakir also fall under a Sufi order and have built complexes thanks to the assistance of their followers. Madrasahs that are not connected with any order continue to live under more modest conditions.

Political Function and Support

Kurdish geography was not connected with the central authority in the Ottoman era. Upon the foundation of the republic, the lack of connection to the center in political terms was reinforced by a religious element. The Kurds did not adopt the new state and its policy about religion, instead opting for alternative actions, including riots. Therefore, a religious-political opposition developed.[23] Once riots in the region were suppressed, madrasahs came to be identified with the opposition against the modern republic. The madrasah has become the only alternative institution against the school, mufti, governor, language and courts of the "state". In the eyes of locals, a madrasah is unlike the public school, which makes people into nonbelievers; additionally, the language of education in madrasahs is Kurdish and not Turkish. Unlike public schools, madrasahs do not accept girls since they lead to "immorality". Persons endorsed by a madrasah are not religious officials according to the government; moreover, they are Shafi'ite and do not impose Hanafism. Saydahs have more authority over the public than local governors. In legal disputes, they adjudicate pursuant to divine law, *Shariah*, rather than human law. With

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[23] Martin van Bruinessen , *Ağa, Şeyh, Devlet Kürdistanın Sosyal ve PolitikYapısı*. (çev. Banu Yalkut) İstanbul: İletişimYayınları., 2011, p. 113, also see Bruinessen, "The Naqshbandi tariqa as a vehicle of political protest among the Kurds (with some comparative notes on Indonesia), International Conference 'New Approaches in Islamic Studies', Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), Jakarta, 15-17 August 1986, p.4.

this point of view, society has acted with suspicion towards public schools, even the Imam Hatip Schools, considering them to be institutions that were established by the state to deteriorate Islam.

The strong social status of saydahs has attracted the attention of politicians during the transition to a multiparty democracy. Right-wing or conservative parties, which sought votes from locals, began to develop particularly good relations with saydahs. Mayors and members of parliament came from Saydah families.[24] The strong potential to gain votes from madrasahs helped them survive. Nevertheless, the same issues brought official oppression. Indeed, political parties, which could not gain votes from madrasah authorities, oppressed the madrasahs once their party came to power. In our sample group today, some madrasah members side with the current ruling party, while others indicate they are not for or against any political view. Considering recent history, both these attitudes are understandable.

In Turkey, the AKP government explicitly takes a positive view of madrasahs. This is true not only for eastern madrasahs but also for all such institutions around Turkey. Madrasahs have gained a serious comfort zone under the AKP government despite its early days. In fact, political opinions about madrasahs improved so much that they were granted official status under title "Quran Course" as well as official – albeit limited – financial aid. Some approved "mullahs" quickly became religious officials by taking the relevant exams. Nonetheless, some madrasahs are still uneasy with this tolerant and supportive attitude of the state. For example, madrasahs close to Hüda-Par, an "Islamist" religious party, indicated they do not want to take official posts within the state structure to avoid getting integrated into the system. What is even more striking is that an official imam was among those who were uttering such claims. Moreover, another madrasah, which also represents a Sufi order, asserts that it will refuse any official identity or assistance, fearing that the government will interfere with its current curricula and internal structure. Apparently, despite the much expressed piety and sincerity of government members, the locals still have doubts about the intentions of the state.

Adaptation to Emerging Conditions

A capacity for integration into emerging conditions is another prerequisite for the survival of an institution during a process of social change. An organization that entirely denies the current situation and insists on preserving its traditional structure will be marginalized and ignored by the masses over the course of time. There is every sign that traditional madrasas have been trying

[24] Yalar, ibid, p. 462-463.

to adapt to emerging conditions in many aspects, whether they like it or not. Nevertheless, these conditions are related to external factors rather than the internal structure of madrasahs.

Although certain locals doubt the general and religious policies of the government, madrasahs are now aware of the importance of official identity to survive in a secularizing environment. Today, most madrasahs operate as Quran Courses. As indicated above, some madrasahs, which do not want to come under the control of the mufti office, are also integrated into the system to some extent, acting as nongovernmental organizations. Indeed, operating under the name of an official institution, a private association or a foundation provides ease and possibilities in many ways.

Another striking example that reveals the inevitability of change and adaptation is the ability of madrasah teachers to conduct official duties now, which became possible only recently. A significant number of melles[25] and saydahs, who formerly refused to take official posts and served as religious educators on a voluntary basis, are now employed as imams in mosques or teachers of the Quran in the madrasahs, many of which are now recognized by the state as legal institutions.[26] There are even saydahs who teach in academia with Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees. In the last couple of years, the government has provided official posts in religious services to many mullahs, pursuant to official policy. Thus, madrasah activities have attained legal status. Additionally, the struggle to make a living, which has been a common long-lasting problem among madrasah personnel, is over. Until recently, saydahs had to live on public financial assistance. Accordingly, their reputation was damaged, and it was more difficult to steer new generations toward their profession.

Today, saydahs are not isolated as before. In addition to their official duties, they are involved in various activities, including organizations under a foundation or association, a presence in trade unions, and informing the society about their activities via websites or social media.

Like saydahs, madrasah students also want to obtain official recognition. In this respect, all madrasah students attend open high schools or Imam Hatip High Schools; some even try to study and graduate from the faculties of theology of open universities with much success .[27] Saydahs have led the way for

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25 *Mele* or *melle* is another honorific title given to those who undertook religious education and training, also sometimes known as *imam* or *'alim*.

26 Kayhan 2014, 80; Also see Bala 2012, 99

27 Kayhan 2014, 84; Also see Bala 2012, 113; Çelik 2013, 118; Memduhoğlu 2013, 144

students, who can now get diplomas, which should make it possible and easier to find a decent job in a highly competitive free market. Thus, parents are convinced that their children will have official diplomas and can find jobs more easily because of madrasah education gaining the same status as secular education. A saydah working at a madrasah with a Sufi setup says he does not care about official diplomas; however, he has to enroll madrasah students into high school due to pressure by parents. This new method is another reason that explains the current popularity of madrasahs. On the one hand, parents, want their children to gain religious knowledge and manners; on the other, they want them to have an official diploma to have "a real job" when the time comes. If madrasahs tried to prevent or ban students from getting an official diploma, they would probably not have so many students or so much public support.

Madrasahs make certain adaptations regarding their curriculum and physical conditions in addition to the aforementioned attitude regarding official identity. Despite their reluctance, some madrasahs opt for restrictions in curricula.[28] Indeed, society no longer accepts a madrasah education of eight to ten years for a student. In addition, new madrasah complexes comprise a separate dormitory, administrative block and library with plans to add housing for teachers and areas for sports.[29] Madrasahs are currently addressing the problem of meals, which have been a serious difficulty in the past since students are given three meals every day.[30]

Another important example of adaptation is that madrasahs have been moving to cities from rural areas, which has not been voluntary for a variety of reasons. Although forces of social change helped to bring about this situation, the political environment of 1990s was the dominant component in this forceful change of tone. According to madrasah members, students were provided a better education in villages thanks to easier activity in an isolated environment, higher educative concentration and better moral development.

Nevertheless, once madrasahs moved to city, they faced new, unprecedented challenges and opportunities. For example, they became better known among the people, attracting more students and greater financial aid. In the past, madrasahs lived on the favor of villagers; however, with this new situation, they enjoyed a rapid rise in the number of students and the amount of financial support in the city. The changing political and economic structure of

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28 Bala 2012, 131.

29 Kayhan 2014, 69

30 Hamidi 2013, 315-316; Also see Kayhan 2014, 72.

Turkey played a central role in this development. Nevertheless, madrasahs would have never improved in the same way if they remained in rural areas.

Such rapid development led to another form of organization, namely, the branching of madrasahs. Once larger madrasahs reached their natural peak, they began to establish branches in other places, even in western metropolitan cities, rather than becoming an extremely huge, single institution in their historical location.[31] Thus, it was no longer necessary to bring every student to east to a certain city. Moreover, a new graduate could easily obtain a suitable living space and find a job as a mullah. Evidently, larger madrasahs see no harm in this untraditional approach, while saydahs at smaller madrasahs object to branching, arguing that there should be no monopoly in science, and each saydah should have the right and opportunity to act in an independent manner. Nevertheless, branching has clearly contributed to the proliferation of madrasahs.

[31] Kayhan 2014, 68; Also see Çelik 2013, 110.

Family Tradition

Family tradition is another significant factor in the survival of madrasahs. This concept is applicable to both saydahs and students. Most saydahs are from families with a certain tradition of scientific education, and the children keep the process going.[32] For example, Ohin Madrasah, which has its origins in Seljuk Baghdad, has been administered by a single family throughout its history; even today, all of its teachers are said to be family members.[33] Saydah is a family profession for these people. More precisely, such families have gained a reputation and earned a living in society thanks to their saydah quality. Their position was cemented by a religious motivation, namely, '*ilm*," science. Therefore, it is not easy for a member of this family to choose any other profession than teaching at a madrasah. The cause becomes much more important if the position of saydah is combined with sheikhdom. Indeed, sheikhdom indicates a huge influence and significant income, which should be maintained by a following family member. In Eastern Anatolia, sheikhdom often descends from father to son.[34]

Madrasah students include many children whose father either studied or is still in charge at a madrasah.[35] A father who attaches importance to a madrasah for his religious-moral and professional development, enrolls his son at the same institution when the time comes. In our interviews with students who come to eastern madrasahs from the west, we determined that their families are of eastern and madrasah origin as well.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that families who enroll their children in a madrasah are mostly from a lower socioeconomic class (Bala 2012, 108-109). Saydahs admit this fact. Relatively poor pious families who cannot afford to enroll their kids neither in public nor private schools constitute the student pool at madrasahs. Children of rich families do not usually attend madrasahs even if their parents are pious or have a tradition of madrasah education. However, middle-class families have recently started to enroll their children in madrasahs. This may be due to an improving economic structure in Turkey as well as the developing physical conditions and official status of madrasahs.

Conclusion

Traditional madrasahs are still active in the Eastern Anatolia Region of Turkey despite the fact that all of Turkish society has been undergoing an intense

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32 Kayhan 2014, 45-46,67; Also see Bala 2012, 99.
33 Ayte 2013, 62-63
34 Akot 2013, 206.
35 Bala 2012, 111.

modernization program and rapid social change imposed by the elites of the young republic. The argument that this modernization process has had a limited effect (or none at all) and has not produced the results expected by the Turkish governments' policymakers is a valid one. One of the reasons for this failure is that the elites of the modern republic have spent all their financial and human resources modernizing the so-called western parts of Turkey with scant regard to the fact that the eastern parts of Turkey were also in need of modernization. The second reason is that traditionally, Diyarbakır and the surrounding regions have been conservative and not as cosmopolitan as some other parts of Turkish society. One of the factors that made the region conservative and kept it traditional has been policymakers' lack of interest, until recently, in developing the region in terms of education, economic growth, and political participation. This is said to be one of the main causes of the so-called "Kurdish problem." As far as our study is concerned, the final reason for this failure seems to be the function of religion in general, religious institutions such as madrasahs, and religious leaders in particular. They have been the carriers of the traditional conservative worldview and way of life in the present and maybe into the future. Therefore, one could argue that certain parts of Turkish society, the southeastern parts of it in particular, reflect both traditional (*Gemeinschaft*) and modern (*Gesellschaft*) characteristics at once. Therefore, we conclude that Turkish society, particularly Diyarbakır and the surrounding regions, seems to go through a transitional period the result of which cannot be predicted easily by the criteria provided by the current social sciences.

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