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Shifting Beliefs on Digital Platforms:
The Case of the 'Godless Utopia' of Binnur Duman Academy

Merve BAHADUR[*]
İhsan ÇAPCIOĞLU[**]

Abstract

Technological developments and the introduction of mass media into our lives have led to an increase in the visibility of religion on digital platforms. With the digitalization process affecting religious perceptions and practices, the change in the phenomenon of belief has brought about an intensification of spiritual searches. These searches offer almost all belief systems, from institutionalized religions to far eastern religions, from traditional sects to modern community structures, the opportunity to be represented in the digital world. Alternative formations outside of institutionalized religions such as paganism, Hinduism, esotericism, mysticism and occultism open the door to new forms of belief and offer spiritual experiences. Thanks to the channels recommended in reels and live IGVT videos on social networks, individuals have easy access to flexible and versatile spiritual experiences. In this study, the practices such as psychic surgery, return to self, and retreat camp are discussed in the account of the spiritual group named Binnur Duman Academy on the social media application Instagram, which has 545 posts and 813 thousand followers. The study, which applied content analysis, one of the qualitative research techniques, was limited to 15 IGTV video content among 545 posts published between January 2023 and March 2024. The impact of spiritual experiences on religious practice and spiritual quests in IGTV videos was evaluated, and it was analyzed how the rituals in the Instagram posts of the group within the new age movements were recognized on social networks.

Keywords: Binnur Duman Academy, Shifting Beliefs, Godless Utopia, New Age, Social Media

Dijital Platformlarda Değişen İnançlar:
Tanrısız Ütopya Binnur Duman Akademi Örneği

Öz

Teknolojik gelişmeler ile kitle iletişim araçlarının hayatımıza girmesi din alanının da dijital platformlarda görünürlüğünün artmasına neden olmuştur. Dijitalleşme sürecinin dini algı ve pratikleri etkilemesi ile birlikte inanç olgusunun değişimi, manevi arayışların yoğunlaşmasını beraberinde getirmiştir. Bu arayışlar, kurumsallaşmış dinlerden uzak doğu dinlerine, geleneksel tarikatlardan modern cemaat yapılarına kadar neredeyse tüm inanç sistemlerine dijital dünyada temsil imkânı sunmaktadır. Dijital dünya paganizm, Hinduizm, ezoterizm, mistisizm, okültizm gibi kurumsallaşmış dinlerin dışındaki alternatif oluşumlar yeni inanç biçimlerine kapı aralamakta ve spiritüel deneyimler sunmaktadır. Sosyal ağlardaki reels ve canlı IGVT videolarında önerilen kanallar sayesinde bireyler, esnek ve çok yönlü spiritüel deneyimlere kolayca erişim imkânı bulmaktadır. Bu çalışmada sosyal medya uygulaması Instagramda yer alan Binnur Duman Akademi adlı spiritüel grubun 545 gönderi ve 813 bin takipçiye ulaşan hesabında psişik ameliyat, öze dönüş, inziva kampı gibi uygulamaları ele alınmaktadır. Nitel araştırma tekniklerinden içerik analizi uygulanan çalışma Ocak 2023 - Mart 2024 tarihleri arasında yayımlanan 545 gönderi arasında yer alan 15 IGTV video içeriği ile sınırlandırılmıştır. IGVT videolarında spiritüel deneyimlerin dini pratik ve manevi arayışlar üzerindeki etkisi değerlendirilmiş, New age akımları içerisinde yer alan grubun Instagram iletilerindeki ritüellerin sosyal ağlarda nasıl tanıtıldığı ele alınmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Medya, Değişen İnançlar, New Age, Tanrısız Ütopya, Binnur Duman Akademi

[*] Dr., Independent Researcher, e-mail: uysalmerve_32@hotmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0001-6377-2081, Ankara, Türkiye
[**] Prof., Ankara University, e-mail: ihsancapcioglu@yahoo.com, orcid.org/0000-0003-4796-5232, Ankara, Türkiye

Introduction

Although belief and rituals have been among the most fundamental needs and activities of humanity throughout history, under the influence of modern parameters such as individualization, rationalization, and pluralism, individuals may turn away from institutional religions and gravitate toward new sets of beliefs and practices. In this process, there is a significant change in the character of religious beliefs and practices as religious preferences become more individual and confined to the private realm. In *Critique of Modernity*, Touraine refers to this transformation, noting that the crisis of religion is reshaping a world that has lost its meaning, and while religion may have fragmented, its components have not disappeared (Touraine, 2000, p. 339; Gürbüz and Aygül, 2021). Indeed, with the diminishing influence of the sacred and the rise of the profane, spiritual beliefs have emerged as new alternatives in humanity's quest for meaning and to fill spiritual voids. Contemporary sociologists of religion, such as Stark, Bainbridge, and Bellah, point to the growing interest in religion and spirituality. Meanwhile, Wilson, Bruce, and Wallis highlight that religion in modern society has undergone profound changes, with the new religious beliefs emerging as a byproduct of secularization (Arslan, 2009, p. 104) This process represents a shift from the classical secularization paradigm, which posited the "extinction of religion," to a new paradigm of "revival" or "resurgence." In fact, Vattimo's work, The Future of Religion (Rorty and Vattimo, 2009), emphasizes that the era of traditional belief systems has come to an end and an era of "subjective religious interpretations" has begun. When it comes to religion, especially within the framework of the concept of "*spiritual responsibility*," approaches where individual preferences and commitments are decisive come to the fore (Bölükbaşı, 2012, p. 39).

This shift in the perception and experience of the sacred has opened the door for new conceptualizations and the emergence of spiritual communities in the context of rediscovering lost meaning. In these communities, namely new age movements (NAMs), the modern individual's idea of *believing without belonging* brings with it the quest for self-realization (*tekâmül*) and ultimate happiness within alternative groups. Ultimately, the "breaking of the spell" of the nineteenth century, despite the appeal of science and technology in the twenty-first century (Beck, 2011, p. 10), has reignited the quest for meaning among individuals whose despair has increased. Along with the growth of NAMs, spiritual groups characterized by features such as alternative religion, mystical tendencies, Eastern mysticism, and new meditative trends have become destinations for modern individuals experiencing existential crises. The increasing interest in mystical orientations, in essence, stems from the impact of secular forces on new religious consciousness in modern society. The dissatisfaction produced by secular cognitive frameworks enables new forms of religious and spiritual teachings to be described in a variety of eclectic terms, including *patchwork faith, half faith, imitation religion, occult tendencies, and Eastern mysticism* (Arslan, 2010, p. 207).

The era following the 1960s, when spiritual tendencies emerged, has been defined through conceptualizations such as *the new wave* (Davie, 1990), *oriental religious awakening* (McLure), *new religious consciousness* (Glock and Bellah), *the reconstruction of religion* (Falk), and *the severe contemporary religious crisis* (Acquaviva). During this time, NAMs have introduced forms of spirituality that emphasize hybridity and innovation as opposed to traditionalism and purification (Arslan, 2006, p. 11). Essentially, the beliefs and rituals of NRMs are examples of spiritual and mystical phenomena based on ancient pagan teachings that have been presented to modern

society (Develi, 2019, p. 60-61). These examples are regarded by their followers as a kind of truth-seeking endeavor (Veer, 2009, p. 1101). In a broader sense, they are believed to represent the effort to quest for the meaning of life and to reach one's true self (Narcıkara, 2018, p. 13).

Yoga and meditation, which are frequently utilized as rituals by NAMs on social media, are presently regarded as preventive health strategies rather than being associated with their religious origins in Eastern religions (Develi, 2019, p. 63). Similarly, blended ideologies such as Transcendental Meditation, Sahaja Yoga, Spiritualism, and Mevlevi Sufism, along with practices like reincarnation, diverge from their origins in the classical teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism (Yitik, 2018, p. 243). The orientation toward these movements, also referred to as alternative sanctities, is increasing daily with the support of internet-based social networks. *The rise in visibility of religion* with the advent of social media (Arslan, 2016, p. 18), as well as the reproduction of religion in its mediatic forms, is described as humanity's third great awakening (Akgül, 2008, p. 63). The view of internet-based social networks as an appropriate medium for NAMs has triggered an online quest for spiritual knowledge and meaning.

Historically, the relationship between the internet, social networks, and religion has gained significant popularity. In this regard, the freedom of sharing, interactivity, user-friendliness, affordability, and accessibility at any time contribute to the growing popularity of new media among NAMs (Cerrah, 2019, p. 1). The design of technology to allow for religious activities—with features such as posting, following, liking, saving, and watching later—along with parameters like NAM websites and social network groups and content sharing are among the indicators of how the secular domain is being spiritualized (Dereli, 2019, p. 98). Indeed, modern healing techniques such as meditation, reiki, quantum, bioenergy, EFT (emotional freedom technique), and personal development-focused life coaching bring NAMs to the forefront. Using these techniques, NAMs build various virtual religious communities, from new cult movements to alternative formations (Dereli, 2019, p. 99), and via virtual networks, offering individuals the opportunity to share their worldviews, find others who share the same opinions, and communicate directly with them. (Şahin, 2019, p. 15). The sharing and announcements by NAMs on digital media platforms, including short videos such as IGVT's one-minute clips, allow individuals to follow online rituals regardless of time and place (Işıklı and Gökbayrak, 2021, p. 108).

1. The Quest for Spiritual Healing in New Age Movements

It is a well-known reality that throughout history, humans have sought to solve the mysteries of existence, to understand themselves, and to find meaning in life (Ulu and Osmanoğlu, 2023, p. 83). However, it appears that the modern age has opened the door to new preferences and orientations in the quest for meaning. Western modern discourses, which are integrated with the mystical understanding of the East, are presented as options that promise to meet the demands of individuals seeking healing through spiritual techniques. These beliefs, which create a legitimate space for themselves based on a crisis of meaning and employ a mystical, irrational, and unique philosophical language, form new age or NAMs (Arslan, 2006, p. 15). These beliefs, which arose as extensions of new religious movements and refer to healing-focused life philosophies, are based on a doctrine that emphasizes religious, mystical experience (Gürbüz and Aygül, 2021, p. 25), which emerged as a counter-culture movement in the 1960s and offered alternative health methods by emphasizing the mind-body connection. new age beliefs, which include alternative therapies such as spiritual development, healing, and wellness, emerged as part of the personal care movement

in the 1970s and grew in influence as part of the holistic health movement in the 1980s, incorporating methods of healing and alternative treatments (Levin, 2022, p. 13). Their emphasis on healing and spiritual contexts has resulted in their perception as esoteric cosmologies or sustainable ideologies that underpin holistic alternative therapies (Levin, 2022, p. 13).

NAMs, also described as a modern revival of antiquity, are seen as a blend of Asian mysticism, influenced by spiritualist structures, and modern physics and science. Their components include meditation and alternative healing techniques such as Hinduism, Zen Buddhism, Sufism, humanistic psychology, Western occultism, enneagrams, reincarnation, and rebirth experiences Therefore, NAMs, which have been popular by being blended with the practices of pantheistic Eastern religions and theology, are defined by Heelas as 'self-religions' (Chryssides, 2007, p. 6). They do not represent a specific period or solely a philosophical structure but refer to a syncretic (*unifying*), eclectic (*selective*) belief system that has become popular in today's world. The quest for holiness of the new age, centered on the individual rather than a god or religious authority, forms the basis of their teachings and practices. In this framework, NAMs can also be defined as beliefs that adopt an individual approach to spiritual matters (Kaya and Aydın, 2013, p. 7).

NAMs are a contemporary transformation of Western esoteric movements and traditions. They are a clear and consistent indicator of secular religion, producing meanings according to individual preferences. NAMs, which reflect a subjective form of religion that emphasizes personal experience, are not traditional religions but rather new beliefs built on modern foundations (Kaya and Aydın, 2013, p. 8). Therefore, NAMs lack an officially registered religion, membership, founder, or leader but instead have ways of thinking that emerge through beliefs and practices. These movements and beliefs gain visibility in new media through activities such as courses, seminars, and camps that do not have a centralized structure, often focusing on promises of spiritual purification, achieving happiness, and returning to the essence (Gürbüz & Aygül, 2021, p. 27). Furthermore, NAMs, which are globalized under the influence of secular trends, place humans at the center, consider God as the source of cosmic energy in the universe, and symbolize inner awakening through the salvation recipes they offer (Pearson, 2002, p. 187-8). They also encompass esoteric beliefs such as theosophy, paganism, shamanism, occultism, and spirituality (Kurt and Demiryürek, 2021, p. 187-8). Thus, NAMs can be defined as both a construction of individual-centered holiness and as a broad movement that expresses an eclectic approach to spiritual matters. In this regard, Hanegraaff acknowledges them as a spiritual subculture and emphasizes that they emerged as a religious belief movement in contemporary societies (Pınarbaşı, 2021, p. 55). NAMs are also included in the "belief" category because they are associated with concepts such as spirituality and mysticism by supporting the individual's quest for self-actualization (Mirza, 2018, p. 19).

On the other hand, because NAMs use a secular and esoteric language, they are considered communities where self-awareness and consciousness develop (Hanegraaff, 1997, p. 552). These communities base many concepts, such as, experiences of inner journeys (*asceticism* meditation, yoga, Reiki, quantum, and astral travel, on beliefs and teachings that have long existed (Develi, 2019, p. 63). Furthermore, such as yoga, retreat, enlightenment, mysticism, spirituality, and Gnosticism, manifest as dynamics with spiritual, profound, and esoteric depth (Yıldız and Meçin, 2014, p. 223). Indeed, NAMs, which have gained popularity in recent times, continue their activities

in various fields, including psychoanalysis, bioenergy, astrology, self-analysis, positive thinking programs, reincarnation, general medicine, shape therapy, hypnosis (Bozkurt, 2022, p. 112), holistic medicine, psychic surgery, root cleansing, and prenatal therapy.

NAMs present themselves with esoteric and fascinating expressions like holistic and synergistic thinking, networking, cosmic energy, and awakening. They collect, package, and offer for individual consumption material that is psychological, therapeutic, magical, somewhat scientific, and difficult to understand (Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, 2006). This consumption represents camps that are formed within the framework of spiritual purification programs and include various training programs. In this cultic medium, the individual tends to consume spiritual commodities through the space provided by communication sources and practices for the purpose of personal development. Individuals participate in healing and purification rituals, meditation sessions, workshops, or camps with themes such as spiritual journeys or returning to the essence (Kurt and Demiryürek, 2021, p. 187-8). In conclusion, NAMs, which emerged in the 21st century to meet the spiritual expectations of individuals, represent beliefs that bear the traces of modernization and are shaped by the secular world. It is understood that thanks to these movements, "healing" has been redefined as the concept of "spiritual healing" in the modern world.

2. Spiritual Healing Techniques in New Age Movements

Spiritual healing techniques enhance an individual's inclination toward mystical, spiritual, and paranormal phenomena, as well as their pursuit of alternative solutions within his realm of meaning. In the modern period, the understanding of healing is presented in a different form than past beliefs, and it adopts new patterns such as subconscious, EFT, and holistic medicine, creating new types of healing, cults, and forms of belief (Arıcı, 2021a, p. 239-241). The uncertainties of modern life make the quest for spiritual healing significant for individuals who do not feel safe (Küçükural et al., 2021, p. 265). Therefore, the concept of "*healing*" occupies a central position in a significant portion of NAMs. Healing practices attempt to fill the spiritual dimension of humans that modern medicine does not sufficiently address through various practices (Doğan, 2020, p. 57). These practices include techniques aimed at self-realization and personal transformation.

Although the quest for healing has been known since ancient times, the meaning attributed to this concept has changed in the modern era. The concept of healing, which is not entirely independent of its past understanding, now places healers—previously referred to with titles such as lead caster, amulet maker, and jinn expeller—into a new mold within a modern-secular structure (Arıcı, 2021b, p. 301-2). In this context, Western-synthesized healing is associated with prayers to Allah (*Al-Shafi*) in Islam to alleviate spiritual distress, baptism in Christianity, and practices like yoga and meditation, which are based on spiritual cosmology in Buddhism and Hinduism (Erten, 2020, p. 394-403.). The understanding of healing, grounded in an eclectic belief system, is considered a new concept under the name of modern healers, targeting not only cognitive and physical healing but also spiritual recovery.

The concept of "spirituality," which has been reinstated by modern healing that has gained popularity in recent years, focuses on an individual and independent journey aimed at developing the inner world to reach personal understanding without being connected to the rules, rituals, or institutions of religion. Spiritual belief forms are individualistic, speak of a direct relationship with

the divine, and often focus on feelings and experiences (Küçükural et al., 2021, p. 173-5). This is a lifestyle that, without encompassing any specific religion or deity, seeks meanings such as love, respect, inspiration, and submission to God, thereby extending beyond adherence to a particular religion. Although modern spirituality is also referred to as "spirituality," "spiritual being," and "spiritualism," it is defined as divine energy that nourishes a personal spirituality through elements like the creator, universal spirit, or God, giving meaning and strength to life (Narcıkara, 2018, p. 13).

In spiritual life, there is talk of a spiritual awakening involving listening to oneself, forgiving, distancing oneself from negative emotions, freeing oneself from egos, and focusing on meaning rather than material concerns. In this sense, NAMs, which recognized one of the examples of meditative and health-oriented spiritual movements today, are being associated with concepts such as *believing without belonging* (Davie, 1990), *the de-institutionalization of religion, and the rise of the post-traditional era* (Hervieu-Leger, 2000) on the basis of offering spirituality determined by individual preferences and commitments.

The growing embrace of spirituality is mostly due to those who, in their quest for meaning, have forfeited their spiritual centers and purposes for existence. At this point, *modern spirituality techniques* fill the void of a life deprived of meaning. Spirituality, understood as having a similar instrumental function to religion, involves the process of searching for things perceived as sacred (Narcıkara, 2018, p. 16). Spirituality offers alternative ways beyond individuals' beliefs, worldviews, or values to achieve the integrity of mind-body-spirit. Yoga, meditation, and other relaxation techniques and exercises have become popular ways to experience spirituality due to a growing interest in Eastern ideas.

Spiritual healing groups, using alternative and holistic medicine treatment methods, which replace conventional medical treatments, offer traditional medicine the opportunity to exist anew in modern forms. Indeed, the traditional and mystical understanding of medicine in Eastern and Indian countries like India, China, and Tibet is synthesized with the ancient healing concepts of the Islamic world and transformed into modern forms (Doğan, 2020, p. 65). These alternative formations, which have gained visibility and recognition through digitalization, are considered health activities that attract the individual who has felt isolated in modern societies.

The continuity of religious groups' existence in harmony with the digital environment is an indication that the religious and the secular have intertwined (Karaarslan, 2015, p. 29-30). Regarding the unique possibilities and dynamics of religiousizing the secular space, Campbell classifies the internet into four categories: a spiritual environment enabling religious experience, a cyberspace suitable for religious use, a tool facilitating the continuation of religious or religious practices, and a technology affirming religious life (Campbell, 2005, p. 9-14). The transformation of digital communication tools into an indispensable part of daily life, the presentation of religious knowledge through digital media, the proselytizing activities of religious institutions on digital platforms (Çuhadar, 2021, p. 69), and the opportunity for online access all demonstrate the relationship between religion and digitalization. Thus, groups that can transfer their offline religious practices into the online environment are emerging in the digital world (Dereli, 2020, p. 89).

Digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube, which have a large number of active users on social media networks, as well as virtual rooms like TikTok in online spaces, are becoming widespread means of disseminating information through religious symbols and images (Oyman, 2016, p. 131 ; Dağ, 2021). In digital environments, people perform the actions and activities they exhibit in the real world, carrying their traditional communities into the digital space and forming digital religious communities through the sharing of similar views and thoughts in digital spaces (Türk and Demirci, 2016, p. 5). Creating a virtual community in a digital environment is achieved through having a nickname, interaction among members, continuity, social control, and members' interest and participation in group activities (Dawson, 2004).

The evolution from institutional forms of religions to individual spirituality and digitalization has enabled the emergence of groups participating in healing rituals on social networks. Spiritual movements, as groups active in the digital world, are spreading in Turkey as healing-focused formations. These include groups such as Sahaja Yoga (Bahadur and Çapcıoğlu, 2021b), Ferhan Sezer Golden Age Healing Techniques (Bahadur and Çapcıoğlu, 2021a) with thematic expansions such as subconscious, NLP, quantum, bioenergy, yoga, and examples that use spiritual energy and healing techniques intensively on social media networks. Participation in these groups is provided through live broadcasts on social networks.

Similarly, Binnur Duman, the subject of this study, describes herself as a spiritual counselor who conducts studies on the spiritual journey, asserting that prior to her spiritual pursuits, she worked in the fields of chemistry, physics, and behavioral sciences. She expresses that she has used her intuitive abilities and healing powers, which she has felt since childhood, as a positive contribution throughout her life and developed them through spiritual maturation and wisdom education. Accordingly, she feels the awareness that the healing power she claims to have inherited from her ancestors and that has existed within her has added to her life in every aspect, and in the spiritual journey to which she feels she belongs, she has dedicated herself to serving people. She also emphasizes that her aim is to increase the number of good-hearted people who possess positive thinking. Duman's posts reveal that she has been providing training in various educational institutions and universities for approximately 33 years. She notes that, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, due to social distancing rules and restrictions, she conducted collective meditative practices through social media to contribute positively to her followers. Binnur Duman offers training in holistic healing, integrative health, Reiki Master, Grand Master, quantum life coaching, spiritual counseling, Sufism and Islamic mysticism, alchemy, shamanic healing systems, ThetaHealing, and mindfulness. It is understood that she provides basic training at four levels, with the fourth level being described as the master stage. This phase, she claims, contains all teachings requiring astral work. In addition, Duman argues that, with the spread of spiritual movements in the digital world, she has actively started using her YouTube and Instagram pages to reach more people, sharing videos and training on social media platforms, making announcements through these applications, and contributing to spiritual evolution with her book *Resonance: Destiny Favors the Brave* (Duman, 2024) .

Within this particular framework, this study aims to examine the Binnur Duman Academy (BDA), a prominent example of NAMs, from various perspectives. BDA is a spiritual movement established by Binnur Duman, who has established a distinct healing system as a field of spiritual activity, is well-known for her psychic surgery and seven-generation family tree studies, claims to

provide healing through her return-to-essence retreat camp and spiritual transformation programs, and describes herself as a spiritual specialist. In this context, the study addresses how spiritual healing techniques, which spark curiosity and interest through IGTV videos shared on Instagram, are introduced and how rituals are handled in the organized healing groups.

3. Methodology

The research model is structured using the qualitative research method. As is well known, content analysis employing qualitative data studies involves careful, detailed, and systematic examination and interpretation of a certain amount of material, with the effort to identify patterns, themes, assumptions, and meanings. Data analyses are designed to code content that can be used to answer research questions. Therefore, content analysis basically relies on a process of coding and data interpretation (Berg and Lune, 2019, p. 344-345). In this framework, the aim of the study is to reach data-driven relational descriptions, and through the applied content analysis, the content shared on social media is examined under three main categories.

The universe and sample of the study are limited to IGTV videos shared on Instagram between January 2023 and March 2024. Among the 545 posts on Binnur Duman's Instagram account, which has 813,000 followers, 15 IGTV videos were included in the research sample. In the study, in addition to analyzing this data over a one-year period, a search model using keywords obtained from the literature review was employed. These videos were categorized under four headings and classified by establishing semantic relationships among them. The categories created were analyzed under specific themes based on the shares in the content. The categories identified within this scope are: "the reconstruction of the metaphysical order: erasing the traces of the past," "therapeutic religions: immediate/now/here," and "extraordinary power: channel/connection." These themes were created within the framework of the characteristics defined by Regis Dericgueborg for the concept of healing, which he describes as the religion of healing or therapeutic religion (Küçükkural et al., 2021, p. 266).

4. Findings

Upon examining 15 IGTV videos out of the 545 posts on Binnur Duman's Instagram account, which has 813,000 followers, it is evident that each piece of content is shared within a framework associated with specific themes related to spiritual teachings. The themes concerning the relationship between the digital sphere and spiritual experiences, encompassing alternative religions, can be addressed under three main headings.

4.1. The Reconstruction of the Metaphysical Order: Erasing Traces of the Past

In new age beliefs, features such as emphasizing mystical experience, establishing a direct connection with God or an absolute being, rejecting a rational approach, and highlighting the millennium or happiness phase are appealing to the modern individual. In this context, the information obtained in the research on new age beliefs and their effects on individuals reveals the functioning of spiritual movements. Essentially, from past to present, people have resorted to various rituals and practices to fulfill desires or seek healing within a religious or spiritual framework. These practices, produced in modern forms, claim to apply a healing system aimed at erasing traces of the past and achieving purification. One such figure is Binnur Duman who

promotes a healing approach aimed at erasing traces of the past and suggests that even familial ties from 7-8 generations ago impact our present lives. In fact, in an Instagram IGTV video where she shares statements like "*You can cancel past contracts, you can purify from past karmas,*" and "*You are the only connection between the past and the future,*" (Binnur Duman, 2023b) she expresses that deep spiritual purification will occur by cleansing the negative elements rooted in the past. It is understood that the growing popularity of such practices, similar to traditional folk religion's syncretic practices like lead pouring, and their presentation as a spiritual remedy) (Okutan, 2017, p. 28), have triggered the quests for healing.

Binnur Duman constructs her teachings around themes such as "finding your own reality," "authentic life," "searching for the right path," and "deep truth" under the practice of new age beliefs. In this framework, she suggests to her followers, "*Discipline your own mind!*" as a solution for situations where the negative perspectives produced by deeply-rooted thought patterns cause issues. This solution, which she calls a "spiritual fast," is also described as a miraculous practice for new beginnings that open new doors in life. Indeed, in an IGVT post titled "*I am aware that everything starts and ends with me, that I am the cause of everything. I thank you for everything I have and for this life given to me.*" There are 30 comments in this context. Among these comments, followers' remarks such as "you are our guide" and "praise be" stand out. It is understood that Duman leads her followers through short online videos, promising to cleanse negative thoughts and release the burdens of the past.

In an IGVT video shared with the caption "*Are you ready to embark on a journey of self-discovery, a journey from yourself to yourself? If your answer is yes, write it in the comments!*" (Binnur Duman, 2023c) It is understood that the aim is to instill awakening and awareness in individuals on their journey to becoming their true selves. Comments such as "yes, I'm ready," "thank God," "may this journey be with love," "whatever you say, master," "you have become my lighthouse," and "I have been reborn from my ashes" draw attention to this post. As seen in these examples, Duman's advice to individuals seeking "self-realization," a popular motto of NAMs, begins with *healing*. According to her, *healing* occurs through the acceptance of the unity of the past and the present and cleansing from this reality. Self-realization through mental, physical, and spiritual practices offers a subjective experience like a new age tonic to wounded souls. It is understood that Duman's approach to healing, which includes shamanic elements and who describes herself as a shaman woman, is aimed at helping people feel good and live the rest of their lives in happiness and peace. In the post "*How will we bring out the shamanic healer within us?*" (Binnur Duman, 2023e) it is stated that everyone has a healing power within them, and by uncovering this true essence, both self-healing and the healing of others can be achieved.

Binnur Duman, who provides online services to individuals using networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), and YouTube in the digital sphere as a spiritual movement, has been integrated into the online world as an example of YÇA and the search for alternative sacredness. Thus, through religious social networks that change according to circumstances in terms of individuality, depth, and fluidity (Dereli, 2019, p. 100), it has mediated modern individuals' return to the sacred, departing from a singular, static religious community. The quest for sacredness aimed at filling the spiritual void of modern humans is supported by online content produced by spiritual currents and movements. Indeed, spiritual movements, which bring new

forms and content to spiritual and mystical phenomena, offer new alternatives to individuals in search, through healing/health application techniques.

4.2. Therapeutic Religions: Immediate/Now/Here

The idea, expressed by NAMs, that humanity will undergo a spiritual leap and that a transpersonal cosmic awareness will emerge is based on the prediction that we are on the threshold of a new era (Karaosmanoğlu, 2009, p. 98). NAMs, which are nourished by esoteric traditions and composed of claims focused on healing (Levin, 2022, p. 7), place special emphasis on healing practices as a means of recovery. Essentially, in new age beliefs, the spiritual realm is shaped, directly or indirectly, within the framework of practices that have healing or therapeutic effects. Dericgueaborg's description of a "healing religion" or "therapeutic religion" is based on the thesis that an individual has full authority over themselves and that this is made possible through their own experience. Therapeutic religions claim to aim at healing the physical or mental aspects of life through *immediate/now/here* recovery, thereby repairing a damaged life (Küçükkural et al., 2021, p. 265-8). Indeed, the IGTV videos on Binnur Duman's Instagram account, featuring posts like "*You are here to be yourself*" and "*You are here to live the life you deserve,*" (Binnur Duman, 2023k) align with the definitions of healing religion or therapeutic religion. In this context, a comment made on a post about a return-to-essence camp—"Gratitude for your presence, teacher; I salute the greatness within you; I set my intention"—is particularly noteworthy (Binnur Duman, 2023j). In new age beliefs and spiritual movements, it appears that participants in practices such as therapy, yoga, and camp are motivated by the desire to achieve some benefit "*now and here*."

The understanding of healing in new age beliefs is grounded on Kohut's idea that the individual develops a sense of belonging and unity with the world throughout his life in self-psychology (Amarasingam, 2009, p. 282). In this context, Binnur Duman, who gained attention with her post, "*You are ready to embark on the journey of finding yourself—from yourself to yourself; if your answer is yes, write it in the comments,*" (Binnur Duman, 2023d) invites her followers to introspection and to question certain aspects of their lives. Participants in BDA's trainings state that the aim to be achieved through therapeutic activities is to activate the healing mechanism of the followers and to discover their own healing power.

The new media is an important instrument in promoting virtual communities that distribute health and healing. The BDA community, which utilizes teachings aimed at spreading the messages of religions, also uses the opportunities provided by new media to reach a wide audience) (Gündüz, 2010, p. 46). Essentially, since the phenomenon of a return to the sacred opened the door to the formation of alternative religious communities, many virtual communities appeared in the media with structures offering healthy living suggestions. Descriptions such as the re-establishment of religion, the great awakening, and the return of the sacred have brought NAMs to light as movements filled with a variety of spiritual themes, and this increased visibility has been realized through mass communication tools, especially new media.

The emergence of NAMs and spiritual movements has brought about the competition between religions over spirituality, the prioritization of the individual's need for healing in their private life (Sevinç, 2014, p. 115), as well as the incorporation of belief, ritual, and worship forms into

religiously themed products on a voluntary basis. This data suggests that NAMs have shifted traditional religions' salvation teachings, which emphasize the afterlife, to a ground that emphasizes improving life in the present.

4.3. Extraordinary Power: Channeling/Connection

Followers of the BDA community believe that a guide is assigned to each individual at the moment of their birth, and this guide stays with the person throughout their life. In addition to this guide, who provides spiritual guidance at various stages of life, individuals also need other entities (Bozkurt, 2022, p. 109). The role of this guide is to offer spiritual support to the individual (Uysal, 2015, p. 33). Essentially, it is stated that existential tensions arise with changes in the individual's life cycle in NAMS, and over time, spiritual quests develop to cope with these tensions (Özkan, 2006, p. 138).

The post titled "*Have you lost your way? I can help you find it*" (Binnur Duman, 2023i) highlights the need for a spiritual guide, the presence of spiritual leadership to address this need, and the individual is not alone. However, in NAMs, which typically lack a specific founding leader, the existence of a *channeling/connection* between the individual and their healing is considered important. In spiritual practices, the concept of a "channel" is sometimes associated with access to specific knowledge, while in other cases, it is used in relation to healing. Indeed, with the phrase "I can help you find your way," a connection is established between those seeking healing and the spiritual healing experience through healing energy, cosmic energy, and universal life energy.

In the post shared as "psychic surgery and seven-generation family tree work," the experience of encountering healing energy is described as "*a turning point in life, a milestone.*" (Binnur Duman, 2023a). In the comments related to this post, requests for healing are expressed, and a contact number is provided. It is stated that healing is a practice using holistic medicine and energy anatomy that improves people's lives in five dimensions: spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, and existential. In this context, it is understood that online healing practices are conducted through expressions such as deep cleansing, purification, and establishing connections by opening energetic channels. It is also understood that the techniques applied in self-return, retreat, and spiritual transformation programs aim to support individuals, particularly during challenging times, in aspects where they feel spiritually lacking and to provide answers to their quest. These techniques, which seek to spiritually comfort the individual, elevate personal energy, and repair the wounded self, seem to make these practices appealing.

Indeed, (Binnur Duman, 2023f) in her post titled "*Make an intention for your new life and get rid of all the blockages that are not good for you; do not serve your development, delay you, and hinder you,*" states that a person can get rid of his/her blockages through psychic surgery and seven-generation family tree training. It is understood that she offers these trainings to those who attend her camps and considers these educational sessions as a turning point for the participants. According to Duman, this is a return-to-self or retreat camp focused on healing the weights and karmic knots that we have carried with us from the past to the present. In a post titled "*This life is yours; you are here to be yourself; you are the architect of your own destiny,*" (Binnur Duman, 2023h) which is shared in connection with the seven-generation family tree training, Binnur Duman calls on her followers: "*Get up, awaken, ignite the light within you, and say, 'I am here,' and raise your level of consciousness; contribute to the whole.*" Under this post, there are comments from followers

such as "I salute the greatness within you, I choose to let go of everything, and I am deeply grateful."

A comment was made under a segment taken from an IGTV video published during the return-to-self and retreat camp, stating, "We don't need any miracles; we are here to remember that we are the miracle" (Binnur Duman, 2023g). Additionally, comments such as "Every place where love and compassion are spoken is heaven; I accept this and give endless thanks" were made in response to this post. These examples demonstrate that followers perceive the teachings and posts shared from the Binnur Duman account as a form of spiritual healing and as a way to comprehend the realm of existence beyond our senses (Brennan, 2010, p. 24).

In her post titled "*You don't need a miracle because you are a miracle yourself*," (Binnur Duman, 2023l) argues that everything is an illusion and a simulation, sending her followers the message, "The only truth is you; you are here to be yourself." This reflects a typical example of individualized beliefs on social media. Indeed, for spiritual, therapeutic, and healing practices associated with individualized belief to achieve the desired outcome, a person must control their life and step into an extraordinary life experience (Küçükkural et al., 2021, p. 284-5).

Binnur Duman draws attention to the "new moon" practice, which she describes as an essential for new beginnings, and in her Instagram post titled "*Contract Cancellation, Healing the Past, and Oath Breaking*," (Binnur Duman, 2024) she gives the following advice to her followers: "Delayed spiritual contracts, fateful ties, messages from our family and roots, and all psychic energies are a burden on our back. Therefore, we must leave behind everything that prevents a new beginning." When examining the comments on the post, phrases such as "I received it, I accepted it, I received it with all my heart, I received it for the good of myself and the whole" are frequently repeated.

Discussion and Conclusion

The training sessions featured in Binnur Duman Academy's social media activities, the techniques applied in these sessions, and the expressions used appear to align with the typical characteristics of NAMs. As seen in the example of Binnur Duman Academy, the teachings of NAMs encompass health and healing practices such as yoga, meditation, aura work, holistic medicine, reiki, and subconscious cleansing, as well as alternative orientations, including modern interpretations of Paganism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, although they are not explicitly defined as rituals. Examples of meditation, spiritual maturation, and spiritual experiences serve as evidence that these teachings represent a modern form of religious ritual. The occurrence of rituals on social media points to a technology-based and supported spirituality (Haberli, 2013, p. 19-20; Haberli, 2014). Indeed, the main factor driving the modern individual's preference for spiritual movements and beliefs in their quest for meaning is social environments. New rituals implemented under the name of healthy living teachings are carried to the offline world through online environments and applications (Dereli, 2020, p. 305) and mediate functional roles. Modern societies are increasingly witnessing examples where neo-paganist and Indian-origin religions are being presented their worship forms as sports and health teachings, such as yoga, reiki, and meditation. Despite scientific developments and rationality permeating every aspect of life, individuals' quest for meaning finds

a place in healing communities, and ultimately, the relationship between the rise of spiritual movements and the digital world is strengthening.

Instagram, as a social interaction application, enhances its appeal by offering features such as following, commenting, liking, and direct messaging, independent of the physical environment, thereby creating a basis for spiritual pursuits. In terms of the relationship between the digital world and spiritual experiences, content centered on mysticism, spiritual experiences, and the quest for eternity supports the orientation towards healing communities. Similarly, global structural transformations and the problems created by the secular-sacred dichotomy have also revived interest in spiritual movements. Consequently, individuals seeking to handle real-life challenges and alleviate existential concerns and tensions turn to virtual practices that offer spiritual participation at minimal or no expense. These practices operationalize spiritualism or spiritual transformation, the defining characteristic of NAMs, by giving a new form to ancient pagan teachings and religious rituals within the information society. NAMs, which create space for spirituality, appear as spiritual healing communities in social media platforms, preferred by those searching for holistic health solutions and promising individuals seeking meaning a way to escape loneliness and past blockages.

In conclusion, religious knowledge, sharing practices, and participation in online groups and live broadcasts in the digital age occur through technology-supported, internet-based, religiously themed, and spiritually oriented communication. These new spiritual practices that serve as the basis for such communication lay the groundwork for the digitalization of religion or spirituality, bringing with them alternative virtual group formations. The BDA community, which is the subject of the study, similarly shares content on its Instagram page with 813,000 followers. When examining 617 selected posts and 15 IGTV videos, it is evident that spiritual teachings such as psychic surgery, seven-generation family trees, auras, hypnosis, and spiritual cleansing are prominent. Indeed, the main goal of the BDA is "new awakenings in a brand-new era." It is understood that the practices carried out through spiritual healing techniques, presented with themes such as mental cleansing, the womb, forgiveness, and wish fulfillment work, are categorized under three main themes. In the study, these themes are identified as the reconstruction of the metaphysical order: erasing the traces of the past; therapeutic religions: immediate /now/ here; and extraordinary power: channeling/connection. Short videos, approximately one minute long, were analyzed, and comments made by followers about these videos were included. As a result, it has been observed that the meaning-seeking of individuals in secularized and increasingly individualized societies is nourished by new belief systems, supported by rituals related to health, sports, and healing. Individualized quasi-religious structures, distanced from institutional religion, come to light through social networks and facilitate the reattachment of individuals to a collectivity. Although these virtual communities, which base their teachings on yoga and meditation, claim that they are not a religious group, it is seen that they are nourished by religious teachings, a secular spiritualist framework, and an individual-centered understanding of sacredness.

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MEDİAD

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Dijital Platformlarda Değişen İnançlar:
Tanrısız Ütopya Binnur Duman Akademi Örneği

Merve BAHADUR*
İhsan ÇAPCIOĞLU**

Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

Geleneksel dinin etkisinin zayıfladığı modern toplumlarda, yeni dinsel formlar ve ruhsal arayışlar ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu yeni dinsel formlar, iletişim araçlarının yaygınlaşmasıyla birlikte insanların dikkatlerini daha çok çekmektedir. Bu bağlamda spiritüel şifa grupları olarak adlandırılan ve modern dünyanın yeni ruhsallık tarzlarını temsil eden önemli bir akım olarak Yeni Çağ Hareketi olarak öne çıkmaktadır.

Spiritüel şifa grupları senkretik ve esnek bir yapıya sahip olup, spiritüelliği barındıran pagan kültürden ve doğulu mistik dinlerden oluşan hareketleri kapsamaktadır. Seküler bir nitelik taşıyan bu hareketler, anlam krizleri yaşayan insanlara ruhsal (spiritüel) söylemleriyle kendilerini sunmakta; reenkarnasyon, karma ve paganizm gibi paranormal olguları barındıran eklektik bir sistem oluşturmaktadır. Bu gruplar ezoterik ve büyülü sözcüklerle örüntülenmiş temalar kullanarak şifalanma ve arınma ritüellerine özel bir önem atfetmektedir. Bu ritüeller, insanların fiziksel, zihinsel ve ruhsal iyilik halini artırmayı amaçlayan modern bir şifacılığı temsil etmektedir.

Son yıllarda hızla artan ve popülaritesi ile dikkat çeken spiritüel şifa grupları yoga, meditasyon, öze dönüş ve arınma gibi çeşitli iyileşme tekniklerini içermektedir. Bu teknikler, bireylerin anlam arayışlarını gidermelerine ve geçmişle olan bağlantılarını temizlemelerine yardımcı olmak amacıyla işlevsel bir sistem sunmaktadır. Bu sistem, sadece fiziksel sağlığı değil, aynı zamanda zihinsel ve ruhsal sağlığı da önemseyen bütünsel bir çerçeveyi benimsediği iddiasındadır.

Kutsal ve seküler olanın iç içe geçtiği dijital teknoloji ve iletişim araçlarıyla temsil edilen söz konusu sistemi öneren dijital platformlar, bu tür spiritüel pratiklerin yaygınlaşmasında ve daha geniş kitlelere ulaşmasında önemli rol oynamaktadır. Özellikle sosyal medya ve internet siteleri, bireylerin bu ritüellere kolayca erişim sağlamalarına ve bu pratikleri kendi yaşamlarına entegre etmelerine katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bu süreç, bireylerin sadece fiziksel sağlıklarını değil, aynı zamanda zihinsel ve ruhsal sağlıklarını da önemsemelerini önermektedir. Modern toplumda teknoloji destekli dijital araçların yaygınlaşması, bireylerin spiritüel pratiklere yönelik ilgisini artırmakta ve bu alandaki

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* Dr., Independent Researcher, e-mail: uysalmerve_32@hotmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0001-6377-2081, Ankara, Türkiye
** Prof., Ankara University, e-mail: ihsancapcioglu@yahoo.com, orcid.org/0000-0003-4796-5232, Ankara, Türkiye

farkındalığı genişletmektedir. Spiritüel şifa tekniklerinin yer aldığı dijital sistemin aktörleri, bireylerin manevi arayışlarına cevap verdiğini ve onların yaşam kalitelerini artırdığını ileri sürmektedir.

Toplumun iletişim teknolojileriyle kuşatıldığı günümüzde, 1980'lerden itibaren yaşanan ve yoğunluğu gittikçe artan teknolojik gelişmeler temsil ettiği dijitalleşme süreci, manevi arayışların yoğunlaşmasına neden olmaktadır. Dijitalleşme, bireylerin hayatlarını anlamlandırdığı ve dini pratiklerini çevrimiçi ortamlarda yeniden ürettiği dijital bir *habitus* oluşturmaktadır. Bu *habitus*, özellikle geleneksel yapılardan uzak doğu dinlerine, tarikatlardan cemaatlere kadar geniş bir yelpazede temsil imkanı bulmaktadır. Paganizm, Hinduizm, ezoterizm, mistisizm ve okültizm gibi kurumsallaşmış dinlerin dışında alternatif inanç biçimleri dijitalleşmeyle ön plana çıkmaktadır. Böylece bireyler, mistik, akıldışı ve paranormal unsurları barındıran yeni spiritüel şifa teknik ve deneyimlere ilgi duymaktadır.

Dijitalleşme süreciyle birlikte dinin dijital dünyada yer alması, temel ihtiyaçlar, anlam sistemi ve toplumsal bir aktivite olan inanç olgusu, modern çağda yeni dini temayüller ve yeni inanışlar çerçevesinde belirlenmektedir. Bu yeni inanışlar, Doğu'nun mistik anlayışı ve Batı'nın modern söylemiyle birleşerek spiritüel şifacılık adı altında bireylerin taleplerini karşılayan unsurlar olarak görülmektedir. Böylece bireyler, şifalanma ve arınma ritüellerine, meditasyon seanslarına, atölyelere veya öze dönüş gibi spiritüel yolculuk temalı kamplara katılım sağlamaktadır. Günümüzde dinlerin kurumsal formlarından bireysel spiritüelliğe doğru evrilmesi ve dijitalleşmesiyle, sosyal ağlarda meditasyon ve şifa ritüellerine katılım sağlayan gruplar ortaya çıkmıştır. Dijital dünyada görünürlüğü artan bu hareketler (*self spirituality*), Batı toplumundan aktarılan sağlık ve şifa odaklı oluşumlar olarak yayılmaktadır. Bu hareketler, yeni inanç biçimlerinin dijital dünyada temsiline ve tanıtımına yön vermektedir.

Dijital çağda, internet ortamında gerçekleştirilen dini bilgi arayışı, paylaşımı, çevrimiçi gruplara veya canlı yayınlara katılım pratikleri, sanal dini iletişimler aracılığıyla gerçekleşmektedir. Bu iletişim tarzı, sosyal medya ağları sayesinde Dünyada ve Türkiye'de Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube gibi dijital platformlar aracılığıyla çevrimiçi alanlarda dine ait sembol ve görüntülerle yaygın bilgilendirme araçlarına dönüşmektedir. İnsanlar, dijital ortamlarda gerçek dünyadaki eylem ve aktivitelerini rahatlıkla gerçekleştirmekte, ait oldukları geleneksel cemaatleri dijital ortama taşıyarak benzer görüş ve düşüncedeki insanlarla dijital dini topluluklarını oluşturmaktadır. Böylece günümüz insanının anlam arayışında spiritüel hareket ve inançları tercih etmesinde en etken faktörün sosyal mecralar olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Neo paganist ve Hint menşeli dinlerin ibadet şeklinin modern toplumda yoga, meditasyon adı altında spor ve sağlık öğretisi olarak sunulması gittikçe yaygınlaşmaktadır. Bu çerçevede, Yeni Çağ Hareketi ve benzeri hareketler, bireylerin günlük hayatlarında spiritüel ihtiyaçlarını karşılamalarına yardımcı olmakta ve onlara anlam arayışlarında rehberlik etmektedir.

Yöntem

Dijitalleşmenin dini algı ve pratikler üzerindeki etkilerini ve bu süreç içerisinde ortaya çıkan yeni spiritüel arayışları konu edinen bu çalışmada din olgusu, teknolojik gelişmeler ve kitle iletişim araçlarının yaygınlaşmasıyla dijital platformlarda kendine yer bulmuştur. Bu platformlar aracılığıyla dönüşen dini algı ve pratikler, sosyal medya uygulaması Instagram'da yer alan Binnur Duman Akademi adlı spiritüel grubun etkileşimleri ve ritüelleri çerçevesinde ele alınmaktadır. Binnur Duman Akademi, 545 gönderi ve 813 bin takipçisi ile dikkat çekmekte ve takipçilerine psişik ameliyat, öze

dönüş ve inziva kampı gibi çeşitli uygulamalar sunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Ocak 2023 - Mart 2024 tarihleri arasında paylaşılan gönderiler arasından seçilen 15 IGTV videosu ile sınırlandırılmıştır. Nitel araştırma tekniklerinden içerik analizi uygulanarak, Instagram iletilerinde yer alan içerikler ve bu içeriklerin sunumunda uygulanan teknikler gözlemlenmiş ve iki ana tema belirlenmiştir. Bu temalar; spiritüel dönüşüm programı ve öze dönüş inziva kampı olarak adlandırılmıştır. Ayrıca, söz konusu iki ana temanın dışında metafizik düzenin yeniden inşası, geçmişin izlerini silme, terapötik din ve olağanüstü güç gibi üç alt tema tespit edilmiştir. Grubun paylaşımlarında kullanılan teknikler ve icra edilen ritüellerin sosyal ağlarda nasıl tanıtıldığı üzerine odaklanılmıştır. New age akımları içerisinde yer alan ve Instagram iletilerinde kullanılan içerikler, çevrimiçi ritüel ve spiritüel deneyimlerin görünürlüğünü artırmıştır. Grubun Instagram iletilerinde kullanılan içerikler, bireylerin çok yönlü spiritüel arayışlarına cevap üretmekte, Instagram'da yayımlanan IGTV videolarında spiritüel deneyimlerin nasıl icra edildiği, dini pratik ve manevi arayışlar üzerindeki etkisi, modern formlarla üretilmiş bu içerik ve gönderilerle kapsamlı bir spiritüel deneyim sunmaktadır.

Yeni inanç biçimlerini temsil eden, spiritüel yolculuk adı altında çalışmalar yapan ve kendisini ruhsal danışman olarak tanımlayan Binnur Duman, çocukluğundan beri var olduğunu iddia ettiği sezgisel yeteneğini ve şifa gücünü yaşamı boyunca işine pozitif katkı olarak kullandığını, sonradan aldığı ruhsal tekamül ve bilgelik eğitimleriyle ise bu gücünü geliştirdiğini belirtmektedir. Kendinde var olan ve atalarından geçen söz konusu şifa gücünün yaşamı boyunca her alanda kendine farkındalık kattığını ileri süren Binnur Duman, holistik şifa, bütünsel sağlık, Reiki Master - Grand Master, kuantum yaşam koçluğu, ruhsal spiritüel danışman, sufizm ve tasavvuf eğitimleri, simyacı, şaman şifa sistemleri, ThetaHealing, mindfulness gibi eğitimler vermekte ve YouTube kanalının yanı sıra Instagram sayfasını da aktif olarak kullanmaktadır.

Binnur Duman Akademi'nin Instagram iletilerinde yer alan ve dikkat çeken paylaşımlardan biri psişik ameliyattır. Psişik ameliyat, fiziksel ameliyat gerektirmeyen spiritüel bir yöntem olarak nitelendirilmektedir. Bu ritüel, bireylerin ruhsal iyileşmesini ve geçmişten gelen olumsuz enerjilerin temizlenmesini amaçlamaktadır. Öze dönüş programı ise, bireylerin içsel yolculuğunu keşfetmelerini ve kendilerini yeniden tanımlamalarını sağlamaktadır. Program, bireylerin ruhsal gelişimini destekleyen meditasyon ve farkındalık tekniklerini içermektedir. Instagram'da yayınlanan IGTV videolarında grup liderleri ve katılımcılar ritüelleri nasıl icra ettiklerini açıklamaktadır. Videolar, bireylerin deneyimlerini paylaştığı ve spiritüel dönüşüm süreçlerini zenginleştirdiği içeriklerle doludur. Söz konusu videoların, takipçilerin gruba yönelik ilgisini artırdığı gözlemlenmiştir.

Sonuç

Çalışma, dijitalleşme sürecinin dini pratikler ve spiritüel arayışlar üzerindeki etkilerini Binnur Duman Akademi örneğinde ortaya koymaktadır. Dijital platformlar, bireylerin manevi arayışlarını destekleyen çeşitli yeni alanlar sunmaktadır. Binnur Duman Akademi örneği, yeni inanç biçimlerinin dijital dünyada nasıl temsil edildiğini ve sosyal ağ Instagram'da nasıl sunulduğunu göstermektedir. Bu çalışma modern dönemde değişen yeni inanç biçimlerinin birey merkezli kutsallık oluşumundaki etkisini, karma, tekamül, okültizm, ezoterizm ile temellendirilmiş ritüellerin sosyal ağlarda yaygınlaştığını göstermektedir.

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MEDİAD

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Digital Media and Islamic Matchmaking in Indonesia:
The Case of "Kelas Jodoh"

Acep MUSLIM*
Yessika NURMASARI**
Lina Kamila RAHMASARI***

Abstract

The increase of religiosity in Indonesia, which has coincided with the development of digital media, has led to the emergence of various services that incorporate religious values, including in the areas of education and the facilitation of the marriage process. This study examines "Kelas Jodoh" (KJ) or "Matchmaking Class" as a case study to understand the role of digital media-supported Islamic matchmaking organizers within the context of existing Islamic matchmaking practices in Indonesia, particularly against the backdrop of rising personal piety and the use of digital media. It investigates how Islamic values governing pre-marital male-female relationships interact with the technological affordances of digital media, contributing to the evolution of digital religion. The study applies a qualitative case study method, with data collected through interviews with the KJ owner and manager, as well as with members (KJ's participants). The findings indicate that KJ represents a fusion of increasing Islamic piety among urban Muslims and the growth of digital media, thus continuing to shape and expand the horizon of digital religion. The study also demonstrates how KJ's use of digital tools and its mediator role reflect practices akin to those of modern Islamic movements such as the Tarbiyah group.

Keywords: Digital Religion, Islamic Matchmaking, Kelas Jodoh, Indonesia

Endonezya'da Dijital Medya ve İslami Evlilik Uygulamaları:
"Kelas Jodoh" Örneği

Öz

Dindarlığın artışı, dijital medyanın gelişimiyle paralel olarak, dini değerleri içeren çeşitli hizmetlerin ortaya çıkmasına yol açmıştır; bunlar arasında eğitim ve evlilik sürecinin kolaylaştırılması da bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışma Endonezya'daki mevcut İslami tanışma uygulamaları bağlamında, dijital medya destekli İslami tanışma organizatörlerinin rolünü anlamak için "Kelas Jodoh" adlı siteyi bir durum çalışması olarak ele almakta ve özellikle dijital medya kullanımına bağlı olarak artış gösteren dindarlık tutumları ekseninde bu yapıyı analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, evlilik öncesi erkek-kadın ilişkilerini yöneten İslami değerlerin dijital medyanın teknolojik olanaklarıyla nasıl etkileşime girdiğini ve dijital dinin evrimine katkıda bulunduğunu araştırmaktadır. Çalışma, KJ'nin sahibi ve yöneticisi ile yapılan röportajlar ve üyelerle (KJ'nin katılımcıları) toplanan verilerle bir vaka çalışması yöntemi uygulamaktadır. Bulgular, KJ'nin kentsel Müslümanlar arasında artan dindarlık ve dijital medyanın büyümesinin bir birleşimini temsil ettiğini ve böylece dijital dinin şekillendirmeye ve

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* Assist. Prof., M.A., Acep Muslim, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, e-mail: acepmuslim@uinsgd.ac.id, orcid.org/0000-0002-1353-5368, Bandung, Indonesia

** Assist. Prof., M.A., Yessika Nurmasari, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, e-mail: y.nurmasari@uinsgd.ac.id, orcid.org/0000-0002-3349-4786, Bandung, Indonesia

*** Assist. Prof., M.A., Lina Kamila Rahmasari, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, e-mail: linakamila@uinsgd.ac.id, orcid.org/0009-0002-1587-5603, Bandung, Indonesia

genişletmeye devam ettiğini göstermektedir. Çalışma ayrıca, KJ'nin dijital araçları kullanma ve arabulucu rolünün Tarbiyah grubu gibi modern İslami hareketlerin uygulamalarına benzediğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Introduction

In the past three decades, there has been a noticeable increase in religiosity and the presence of religion in public spaces across Indonesia and many Southeast Asian countries (Fealy & White, 2008; Hefner, 2010; Qurtuby, 2013; Reuter & Horstmann, 2013). This strengthening of religiosity is, in part, seen as an individual's response to the 'radicalized processes of modernity,' which have pushed them to embed themselves more deeply in or establish closer connections with their religion (Reuter & Horstmann, 2013). This trend is accompanied by a rise in conservatism within religious practices and its manifestations in the political sphere (Bruinessen, 2013; Sebastian et al., 2020). Simultaneously, this increase in religiosity coincides with the growth of information and communication technology, including digital media. The internet penetration rate in Indonesia has reached 79.5% (KataData, 2024), with Indonesians averaging over 7 hours online daily. On a global scale, Indonesia consistently ranks among the top 5 countries in terms of active social media usage (WorldPopulationReview, 2024). The intersection of strengthened religiosity and advancements in digital technology has led to various forms of digital religion (Campbell, 2013; Campbell & Bellar, 2023).

Campbell (2023) defines digital religion as "a term used to describe how religious individuals and groups engage with digital media and emerging technologies" (p. 1). The engagement between religious practices and digital media continues to evolve and shape each other. For instance, it has transformed from the Web 1.0 era, which primarily positioned the religious followers as consumers, to the era of social media, where they actively participate as creators. In addition to its interactive characteristics, the relationship between religion and digital media increasingly reflects a blending of online and offline experiences. To illustrate this phenomenon, Campbell (2013) introduces the concept of digital religion, which emphasizes the integration of online and offline religious practices, where digital media both influences and is influenced by religious activities. Scholars also use terms like Religion 2.0 to describe the merging of real-world and virtual-world religious practices, highlighting how digital technologies mediate and enhance religious experiences (Cheong & Ess, 2012).

In Indonesia, one example of how digital religion has continually evolved through the interplay between technological advancements and religious trends can be observed in the use of messaging apps. In the mid-2000s, there was already innovation in using Short Message Service (SMS) to deliver religious messages (Fakhruroji, 2015). A decade later, as messaging apps evolved to be internet-based with more features, new digital religious practices emerged, such as *One Day One Juz* movement (Muslim, 2017; Nisa, 2018).

Recently, digital communication tools have also become widely used in the process of *taaruf* or Islamic matchmaking (Nisa, 2021). The trend of Islamic matchmaking has gained popularity

alongside the increasing religious awareness in the post New Order era. Since the mid-2000s, campaigns through books and Islamic films have encouraged young Muslims to avoid dating which they consider as a sin. Later, this trend has evolved beyond mere campaigns but also help to facilitate in finding a Muslim mate to marry. Various organizers, both community-based and corporate, now offer comprehensive matchmaking services, ranging from pre-marital classes to introductions. In this process, they utilize a range of digital media tools, from WhatsApp groups to specialized apps. Kelas Jodoh, in this context, is an institution that facilitates the preparation of Muslims in Indonesia for marriage, covering both educational aspects and matchmaking processes.

In Indonesia, research on digital media-based matchmaking remains limited. One study conducted by Nisa (2021) views that the trend of Online Islamic matchmaking as part of a halal (permissible in Islam) lifestyle. By examining cases such as *Rumah Taaruf MyQuran* and *Indonesia tanpa Pacaran in Indonesia,* as well as the *Soul Seekers of Marriage Conference Halal Speed Dating* in Malaysia, Nisa identifies similarities between these online-offline matchmaking movements and the matchmaking practices within Islamic groups, particularly *Tarbiyah* group. Additionally, she concludes that these matchmaking platforms help women exercise their agency, demonstrating how women can overcome their shyness and take control of the process of finding a marriage partner. There are few other studies about Islamic matchmaking, but mostly remain focus on offline method. An example of typical study is one conducted by Rusdi (2019) on the Taaruf practice organized by *Majelis Calon Ayah Amanah (MCAA)*.

Using "Kelas Jodoh" (@kelasjodohfsk) or KJ as a case study, this research aims to examine the relationship or position of KJ within the context of existing Islamic matchmaking traditions in Indonesia, as well as in the context of increasing personal piety and the use of various digital media to facilitate expressions of religious commitment. KJ is an institution that facilitates pre-marital education from both knowledge and spiritual aspects through a series of marriage classes. Additionally, it helps Muslims who wish to find a potential partner through an Islamic matchmaking process *(taaruf)*. KJ was chosen as a case because the pre-marital education and matchmaking facilitation processes at KJ are supported by various digital platforms, including Instagram (for campaigns), a dedicated app (for learning and partner search), and WhatsApp (for more intensive communication with potential partners). In this case, the KJ example will show how these various digital platforms also play a role in the overall process of pre-marital education and Islamic matchmaking that they facilitate. Participants are required to pay a fee to join the marriage classes and matchmaking services. Furthermore, the study also aims to focus on how Islamic values regarding the regulation of male-female relationships before marriage interplay with the technological affordances (Hogan & Wellman, 2012) of digital media and shape a form of digital religion.

Marriage and Islamic Matchmaking in Indonesia

Marriage is considered a significant life stage in Indonesia, including for young people. Several studies on Indonesian youth indicate that one of their personal aspirations is to become more religious and to have a harmonious family (Parker & Nilan, 2013). However, this does not necessarily mean that they view marriage as a requirement for being religious. Historically, the process leading to marriage in Indonesia has undergone considerable transformation, marked notably by an increasing space for agency among young people in determining with whom they form relationships and subsequently marry.

According to Hildred Geertz (1961) as cited by Smith-Hefner (2005), in the 1950s and 1960s, marriages in Indonesia, particularly in Java, were generally arranged by parents and took place when the woman and man were still very young. Women would often become engaged immediately after experiencing menstruation, or even before it occurred. At that time, women in Java were typically married by the age of 16 or 17. During this period, or prior to the Islamic resurgence in the 1970s and 1980s, parental considerations in matchmaking were based not on religious factors, but rather on social status and class. Thus, unlike contemporary early marriages often influenced by religious beliefs, early marriages in the 1950s and 1960s were more driven by cultural and economic norms.

Within the Muslim community, views on marriage vary widely, ranging from love marriage based on mutual affection to arranged marriages determined by parental choice (Rochadiat et al., 2018). In love marriage, compatibility is assessed through pre-marital attraction, whereas in more conservative arranged marriages, partners are evaluated based on qualities such as character, temperament, and religiosity (Rochadiat et al., 2018). Matchmaking practices occur within both traditional and modern Islamic groups. In these groups, marriage arrangements are pursued with different objectives compared to those commonly practiced in Javanese society during the 1950s and 1960s. Additionally, matchmaking processes in such Muslim groups typically involve strict limitations on interactions (dating) between men and women.

In some traditional pesantren[1] communities, the process of selecting potential spouses and arranging marriages is predominantly managed by the parents, who are typically the kyai (leaders and owner of the pesantren). In these cases, some kyai prefer to marry their children to the offspring of families from the pesantren they lead or to children of kyai from other pesantren. Matchmaking among the children of kyai is often driven by institutional objectives, such as ensuring the succession of the pesantren (Horikoshi, 1987; Muhadi, 2016) and maintaining the kyai's status (Assulthoni, 2018). In traditional pesantren settings, such marriages frequently exhibit endogamous tendencies, meaning marriages are arranged within close kin to preserve the lineage of the pesantren family and to avoid conflicts (Muhadi, 2016). Within these traditional pesantren communities, lineage (nasab) is a crucial factor when parents arrange marriages for their children (Assulthoni, 2018). The desire to maintain the nobility of lineage is also a reason for endogamy marriage among families that claim descent from the Prophet, such as the Alawiyyin group in Indonesia (Kurdi, 2013).

In modern Islamic movements, such as the Tarbiyah movement (Asyari & Abid, 2016), a distinctive feature of Islamic-style matchmaking is both the involvement of a mediator and the ideological motives behind it. According to Asyari and Abid (2016), within the Tarbiyah movement, recommended marriages are those between members of the movement, aimed at preserving the purity of the movement. The marriage process in Tarbiyah is mediated by religious teachers or Murabbi (male) and Murabbiyah (female).

The phenomenon of self-initiated romance, or the formation of relationships between young men and women, commonly referred to as dating in Indonesian culture, has gained popularity over the past few decades (Smith-Hefner, 2005). This trend coincides with the prolongation, or increasing duration, of the period between adolescence and adulthood (and marriage), as well as

the rising levels of literacy and general education, which provide opportunities for young people to meet individuals of the opposite sex (Smith-Hefner, 2019).

The concept and practice of *pacaran* (dating), which allows for the establishment of relationships and intensive interactions between men and women before marriage, has begun to face criticism alongside a growing religious awareness in 2000s, particularly among urban populations. For example, in the early 2000s, popular books advocating for the rejection of dating and promoting marriage through religious pathways, known as taaruf, began to emerge. This movement has become increasingly widespread with the rise of hijrah[2] communities (Akmaliah, 2020; Triana et al., 2021) and organizations specifically campaigning against dating, such as the *Indonesia Tanpa Pacaran (ITP or Indonesia Wihout Dating)* movement. Additionally, institutions facilitating matchmaking between Muslims through taaruf have also appeared, incuding those of using digital media in their facilitation process such as *Kelas Jodoh*.

"Kelas Jodoh" (KJ) was established in February 2017 by Setia Furqon Kholid, an entrepreneur, motivator, writer, and influencer. In an interview, Kholid stated that he is both the owner and the conceptor of Kelas Jodoh. Transitioning from premarital seminars to an online-based application under the same name, Kelas Jodoh began incorporating a mobile app starting with the second batch. This app includes a matchmaking navigation feature and utilizes WhatsApp for the mediation process.

As of early 2024, KJ has conducted 45 batches, each of which can accommodate up to 100 participants. Its instagram account (@kelasjodohfsk) shows that in arround July 2024 it has a total of over 260,000 followers on Instagram, while its application has been downloaded more than 10,000 times. KJ is a paid and professional service and application designed to ensure participants' commitment and seriousness in the ta'aruf (matchmaking) process. It integrates matchmaking practices with Islamic values, marriage psychology materials, and utilizes various digital platforms across several stages of its activities. This study, however, does not analyze the case from the common "commodification" perspective, which tends to oversimplify the issue by suggesting that the entity operates as a business that profits by exploiting religious beliefs. Instead, this study seeks to understand the detailed process of how this service functions and how it manages to integrate Islamic values throughout the process, including the use of various digital media platforms.

Methods

This research aims to answer the question of how "Kelas Jodoh" (KJ), as a digital media-supported Islamic matchmaking organizer, plays a role within the context of existing Islamic matchmaking practices in Indonesia, particularly in relation to the rise of personal piety and the use of digital media. More specifically, it seeks to explore how KJ maintains Islamic values in the relationship arrangement process, which is largely mediated through digital technologies, and how this process contributes to the shaping of a form of digital religion. This study employs qualitative case study method. According to Yin (2018) case study method is suitable for investigating contemporary phenomena with research questions that are of the "how" and "why" nature. Yin also notes that a distinct feature of case studies is their focus on a contemporary phenomenon within its context. In this research, KJ will be examined within at least two primary contexts: the religious resurgence in Indonesia, particularly since the early 2000s, and the development of digital media, including social media, which has significantly expanded over the past two decades.

Regarding data sources, case study research "relies on multiple sources of evidence" (Yin, 2018). Therefore, this study employs various data collection methods and sources, including interviews, online observation, and literature review. Interviews are conducted with the administrator, the owner of KJ, and members. The KJ members informants were selected using the convenience sampling method. The criteria applied were: (1) they had participated in the series of programs offered by Kelas Jodoh, whether or not they had reached the marriage stage; (2) specifically, the researcher also selected KJ members who had successfully married with the facilitation of KJ. The number of female KJ members is greater than that of male members, so in this study, there were more female participants interviewed than male participants. Overall, the diversity of informants is crucial for capturing a range of experiences as KJ members.

Interviews with the administrator and owner of KJ aim to explore the context of Kelas Jodoh's emergence or background, as well as the details of how KJ operates. Meanwhile, interviews with informants from the KJ member group focused on their experiences participating in or using the various services provided by KJ. The following is a profile of the 10 informants interviewed for this study.

Table 1. List of informants

(Pseudo)name	Age	Gender	Marital status	Education	Occupation	Position at KJ
Furqon	n.a	Male	Married	S3	Entreprenuer, Motivator	Owner of KJ
Noya	n.a	Female	Married	S1	Manager	Manager & facilitator at KJ
Tita	24	Female	Single	S1	School teacher	Member
Reni	29	Female	Single	S1	Textile Engineer	Member
Vida	26	Female	Single	S1	Admin staff	Member
Yuli	30	Female	Married	S2	University Lecturer	Member
Nia	29	Female	Married	S1	Trading company worker	Member
Rifa	27	Male	Married	S1	IT Engineer	Member
Robi	29	Male	Married	S1	Laboratorium tech	Member
Lia	27	Female	Married	D4	Housewife, Online shop	Member

In addition to conducting interviews, the research also involved online observation. One of our research team members registered on the KJ app to examine its features and stages of KJ services. Furthermore, online observation was conducted on Kelas Jodoh's Instagram account, analyzing the activity on the platform to gather information that would complement the data from the interviews.

Interviews with the informants were conducted in April and July 2024. Ethically, interviews with informants began with an explanation of the research objectives and an outline of the questions to be asked. The questions cover topics such as how informants decided to participate in Kelas Jodoh, their experiences at each stage of the Kelas Jodoh program, how they found the right partners through KJ, their opinions on how KJ facilitated the overall process, and some additional follow-up questions. At the start of the interviews, the research team informed the participants that they could choose not to answer any questions they found too sensitive. This was particularly emphasized with informants from the KJ member category, as some questions pertained to their experiences in establishing relationships with others, both in the past and present. The interviews commenced only after informants agreed to these terms. All informants in this research are presented in pseudoname to protect their privacy, except for the owner and KJ administrator as there are no sensitive personal information provided by these two informants.

The study has been granted ethical clearance from Research and Community Service Division of Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung. The application for ethics clearance was reviewed by LP2M in compliance with the UIN Sunan Gunung Djati policy and Research Ethics. Ethical clearance has been granted.

Kelas Jodoh, Religiosity, and Technological Develoment

Kelas Jodoh, and other similar marriage arrangement organizations, emerge as an intersection between the rising Islamic piety among the urban middle-class Muslim population and the development of digital media, including social media and other internet-based applications. It is specifically can be located within the context of the increase in religious awareness, Islamic piety, and the growing visibility of public Islam since the early 2000s (Fealy & White, 2008; Hefner, 2010; Qurtuby, 2013; Reuter & Horstmann, 2013) that has continued into the present day. Around 2015, this trend began to establish its identity, akin to hijrah groups or communities (Triana et al., 2021), which also appeared and continued to develop across various social media platforms. In Triana's et al. research, the hijrah movement is indeed dominated by millennials, typically individuals in their mid-20s to early 40s.

Such a connection can be observed in the historical context or the reasons behind the founding of KJ. Setia Furqon Khalid, the founder of Kelas Jodoh (KJ), stated that one of the primary motivations for developing KJ was the observed difficulty many newly hijrah individuals faced when trying to implement the concept of taaruf in their search for a partner. He noted that,

> *In 2017 there was a significant influx of people undergoing hijrah, many of whom, after the process, found themselves uncertain about how to proceed with marriage. Although there were pre-marital programs that included taaruf, such as those offered at Masjid Salman in Bandung, many individuals found these programs insufficient due to their limited availability and time constraints (Interview with Setia Furqon, July 2024)*

Rifa (male, 27) and Tita (female, 24) are examples of individuals who recently undertook hijrah and sought to find a spouse through *taaruf*. Rifa has since married a woman who is also a KJ's member, Nia. In contrast, as of the time of the study, Tita had not yet married, despite having participated in *taaruf* with two men through Kelas Jodoh. Before joining KJ, both Rifa and Tita had previously experienced dating, which ultimately ended in breakups. Rifa described dating as exhausting, marked by a cycle of breaking up and reconciling. These experiences led him to reflect

deeply on marriage and life itself. He decided to strengthen his religious practice and commit more diligently to worship (hijrah). Through this personal growth, he concluded that marriage is an act of worship that should align with Islamic values. Rifa noted, *"I intended to marry because it is an act of worship. That was the initial trigger. If marriage is an act of worship, why start with dating?"* Consequently, he sought further information on how to find a partner through taaruf, and eventually, a friend recommended joining KJ.

Before joining Kelas Jodoh, Tita had been in a relationship for six years, from senior high school until her fifth semester of college. They had even started discussing marriage, but the engagement was called off because her parents disapproved of her partner due to his education level, which only reached high school. This breakup was a deeply distressing experience for Tita, but it also prompted her to reflect on how to properly navigate the path to marriage. Throughout the interview, Tita repeatedly expressed, *"I am not really a good girl, but I am trying to be the one."*

In addition to the context of increasing religiosity among urban youth, another crucial context for understanding the emergence of Kelas Jodoh is the development of various social media platforms.

KJ utilizes Instagram (one of the most popular social media platforms in Indonesia and world wide) to promote their program and share various religious content, particularly related to Islamic approaches to marriage. In our research, Lia (female, 27), Reni (female, 29), and Muthia (female, 24) joined KJ because the content appeared on their timelines by chance, rather than through intentional searching. Lia described her experience: *"I accidentally discovered Kelas Jodoh"*, Lia said, *"I was browsing Instagram when I suddenly saw a post by Kelas Jodoh about marriage knowledge. I became curious and checked their account."* From there, Lia joined Kelas Jodoh, learned extensively about marriage principles, and eventually engaged in taaruf with a male Kelas Jodoh member, leading to marriage.

Instagram is the most widely used social media platform among individuals in their 20s and 30s, the age group that constitutes the primary target audience of KJ. Therefore, the use of Instagram as a medium for promoting KJ's programs is an effective strategy for attracting participants.

Kelas Jodoh, Digital Media, and Islamic Matchmaking

How does KJ maintain Islamic values in the relationship arrangement process, which is predominantly mediated through digital technologies and how it shapes a form of digital religion? Another key question in this aspect is how KJ addresses the technological affordances of digital applications like WhatsApp, which, in the context of interpersonal communication, emphasize privacy and strict Islamic rules that prohibit excessive interaction between men and women (courtship).

Overall, KJ employs both online and offline approaches yet the online process is more dominant. As will be explained in the following section, out of the seven stages in the KJ process, only one stage is purely offline: the face-to-face meeting between the male and female parties for further introduction, following their initial online acquaintance.

In terms of technology, KJ utilizes three types of digital media for its overall operations. Instagram is used to inform about Kelas Jodoh's programs, promotions, job vacancies, and to share knowledge and tips about marriage (e.g., marriage preparation). The website, which includes a learning management system and a navigation app, is used by registered participants to enter personal data, complete personality tests, access pre-marital learning materials, perform pre-wedding class tasks, record daily worship practices (mutabaah), browse other members' profiles (navigation), and track the locations of other participants. Finally, WhatsApp is employed for three types of activities: (1) Personal chats for registration and consultation with a KJ administrator or facilitator; (2) WhatsApp groups to provide access to the application and teaching materials in the form of e-books and videos; and (3) Moderated WhatsApp groups as a means of communication between participants from both sides, facilitated by a moderator, to get to know each other.
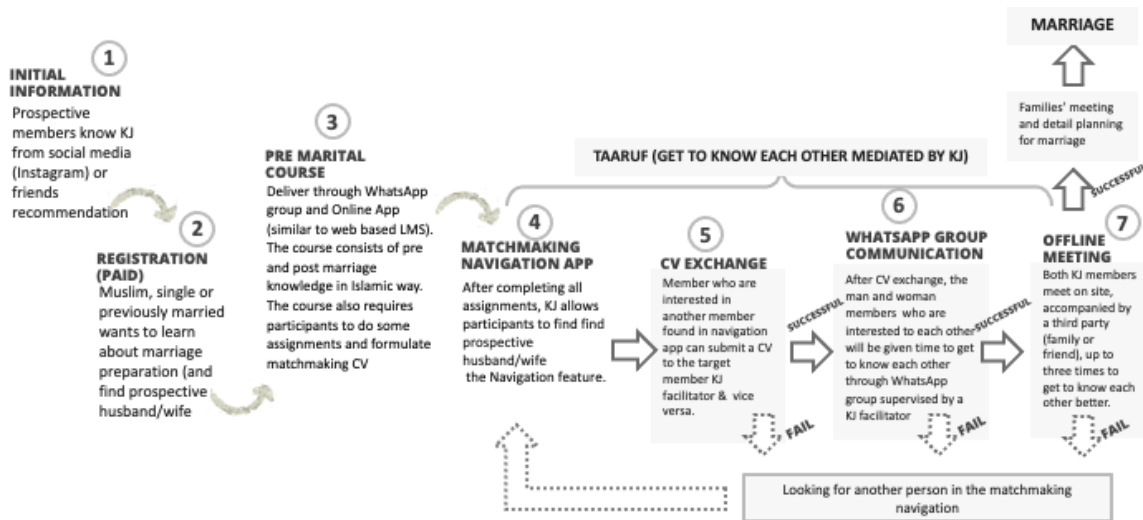
Figure 1. Stages of the Process for Kelas Jodoh Members (Complete Package from Pre-Marital Course to Matchmaking)

Source: Extracted from interview with KJ and members and observation

KJ rejects the label of "matchmaking agency" (*Biro Jodoh*) for their organization. In an interview, Noya, a manager at KJ, stated that

> *From the past until now, Kelas Jodoh (KJ) is labeled as a pre-marital class, not a matchmaking agency. A matchmaking agency often gives the impression of arranging matches without any knowledge. In contrast, KJ has specific steps in place. If someone is only looking for a match through KJ, they won't find it because they need to first participate in the classes. The label has always been pre-marital class, with the additional feature of matchmaking navigation" (Interview with Noya, April 2024)*

Based on interviews with both KJ administrator and members, it can be formulated that the (Islamic) matchmaking process, including pre-marital classes, at KJ is divided into seven stages (see Figure 1). These seven stages do not include the family meeting stage (which can occur without KJ's facilitation) and the wedding itself.

First, Initial Information. This is the preliminary process of how individuals learn about and eventually join KJ as members. Many KJ members discovered KJ through its social media (Instagram at @kelasjodohfsk). KJ's Instagram account is quite active, posting an average of two pieces of content per day related to marriage, including preparation tips, advice for a lasting

marriage, and more. This consistent content production has led to a steady increase in Instagram followers over time. As of early July 2024, the account has approximately 260,000 followers.

Informants such as Reni, Lia, Tita, and Vida first learned about KJ through Instagram and subsequently joined as members. Some members such as Rifa were introduced to KJ through recommendations from friends. Even with a recommendation, prospective members usually review KJ's profile on Instagram, examining both the content and the programs offered before deciding to join. Instagram plays a crucial role in attracting members, who are typically in their mid-20s to 30s—an age group that is very active on social media, particularly Instagram (Dixon, 2024). As Tita recounted, *"Personally, I joined Kelas Jodoh because I am quite active on Instagram. Then, I followed Kelas Jodoh's Instagram account."*

Second, Member Registration. Individuals interested in joining KJ as members can register by filling out a detailed profile (similar to a CV). This information is partially displayed on the navigation app, where KJ members seeking a partner can access initial information about potential matches. The personal data requested is quite detailed, consisting of at least ten categories, each with several more specific questions (See Figure 2, Kelas Jodoh Application). The ten categories of personal information requested include personal profile, general information, self-description, family background, occupation, habits, readiness for marriage, work history, formal education, and non-formal education. Figure 2 shows a screenshot of the registration form that must be completed when someone registers as a KJ member.

During registration, applicants can choose between a full package for one year (including the pre-marital course and the matchmaking process) for IDR 500,000, or just the pre-marital course for approximately IDR 300,000. After registering, members are added to a WhatsApp group (with all participants in a given batch) and gain access to the Kelas Jodoh application (web-based). KJ typically opens four to five registration batches per year, with each batch consisting of hundreds of participants.

Figure 2. Screenshot of the form format filled out by members when registering with KJ

Third, Premarital Course. This stage involves delivering various materials related to marriage through WhatsApp groups and KJ application (which has a format similar to a learning

management system, LMS). The materials are provided in digital formats such as e-books and videos. Almost all of the content delivered in the premarital course is prepared by KJ's owner, Setia Furqon.

For Vida and Tita, the premarital course is considered the most beneficial aspect. Many participants join KJ solely to learn about marriage, not necessarily to find a partner. Tita noted that the materials provided at KJ are well-suited to her needs:

> The materials are accessible and fit well with me. Usually, there are speakers or owners who use complex language, but here it's not like that. The content is easy to understand. Kang Furqon (owner and main resource person at KJ) adapts to the younger generation. He presents material in a way that we can comprehend without being overly complicated (Interview July 2024)

In addition to being relevant in content, the method of delivering marriage-related material at KJ is quite engaging. This is a particular strength, especially since KJ's target audience is primarily young people. Unlike typical religious lectures, which may tend to be complex, the material they present is made simple and easy to understand. The premarital learning process lasts for two weeks. At the end of this period, participants are required to complete exams and assignments. These assignments are not just knowledge-based tests but also involve reinforcing and building habits for performing obligatory and recommended religious practices, such as prayers and Quran recitation. Besides assessing how well participants understand the material, these exams and assignments are also prerequisites for advancing to the next stage, which is taaruf (finding a suitable fiancé or fiancée) through the navigation app.

As stated by the administrators, the premarital course distinguishes KJ from many other matchmaking platforms. In other words, KJ offers more than just matchmaking services; it also prepares its members by providing them with marriage knowledge before proceeding to the marriage process itself.

Fourth, Finding Prospective Husband/Wife in the Navigation App. The Navigation App resembles a simple social media platform where members can view profiles of other members, including age, residence, occupation, and photos. KJ members are granted access to the Navigation App once they have completed the assignments and exams in the premarital course. At this point, it can be observed that KJ does not want to be labeled as a traditional matchmaking agency. As stated by one of its managers (Noya), KJ aims to ensure that individuals who are seeking marriage are adequately prepared for the marital journey. One of the indicators of this readiness is that they have completed a pre-marital course, including fulfilling the associated assignments (as a requirement for certification).

Fifth, CV (Curriculum Vitae) submission and Exchange. If a member identifies a profile in the Navigation App that they find suitable, they can submit a detailed CV to express their interest. However, CVs can only be sent through a KJ facilitator. Before the CV is forwarded to the intended recipient, KJ administrators first verify the CV. If the data is complete, the administrator will send it to the targeted member. If the target is interested, they can reciprocate by sending their own CV to the initiating member. If not, they can reject it. KJ allows a maximum of 5 days for the targeted member to respond. According to Noya, one of the primary facilitators at KJ, it is rare for a CV to be accepted directly and proceed to the final stage (marriage). Often, members must send their CV multiple times and face numerous rejections before finding a match with reciprocal interest. For

example, Nia (Female) submitted her CV several times but faced rejections before receiving a positive response and advancing to the next stage in the second year of her membership at KJ. Other informants shared similar experiences, though not all were willing to disclose how many times they had submitted their CVs.

Sixth, Introduction/Communication via WhatsApp Group. Pairs of members who find each other suitable at the CV exchange stage move on to the next phase, which involves introduction and communication via a WhatsApp group facilitated by a KJ facilitator. They are given one week to communicate through this group. This stage allows both members to verify information provided in their CVs and to ask detailed questions not covered in the CVs. These questions can range from religious school or *madhab* to detailed plans after marriage. This thorough introduction process is crucial in determining whether both parties agree to proceed to the offline introduction/meeting stage.

According to KJ facilitators, many members discontinue the introduction process at this stage for various reasons, or sometimes without providing any reasons at all. For instance, Robi (male) chose not to continue the process because he disagreed with the woman on a particular issue in Islam. Lia (female), another informant, decided not to proceed because her prospective husband planned to live with his parents after marriage, while Lia herself preferred to live independently.

Each member uses WhatsApp communication not only to assess the thoughts and future plans of their prospective partner but also to evaluate each other's character. One reason Nia (female) decided to move forward to offline communication was her impression of her prospective partner's way of communicating. She mentioned that she appreciated his manner of writing on WhatsApp:

His language was well-organized and structured. More structured than mine. From his well-organized language, I was confident that he was patient. I'm anxious and need someone who can calm me down. (Interview July 2024)

Furthermore, the WhatsApp communication process is regulated by strict rules set by the administrators, such as prohibiting the use of various emoticons and only allowing thumbs up and thank you symbols. KJ places great emphasis on ensuring that the communication process does not display excessive emotional expressions, including any signs of mutual affection. Overall, the communication process is formal, direct, and clear. If any participant violates these communication rules, the KJ moderator will issue a warning.

Additionally, some members choose not to continue because they perceive their prospective partners as not serious about the *taaruf* process, indicated by passive attitudes or delays in responding to communications.

Seventh, offline meetings (nadhor). The offline meeting can be considered the final stage in the ta'aruf process facilitated by KJ. At this stage, couples are allowed to meet a maximum of three times in person, accompanied by family, friends, or KJ facilitators. In short, they are not permitted to meet alone without anyone accompanying them. Couples typically decide to meet in person when they have reached a sufficient level of certainty during the WhatsApp communication stage.

This stage also usually involves communication with each other's parents, though not always comprehensively. Despite being the final stage, some members choose to stop at this point and do not proceed to the next step. For instance, Robi decided not to advance to marriage because he found the female member to be very passive. Instead of her, it was her companion (who was her teacher) who engaged more in the communication.

If both members feel compatible during the offline meetings, they can proceed to a family meeting to plan the wedding. KJ itself limits the maximum duration of the preparation period leading up to marriage to six months, unless there are unavoidable or unforeseen circumstances that extend the process.

Discussion

By closely examining the mechanisms and stages of KJ, this study observes how KJ technically resembles regular online dating services (ODS) in several aspects. According to Finkl et. al. (2012) online dating applications typically consist of nine stages, starting from information search about the ODS and ending with offline relationship establishment (Figure 3). Similarities can be found in the stages where the relationship formation process begins with profile searching, followed by bidirectional online communication, then face-to-face communication, and concluding with relationship establishment. In this regard, Walther's (Walther & Whitty, 2021) hyperpersonal model explains how features present in computer-mediated communication (CMC) platforms can enhance intimacy when individuals interacting through these platforms expose themselves to their communication partners.
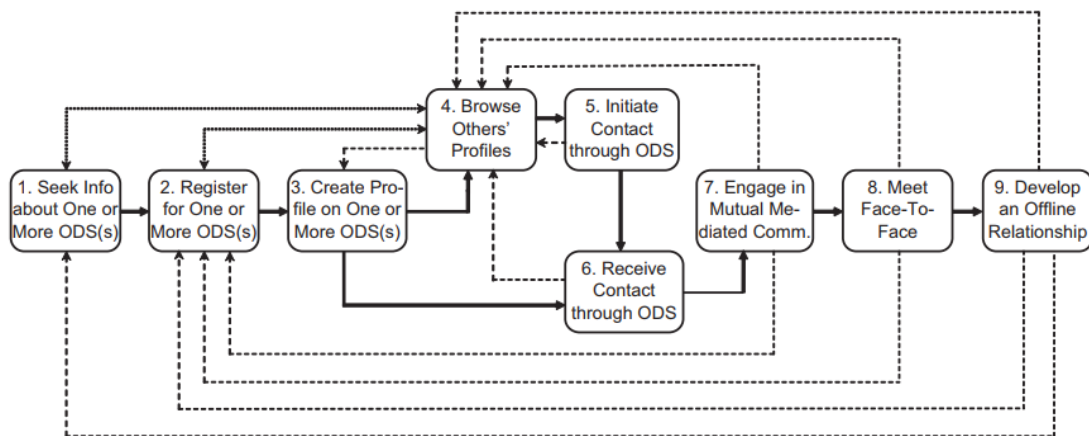
Figure 3. The nine steps in the prototypical, idealized online dating process

Source: Finkel at.al. (2012)

The primary distinctions between KJ and regular online dating services (ODS) are twofold. First, the goal of online dating is not necessarily marriage but rather dating relationships, which may or may not lead to marriage. Second, there is no mediator between the members who register on ODS and those seeking to form a relationship with other members. While this absence might be seen as providing members with the freedom or agency to choose, it can also be argued that a mediator helps keep the communication process on track.

The presence of a mediator is also crucial in how KJ navigates the technological characteristics or affordances with the Islamic values they uphold. For example, WhatsApp, as a technology embedded in smartphones, possesses characteristics such as 'mobile temporality' and 'always-availability' (Green, 2006), which support intensive interpersonal communication models. Additionally, WhatsApp's features maintain privacy. In other words, KJ members could potentially communicate privately without a mediator. However, this rarely occurs because KJ does not tolerate such communication forms, as it would absolve KJ of responsibility for the subsequent process.

This simple process illustrates how digital religion continues to evolve, demonstrating how religious values continuously interact with technological affordances to shape previously non-existent practices. Therefore, when Rainie & Wellman (2012, p. 62) define affordances as "the possible actions a person can perform on an object," in the context of digital religion, these actions can be understood as religiously possible.

Although the owner of KJ states that they do not adhere to a particular religious ideology, their approach resembles that commonly implemented by modern religious groups such as *Tarbiyah* and similar organizations. However, it should be noted that this does not imply that these organizers are structurally part of such groups. This study also confirms Nisa's finding that some Islamic matchmaking organizers in Indonesia and Malaysia are influenced by the approaches typically used by Tarbiyah group (Nisa, 2021). Specifically, the role of the mediator in interactions between individuals in KJ resembles the system employed by *Tarbiyah* group. In *Tarbiyah*, the mediator is often the religious teacher or mentor *(murabbi and murabbiyah)* of those intending to marry (Asyari & Abid, 2016). However, aside from not being ideologically driven, KJ offers greater flexibility compared to the matchmaking practices of Tarbiyah congregations. In KJ, individuals are allowed to choose their own partners, whereas, in Tarbiyah congregations, although not entirely prohibited, it is more encouraged to marry fellow members. Additionally, in Tarbiyah, the match is often selected by the murabbi, though each member has the right to refuse if they feel personally incompatible.

Conclusion

Kelas Jodoh, and other similar marriage arrangement organizations, emerge as an intersection between the rising Islamic piety among the urban middle-class Muslim population and the development of digital media, including social media and other internet-based applications. The increase in religious awareness and the growing visibility of public Islam since the early 2000s has continued into the present day. The steps applied by KJ in facilitating members through a number of digital media highlights how digital religion continue to evolve. It shows how religious values interact with technological affordances to create new practices thus new form of digital religion. Furthermore, in KJ, the role of the mediator and its overall approach in matchmaking mirrors the system commonly used in religious congregations, or contemporary Islamic groups such as the *Tarbiyah* group. The similarities are particularly evident in the values applied, as well as in the role of the moderator and the entire process of building relationships between members until they agree to marry. However, KJ provides greater flexibility than T*arbiyah,* allowing individuals to select

their own partners, unlike in Tarbiyah where matches are often chosen by mentors and marrying within the group is more encouraged, although not strictly enforced.

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Notes

[1] Traditional Islamic boarding school in Indonesia.

[2] In this context, hijrah does not refer to physical relocation from one place to another but is understood culturally as a transformation or hijrah as a change in behavior from previously less desirable to more desirable. This definition is also endorsed by Ustadz Hanan Attaki, a prominent figure in the hijrah movement in Indonesia (Triana et al., 2021).

Mediatization of Islam in Kashmir: A Critical Content Analysis of Contemporary Islamic Socio-Religious Magazines

Muntaha Mehraj HAFIZ*
John Koyye BABU**

Abstract

This paper provides an in-depth analysis of select magazines published by Islamic socio-religious organizations in Kashmir, India. It explores various aspects of these publications, including thematic prevalence, framing techniques, symbolic representation, tone, and the portrayal of religion and faith. Using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, along with content analysis, this study applies Ninian Smart's Seven Dimensions of Religion as its primary theoretical and methodological framework. Key findings highlight recurring themes of ethics, social justice, and community solidarity, alongside the use of persuasive language and rhetorical techniques such as repetition, symbolism, and imagery. The magazines portray religion as a source of guidance and compassion, with ethical and social themes (64.5%) prominently featuring topics like proper conduct, human rights, women's rights, Islamic law, social issues, and community relations. Overall, the positive tone of the publications underscores the role of Islamic magazines in fostering community cohesion and influencing public discourse within Kashmir. This study is of notable relevance for religious practitioners and offers valuable insights for government agencies aiming to engage with Islamic organizations in the region, promoting collaborative approaches to address community needs and inform policy development.

Keywords: Media, Religion, Kashmir, Islamic Magazines, Socio-Religious Organizations

Keşmir'de İslam'ın Medyatikleşmesi: Çağdaş İslami Sosyo-Dini Dergilerin Eleştirel İçerik Analizi

Öz

Bu makale, Hindistan'ın Keşmir bölgesinde faaliyet gösteren İslami sosyo-dini organizasyonlar tarafından yayımlanan seçili dergilerin derinlemesine bir analizini sunmaktadır. Çalışmada, bu yayınların tematik yaygınlıkları, çerçeveleme teknikleri, sembolik temsilleri, üslupları ve din ile inancı ele alış biçimleri incelenmektedir. Hem nitel hem de nicel yöntemler ile içerik analizi yaklaşımını bir araya getiren bu çalışma, teorik ve metodolojik çerçeve olarak Ninian Smart'ın Dinin Yedi Boyutu modelini temel almıştır. Bulgular, etik, sosyal adalet ve toplumsal dayanışma gibi tekrar eden temaların yanı sıra tekrar, sembolizm ve imgelem gibi ikna edici dil ve retorik tekniklerin kullanıldığını göstermektedir. Dergiler, dini rehberlik ve merhamet kaynağı olarak tasvir etmekte ve etik ile sosyal temalara (%64,5) ağırlık vererek uygun davranış, insan hakları, kadın hakları, İslam hukuku, sosyal meseleler ve toplumsal ilişkiler gibi konuları öne çıkarmaktadır. Yayınların olumlu üslubu, İslami dergilerin Keşmir'deki toplumsal uyumu pekiştirme ve kamuoyu söylemini etkileme konusundaki rolünü vurgulamaktadır. Bu çalışma, dini uygulayıcılar için önemli bir kaynak olup, Keşmir'deki İslami organizasyonlarla iş birliği yapmayı hedefleyen devlet kurumlarına toplumsal ihtiyaçları ele almak ve politika geliştirmek için değerli içgörüler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Medya, Din, Keşmir, İslami Dergiler, Sosyo-Dini Organizasyonlar

* Ph.D. Student, Central University of Kashmir, e-mail: muntahahafiz@cukashmir.ac.in, orcid.org/0000-0002-3259-8284, Ganderbal, India

** Assist. Prof., Central University of Kashmir, e-mail: drjohn.babu@cukashmir.ac.in, orcid/org. 0009-0009-4699-0349, Ganderbal, India

Introduction

Religion has always been a powerful force, shaping human history and providing deep meaning to societies and cultures globally. Historically, religious traditions have influenced communities more than political, ideological, or scientific notions, and institutionalized religions have maintained their influence for centuries and extended their reach across various territories. Although religious institutions and faith-driven aspirations have played a vital role in various cultural and social contexts, religious communication, and the study of intersection of religion and media, has significantly remained unexplored when compared to other areas of study in media and communication studies. In such context, it becomes imperative to explore a medium that has epistemological commitments shaping the belief and value system of its audience. This involves a deeper exploration of religious diversity, social dynamics, and the role of media as a tool of mediation and influence, particularly as media and religion intersect to create a new communication paradigm in an era dominated by new media and artificial intelligence.

Researchers and audiences—both consumers and producers—must recognize that religious communication differs from mainstream media culture in its goals. While mainstream media seeks to engage audiences through creative means with diverse goals, religious communication focuses on conveying specific ideologies and messages to its followers with a distinct purpose.

However as new challenges emerge, religious institutions are increasingly turning to secular sphere of communication (mainstream media) to build and influence their audiences, which makes the communicative potential of religious institutions and the fluidity and intricacies of religious phenomena even more interesting. This makes the use of religious media not only essential but integral to modern society, transforming religious engagement into a mediated experience through advanced communication technologies. For instance, in the United States, the internet is used more frequently for religious purposes than for e-banking, and nearly every denomination or religious community maintains its own dedicated media for internal communication and broader public interaction. The U.S. alone hosts approximately 1,700 Christian radio and TV stations, with radio programming being the third most popular format (Campbell et al., 2000).

In many countries, religious media has gained widespread recognition, largely due to the success and influence of televangelists who have created compelling electronic religious formats. This trend suggests that the role and impact of religious media are poised for continued growth. Despite a substantial body of research, studies have predominantly focused on Christian television and radio programs, leaving other religious communities, especially Islam, underrepresented in mediated communication research. To date, no comprehensive scholarly investigation has established a foundational understanding of mediated faith specifically within the Islamic context. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing discussions on religious communication. This paper, therefore, aims to explore how Islam—with its rich and dynamic ideology—is communicated and represented through media within the localized context of Kashmir, India.

Significance of the study within the context of Kashmir, India

Each state has a distinct religious media communication system shaped by its unique regional context. In Kashmir, a Muslim-majority region, religious institutions play a central role in spreading religious messages, reinforcing religious identity, and influencing public discourse. Many prominent

religious organizations in Kashmir use magazines, newspapers, journals, and YouTube channels to disseminate socio-religious ideologies. This growing engagement marks an entry into the multifaceted field of religion and media studies. However, research on religious media—especially within Islamic contexts—remains limited globally, and Kashmir's religious media landscape remains largely unexplored.

This study holds significance as a pioneering investigation into religious media communication in Kashmir. By examining Islamic magazines, it offers insights into how Islamic institutions convey socio-religious ideology, shape religious identity, and contribute to the diversity of religious media. Given Kashmir's political landscape, where some Islamic organizations faced bans and heightened scrutiny in 2019, this study also considers the potential impact of religious media content on community cohesion and national security. This includes examining possible effects on social unity and public perception. The paper underscores the varied ways religious media shape societies, paving the way for future research and providing a foundation for scholars interested in religious media communication, religious media theory, and the unique dynamics between society, religion, and media.

A Brief Overview of Selected Four Religious Organizations and Their Magazines

a) Islamic Shariah Court (ISC)

In Kashmir, the establishment of the Islamic Shariah Court is traced back to the migration of Mufti Bashir-ud Din's ancestors to the region during the Mughal era. Specifically, during the reign of Aurangzeb Alamgir in 922 Hijri (1571), Maulana Qazi Kharudin Abul Khair, a prominent Islamic scholar laid the foundation for the first *Shariah* court in Kashmir. At that time, Justice Shahmiri served as the inaugural chief justice of this court, locally known as the central *Dar ul Futwa* with its headquarters in District Srinagar of Kashmir. Following the lineage of successions, Mufti Bashir-ud Din assumed the position of Grand Mufti of Kashmir in 1962. He held this esteemed role for several decades until his demise in 2019. The court was established with an aim to address the legal matters of Muslims in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, given the absence of a functioning Supreme or High court during the Mughal era. While the first judiciary court was constructed in 1928 by the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, ISC over three decades now, has been operating as a parallel system of justice in Kashmir, with the sole objective of supporting Kashmiri Muslims and resolving local issues at both societal and political levels. Presently, Mufti Nasir-ul Islam leads the institution, having succeeded his father, Mufti Bashir-ud Din, who nominated him on July 8, 2012.

Intended Ideology *of ISC*

To serve people through *Darul Iftah* and *Darul Qaza*, to contribute to the field of Islamic Jurisprudence with respect to the social and political sphere of the valley, to disseminate the principles of Islam, foster cultural brotherhood, and promote interfaith dialogue and understanding.

Press and Publication of ISC

Mir-e-Karwa is a monthly magazine published by the Islamic Shariah Court, Jammu and Kashmir. This magazine publishes articles about Islamic jurisprudence and modern sciences. It follows and promotes the *Hanafi* School of jurisprudence. Its patron and editor-in-chief is Mufti

Muhammad Nasir-ul-Islam. It was formally started in 1974 (Source: Interview with the editor of Magazine *Mir e Karwa).*

b) Jamiat-e-Ahli Hadith Kashmir

Jamiat-e-Ahli Hadith (JAH) is a prominent socio-religious organization in the Kashmir Valley, established in 1923 and formally registered as a society in 1958 during the reign of Maharaja Ranbir Singh of the Dogra Dynasty. Founded by Mohammad Anwar Shopiani in Zaldagar, Srinagar, JAH aims to promote Islamic teachings across Kashmir. With a membership of 1.5 million and operational offices throughout the region, JAH manages 125 pre-primary and primary schools, along with around 700 mosques spread across Kashmir.

The organization oversees two registered trusts: Salfia Muslim and Educational Research Trust, which manages various educational initiatives, and Waqf Tanzeem Trust, which oversees mosque administration. JAH actively supports students in their pursuit of higher Islamic education and maintains affiliations with two universities in Saudi Arabia, as well as Maulana Azad National University in India. Beyond the state-mandated curriculum, JAH in their ideology emphasizes on the moral and spiritual education for children, with a particular focus on women from disadvantaged families and conflict-affected backgrounds. At its headquarters in Barbarshah, Srinagar, women receive religious and conventional education to help them achieve economic independence.

Jamiat-e-Ahli Hadith (JAH) also runs the TMU Diagnostic Center, a modern facility equipped with advanced medical technology sourced from the USA, Germany, and Japan. The center is staffed by highly qualified technologists from the region and provides healthcare services to support economically disadvantaged sections of society. Recently, JAH proposed a comprehensive initiative, the Transworld Islamic University, to the government. This project aims to equip young people with advanced knowledge in fields such as Islamic Studies, Islamic Economics, Business Management, Farm Management, Architecture, Medical Sciences, Islamic Jurisprudence, and Applied Sciences.

Intended Ideology

a. Fostering unity amongst Muslims and strengthening the bonds of mutual relationship and oneness between them.

b. To propagate Islamic Puritan education, organize seminars/symposia, and publish literature to achieve the noble goal of brotherhood and unity in the society without compromising on the fundamentals of Puritan Islam.

c. To practice and propagate the Ahl-i-Hadith movement (Salafism) in Kashmir and to influence Muslim *Ummah* on a global level.

Press and Publication

Jamiat-e-Ahli Hadith publishes a fortnightly magazine titled *Muslim*, which offers in-depth coverage of the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Hadith. In addition to its religious content, the magazine features a medical bulletin and addresses contemporary issues and daily developments, aiming to make a significant impact on the global Muslim *Ummah*. Launched in 1940, the magazine briefly

ceased publication in 1947 but resumed in 1957. It currently has a circulation of approximately nine thousand copies (Source: Interview with the editor of Magazine *Muslim*).

c) Anjuman Nusrat-ul-Islam

Anjuman Nusrat-ul-Islam is a socio-religious educational reform organization established in Kashmir by Maulana Rasool Shah, the Mirwaiz (head priest), in 1899. The organization was founded with the aim of improving education among the predominantly illiterate Kashmiri Muslim population. This initiative arose from concerns over the potential erosion of Islamic culture due to the efforts of Christian missionaries who were setting up schools in the valley during the 19th century.

Before the arrival of the British and the introduction of Christian missionary schools, traditional educational institutions in Kashmir, such as *Maktabas* and *Patshalas,* provided the primary means of education. However, these institutions predominantly focused on religious instruction. The advent of British rule and the subsequent establishment of modern schools marked a significant shift in the educational landscape of the valley, while the influence of these new schools initially reached only a small urban segment of Srinagar's population, their presence notably affected the region's religiously conscious Muslim communities.

In response to these changes, Maulana Rasool Shah under the purview of Anjuman - e-Nusrat ul Islam founded Islamia High School at Rajouri Kadal, Srinagar, in 1899. Originally established as a Madrasa, it evolved into a modern educational institution in 1905, integrating both religious and secular subjects to offer an alternative education for the Muslim majority in Kashmir.

To further propagate Anjuman's ideology, Mirwaiz Muhammad Yusuf Shah, a successor of Maulana Rasool Shah, established the first printing press in Kashmir. The introduction of the printing press and the subsequent rise of new religious ideas contributed significantly to the socio-religious reform movements of the early 20th century. These movements utilized printed materials to spread their message and played a pivotal role in shaping the socio-religious landscape of Kashmir Valley.

Anjuman Nusrat-ul-Islam's historical contributions extend beyond its founding. Known for its decades of political and social reform, the organization has been a key player in advancing mass literacy and establishing higher education for Muslims in Kashmir. Since its inception, it has matriculated 26,550 students from its high schools up to 1995, reflecting its enduring impact on education and social reform in the region.

Intended Ideology

a. Preserving and promoting Islamic education among the youth besides catering to the knowledge of modern sciences.

b. Social, moral, and educational reform of Muslims in Kashmir.

c. Foster unity and cooperation amongst Muslims of Kashmir.

d. To promote the cause of universal brotherhood along with inculcating spiritual and moral spirit among people.

Press and Publication

The monthly publication *Nusratul-Islam was* initiated in 1972 by Mirwaiz Maulana Muhammad Farooq and has since maintained a consistent publication record. The magazine focuses on religious, educational reform, and literary subjects (Source: Interview with the editor of Magazine *Nusratul Islam)*.

d) Islamic Study Circle

Founded in 1968, the Islamic Study Circle is a non-profit, non-political socio-religious organization operating in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. The establishment of this organization had the specific objective of creating a platform conducive to engaging in intellectual discourse and serving as a valuable resource for individuals actively involved in the domains of Islamic *Dawah* and Education. Establishing the Islamic Study Circle was a pivotal moment, as it paved the way for establishing multiple Islamic educational centers in various locations throughout Kashmir. These centers primarily focused on imparting moral education to children and youth in the region. In addition, adult education centers such as Islamic libraries were established, along with a few service and assistance centers. Islamic Study Circle, as the name suggests, endeavours to cultivate intellectual transformation among individuals while also mobilizing them toward societal betterment through social and humanitarian work. The overarching objective is to foster the development of a harmonious and prosperous society firmly rooted in the principles of social justice and equality.

Intended Ideology

1. Character building according to Islam, and educational upliftment and vocational guidance to youth.

2. The organization encourages its members to learn about different religions and explore literature, science, and sociology.

3. To initiate and encourage intellectual efforts to bring out the truthfulness of the principles of Islam to the problems of the contemporary age.

4. To initiate and cooperate in social service activities and promote inter-communal understanding and goodwill.

Press and Publication

Number of books/pamphlets published by the organization such as *Islam ka Aam faham ta'araaf, Awrat Islam Ki Nazar Main, Dawati Deen Ki Rah, Jawahari Risalah, Muhammad Arabi.* A weekly magazine, *Tarjumanul Haq,* is published by the organization. The magazine was first established in 1968 but ceased publication in 1989. However, it was revived and reintroduced to the public in 2014. Presently, the magazine has a weekly circulation of 8000 copies (Source: Interview with the editor of Magazine *Tarjumanul Haq*).

Methodology

The research problem is to investigate the framing and communication strategies employed in Islamic socio-religious publications in Kashmir.

Research Questions

1. To what degree do specific thematic elements recurrently appear in Islamic religious publications within Kashmir?

2. What is the overall treatment of tone in Islamic religious publications?

3. How does the content of Islamic religious magazines impact community and social cohesion: promoting unity or causing division?

Objectives of the Study

The researcher has framed the following research objectives based on the research questions.

1. To analyze the content of the Islamic religious publications in Kashmir in terms of frequency and themes.

2. To analyze the content of religious publications in Kashmir qualitatively in order to explore the journalistic quality and overall tone of the content.

3. To examine the role of Islamic religious publications in promoting social harmony and community cohesion in Kashmir.

Research Method

To address the research problem, a meticulous analysis was conducted on each magazine, focusing on the content they published. This entailed a comprehensive content analysis aimed at examining the framing of religious publications in terms of their content, language, and ideological elements. The analysis involved critically evaluating the textual components of the publications and identifying recurring patterns, themes, and rhetorical strategies employed within them. By adopting a combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis approaches, the researcher was able to quantitatively analyze the prevalent themes and frames in the data while delving into the nuanced aspects of the text through a qualitative exploration of the identified categories. This methodological approach aligns with the study's overarching objective, which is not just *what* is published in these magazines but also *how.*

Sampling Method

The study employed a purposive sampling method in which four *Urdu Islamic* magazines were short-listed as a sample for the study from a distinct number of 26 religious organizations and their respective magazines. The study's time frame encompasses duration of six months, explicitly spanning from March, April, and May to September, October, and November of 2019.

Table 1. Selected four Magazines for the study

o.	Organization	Place	Magazine	Circulation	Periodicity	Issues	Articles
.	*Jamiat-e-Ahli Hadith*	Srinagar	*Muslim*	9000	Fortnightly	6	48
.	Islamic Study Circle	Srinagar	*Tarjmanul Haq*	8000	Weekly	6	48
.	*Anjuman-e-Nusratul Islam*	Srinagar	*Nusratul Islam*	5000	Monthly	6	48
.	Islamic Shariah Court	Srinagar	*Mir-e-Karwa*	3000	Monthly	6	48
	Total		*4*	-	-	**24**	**192**

Within the *scope* of this study, the analysis focused on a total of 24 issues distributed across four distinct magazines. The unit of analysis selected for examination are the articles encompassed within these publications. Initially, the researcher intended to scrutinize each magazine's first ten articles. However, it was observed that the magazines consistently featured between eight and ten articles. The researcher therefore focused on the first eight articles from the four selected magazines to ensure methodological consistency and comparability. As a result, the final number of articles included in the study amounted to 192. In order to conduct this study, the researcher, as evident by Table 1, examined the Islamic publications produced by four socio-religious organizations in Kashmir: *Mir e Karwa* (Islamic Shariah court), *Muslim* (Jamiat e Ahli Hadith), *Nusrat ul Islam* (Anjuman e Nusrat ul Islam), and *Rah-e-Haq* (Islamic study circle). These magazines were selected based on their prominence among the intellectual classes in the valley, as well as their wide circulation and availability.

Research Tool

This study employed a coding sheet as a fundamental research tool to conduct qualitative and quantitative content analysis of Islamic religious magazines in Kashmir. The coding sheet, developed based on established research objectives, served as a structured framework for systematically categorizing and interpreting the textual content of these magazines. The coding sheet was divided into three sections: codes, categories, and themes, and the coding process involved assigning specific codes to recurring themes, sentiments, and critical topics identified within the dataset. The development of the coding sheet was informed by an initial exploratory analysis of a subset of articles within the magazines, ensuring that the coding categories adequately captured the nuances of content.

Inter-coder Reliability

In order to minimize coding errors and ensure a high level of accuracy, the researcher enlisted the assistance of two journalism scholars from different universities to assess inter-coder reliability. These scholars were provided with a comprehensive understanding of the coding scheme and operational definitions of the variables to be coded. A coding test was conducted using a random selection of articles to evaluate the reliability of the coding process. Following this, Holsti's (1969)

inter-coder reliability formula was applied, as it is widely recognized for its suitability in assessing the reliability of nominal data. Below is the formula:

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N1+N2}$$

The formula utilizes variables to calculate the level of agreement between two coders.

In the formula, M represents the number of coding decisions where both coders agree, while N1 and N2 represent the total number of coding decisions made by the first and second coders respectively.

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2(40)}{50+45} = 0.84$$

Based on the sample of 38 articles (which is 20% of the total sample of 192 articles), there is 84% agreement between coder-1 and coder-2 in their coding decisions. Given the strong consensus among the coders, the coding was considered reliable.

Process of Data Analysis

The researchers proceeded to careful examination of selected magazines and a preliminary reading was conducted to gain a deeper understanding. Subsequently, annotate each article, which played a crucial role in constructing a comprehensive coding scheme. To code the articles effectively, the researcher initially focused on listing the keywords present in each article. This step helped in creating a solid foundation for the coding process. After compiling the keywords, a code sheet was finalized, ensuring that all relevant aspects were accounted for. These keywords served as the study's primary codes (in vivo codes), which were then compared against Ninian Smart's seven dimensions of religion. This comparison ensured that the codes resonated with the utilized theoretical framework. Once the articles' inductive codes, or "open codes," were generated, the researcher gathered descriptive information about each code. This valuable data provided a concise summary of the code, enabling the researcher to identify the tone and framing techniques employed within the language of the respective articles. The researcher employed an "axial coding" approach in the next step, grouping the discrete codes into conceptual categories. This step allowed for a more organized and structured analysis of the data. Similar categories were merged using axes, representing the second level of analytical coding. This process helped to establish connections and relationships between the various codes, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the data.

In the final stage of analysis, known as "selective coding," the researcher approached the code clusters purposefully and selectively. This involved determining how the categories related to each other and the narratives they collectively conveyed, also known as "Thematic Analysis" (Corbin J and Strauss, 2008). These categories were aligned with Ninian Smart's seven dimensions of religion, serving as the seven overarching themes or frames for the research study. After the researcher determined which theme/dimension a given category fits in, the researcher reviewed the analysis, noting which themes were most prevalent, forming the quantitative analysis part of this study, while the analysis of categories within the frames/themes formed the qualitative part. Again, the significance of frames is that they are built on perceptions and can shape the social world (Reese, 2001). By looking at these textual frames in terms of underlying organizing principles, this

study aims to reveal something about the conversations these texts create. In the final step, after all the articles were coded correctly, the coding sheet was studied for quantitative and qualitative data interpretation, which was later summarized in the findings and conclusion part of the study.

Treatment of Language

Positive Tone: Includes articles that reflect harmony, encourage moral values, and make efforts to promote understanding and peaceful relations between diverse religious communities in Kashmi such as *Achey Akhlaq, Maa Baap ki Kidmat, Islami Bhaichara*

Negative Tone: Articles that highlight topics related to controversial issues and miscommunication such as *Article 370 ke khilaf muhim, curfew hartaal nahi chalega, Tanashahi Hakumat ke daway*

Neutral Tone: Articles that maintain a balanced perspective, covering diverse subjects such as the economy, education, and health-related issues such as *deen aur science ke kamalaat, mobile phone ke muzir asaraat, Kashmir mai tourism ke halaat*

Limitations of the Study

The study identifies certain limitations inherent in the qualitative methodology employed for data collection and analysis. A primary concern is generalizability, a common issue in qualitative research (Sullivan, 2011). Given the small sample size and specific geographical focus, the findings may need to be more broadly applicable or fully representative of Islamic religious representation in Kashmir, India. This limitation affects the study's external validity, which concerns the extent to which results can be generalized to other populations, cases, or contexts (Cohen et al., 2007). Furthermore, the use of purposive sampling introduces additional concerns about external validity. However, to address this issue, the researcher provides a detailed account of the data collection methods and sampling techniques to enhance transparency and clarify the research process. Despite the limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the specific context of religious representation in the selected Islamic magazines. The qualitative analysis yields a rich and nuanced understanding of these publications' content, language, and ideological elements, contributing to a deeper comprehension of the intersection between religion and media in Kashmir.

Findings and Conclusion

The researchers analyzed 192 articles from four Islamic magazines: *Mir-e-Karwa, Tarjumanul Haq, Nusratul Islam, and Muslim* and presented in three categories: 1. Frequency of themes/dimensions across four Islamic magazines, 2. Analysis of magazines in terms of tone and direction of the story and 3. Response to research questions.

1.Frequency of Themes/Dimensions Across Four Islamic Magazines

Figure 1. Practical and Ritual Dimension of Religion

Theme 1. Practical and Ritual Dimension of Religion
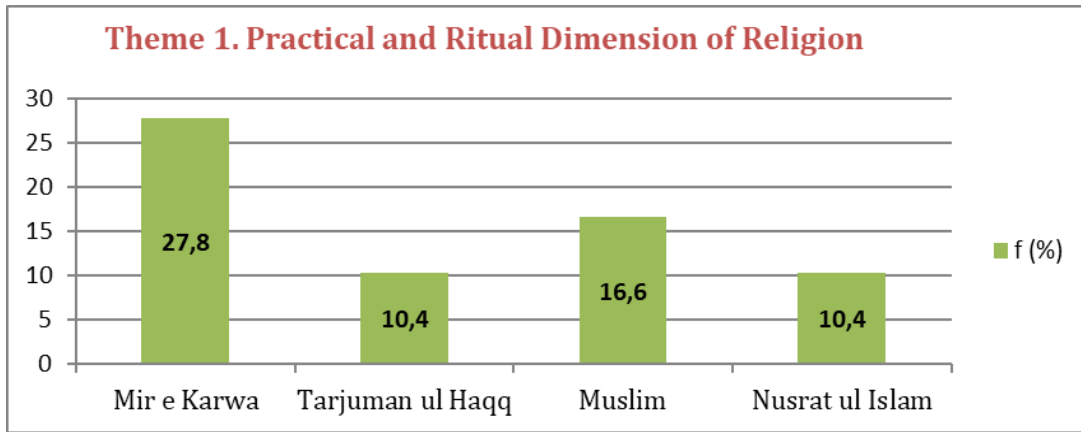
Note: The sample size for each magazine is 48, totalling 192 for the four magazines combined.

In Figure 1, the "Practical and Ritual Dimension of Religion," which is Ninian Smart's first dimension of religion, was analyzed across four magazines: *Mir-e-Karwan*, *Tarjuman ul Haq*, *Nusrat ul Islam*, and *Muslim*. This analysis focused on how prominently each magazine emphasized this theme.

Mir-e-Karwan featured this theme most frequently, with 13 instances that made up 27.8% of its content. *Muslim* followed with eight instances, representing about 16.6% of its content. *Tarjuman ul Haq* and *Nusrat ul Islam* each included the theme five times, accounting for 10.4% of their content.

These results indicate that while all four magazines address the practical and ritual aspects of religion, *Mir-e-Karwan* places the greatest emphasis on it, with the other three magazines including it to varying, but lesser, extents.

Figure 2. Narrative Dimension of Religion

Theme 2. Narrative Dimension of Religion
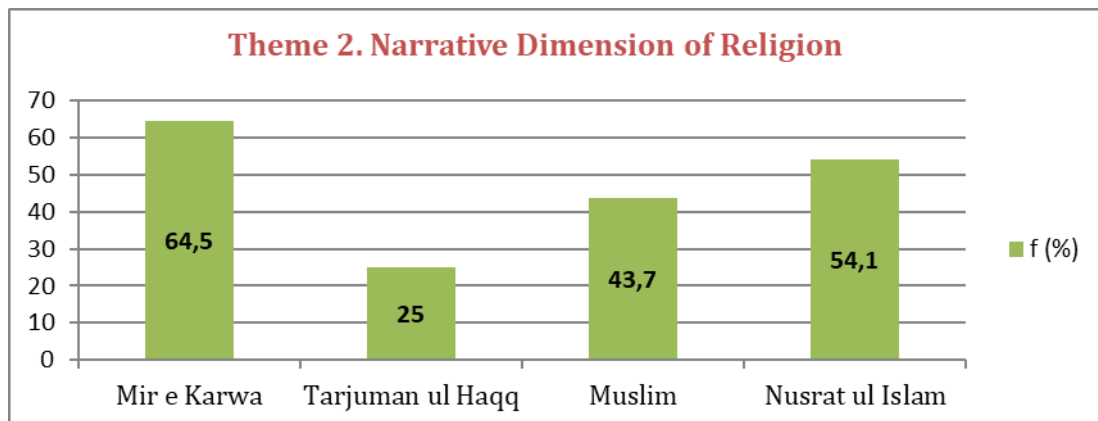
Figure 2 explores how the theme "Narrative Dimension of Religion" appears across four magazines: *Mir-e-Karwan*, *Tarjuman-ul Haq*, *Nusrat-ul-Islam*, and *Muslim*. The analysis shows that *Mir-e-Karwan* stands out with a strong emphasis on narratives, dedicating 64.5% of its content to this theme, highlighting the importance of storytelling in conveying religious beliefs.

Nusrat-ul-Islam and *Muslim* also focus significantly on narratives, with about 54.1% and 43.7% of their content centered on this dimension, suggesting that storytelling plays a crucial role in these publications as well. *Tarjuman-ul Haq*, on the other hand, devotes around 25% of its content to the narrative dimension, suggesting a more balanced approach where narratives are included but not as central to the magazine's overall content.

Figure 3. Experiential and Emotional Dimension of Religion
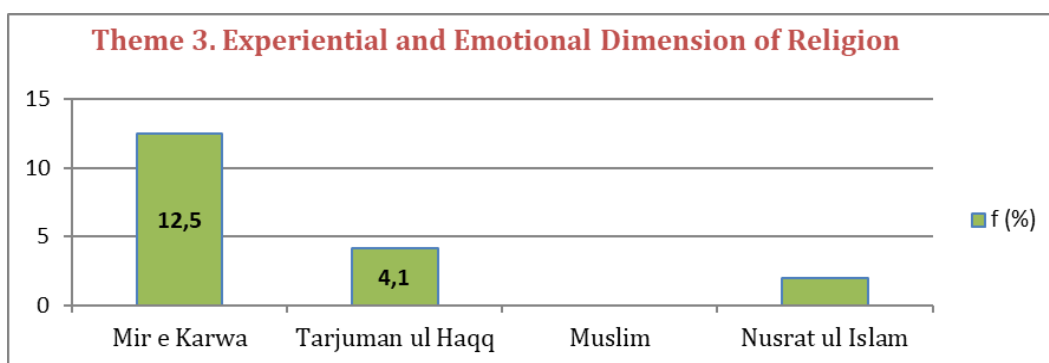
Note: The sample size for each magazine is 48, totalling 192 for the four magazines combined.

Figure 3 provide insights into the representation of the Experiential and Emotional Dimension of Religion across four magazines: *Mir e Karwa, Tarjuman ul Haq, Muslim,* and *Nusrat ul Islam.* The data reveals the number of articles (f) and the percentage of articles (f %) related to this theme in each magazine. Among the magazines, *Mir e Karwa* stands out with a significant presence in this dimension, as it features 6 articles, accounting for 12.5% of the total articles in this theme. This indicates a strong emphasis on exploring the experiential and emotional aspects of religion within the content of *Mir e Karwa*. *Tarjuman ul Haq* follows with 2 articles, representing 4.1% of the total articles in this theme. While it has a lesser presence compared to *Mir e Karwa*, it still demonstrates a level of attention to the experiential and emotional dimension of religion. On the other hand, Muslim did not include any articles pertaining to this dimension, suggesting a lack of focus on the experiential and emotional aspects of religion within the magazine content.

In summary, *Mir e Karwa* emerges as the magazine with the highest prominence in exploring the experiential and emotional dimension of religion, followed by *Tarjuman ul Haq* and *Nusrat ul Islam* to a lesser extent. Meanwhile, Muslim appears to overlook this particular dimension in the analyzed articles.

Figure 4. Social and Institutional Dimension of Religion
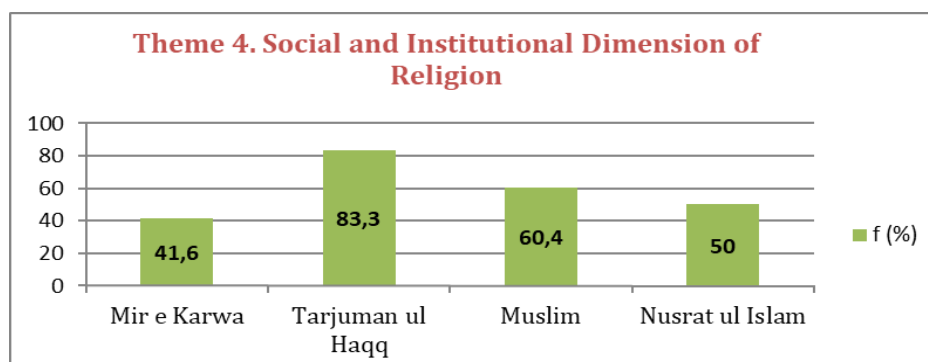
Figure 4 presents a thorough analysis of the Social and Institutional Dimension of Religion theme in four magazines. Notably, *Tarjuman ul Haq* distinguishes itself with the highest frequency of 40 and the highest percentage of 83.3% for this theme. The figures indicate that *Tarjuman ul Haq* places a significant emphasis on exploring the social and institutional aspects of religion in its content. Similarly, Muslim magazine exhibits a substantial presence of this theme, with a frequency of 29 and a percentage of 60.4%.

On the other hand, *Nusrat ul Islam* demonstrates a moderate focus on this theme, as evidenced by its percentage of 50%. The least prominent results among the four are represented by *Mir e Karwa* with a frequency of 20 and a percentage of 41.6%.

Overall, these findings shed light on the varying degrees of emphasis placed on the social and institutional aspects of religion across the four magazines. *Tarjuman ul Haq* emerges as the magazine with the highest prominence in this theme, followed by *Muslim* and *Nusrat ul Islam,* while *Mir e Karwa* demonstrates a slightly lower presence.

Figure 5. Ethical and Legal Dimension of Religion
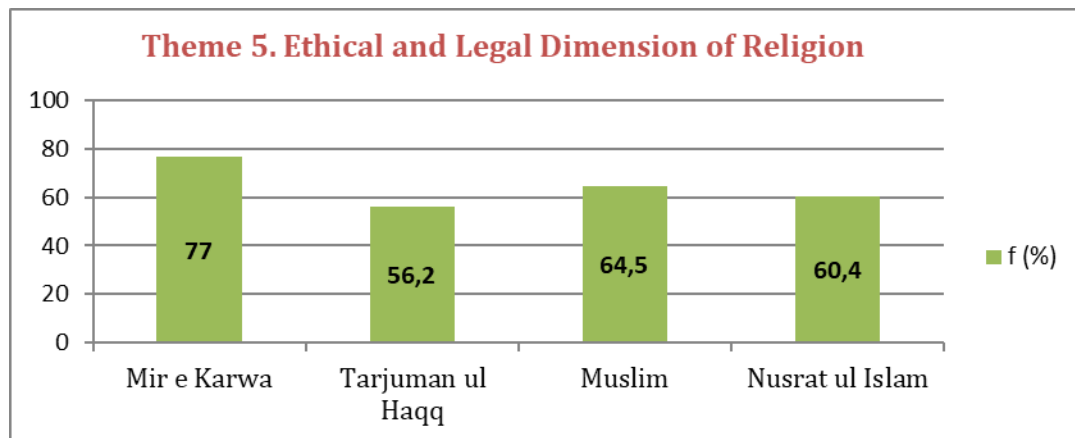
The representation in Figure 5 makes it evident that all four magazines place a significant emphasis on the ethical and legal dimension.

Mir e Karwa stands out with the highest percentage (77%), indicating a strong commitment to discussing and exploring ethical and legal aspects. *Muslim* magazine (60.4%), *Nusrat ul Islam* (60.4%) and *Tarjuman ul Haq* (56.4%), also demonstrate a considerable focus on these themes, highlighting their recognition of the importance of ethical and legal discussions within their content. Overall, the analysis reveals the high degree of emphasis on the "Ethical and Legal Dimension" theme across all the four magazines.

Figure 6. Doctrinal and Philosophical Dimension of Religion
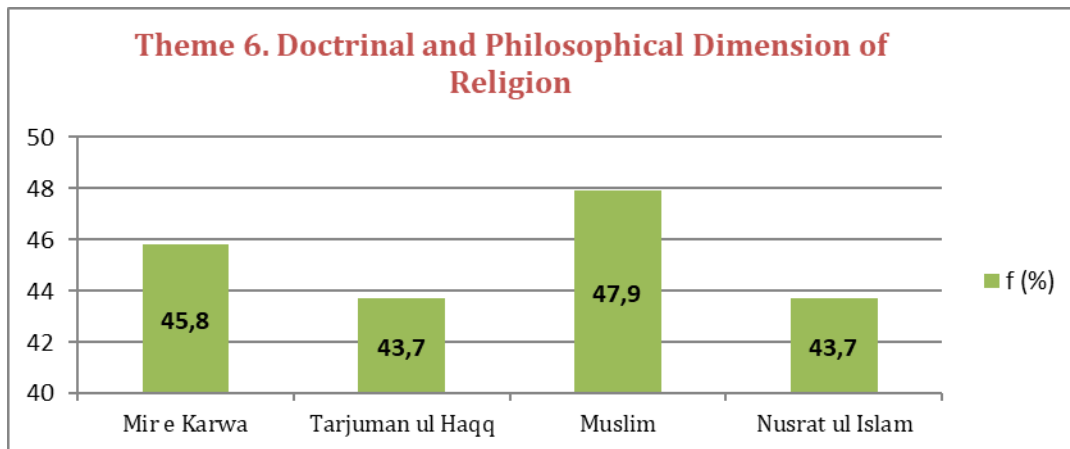
As we analyze the data in the visual representation in Figure 6 closely, it becomes evident that all four magazines: *Mir e Karwa*, *Tarjuman ul Haq*, *Muslim*, and *Nusrat ul Islam*, have placed significant importance on this particular theme.

The *Muslim* Magazine takes it up a notch as it places a strong emphasis on the doctrinal and philosophical dimension of religion with a frequency of 47.9%. *Mir-e-Karwa* follows closely with a frequency of (45.8%), indicating that a substantial amount of content in this magazine explores the doctrinal and philosophical aspects of religion.

On the other hand, *Nusrat-ul-Islam* matches *Tarjuman-ul-Haq* with a frequency of 21 (43.7%) each. By providing in-depth discussions and analysis, these magazines aim to engage their readers in thoughtful reflections and foster a deeper understanding of religious doctrines and philosophical concepts.

Figure 7. Material Dimension of Religion
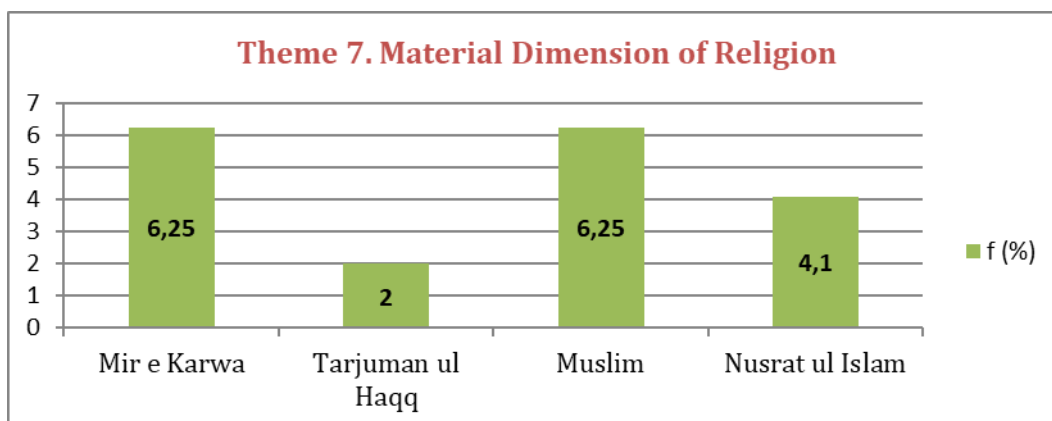
The data in Figure 7 provides explicit evidence of a lower presence of content related to the Material Dimension of Religion across all four analyzed magazines.

In this context, *Mir e Karwa* and *Muslim* magazine emerge as the most prominent publications, with the theme appearing three times, constituting 6.25% of their respective content. *Nusrat ul Islam* follows closely with two instances, accounting for 4.1% of its content. *Tarjuman ul*

Haq, while comparatively less dominant, still acknowledges the relevance of the Material Dimension, featuring the theme once and representing 2% of its content.

2. Analysis of Magazines in Terms of Tone and Direction of the Story

This study aims to analyze the content of religious magazines qualitatively, focusing on examining the tone employed in discussions about religion and related topics. This analysis was motivated, in part, by the 2019 ban on various religious organizations in Kashmir, majorly accused of disrupting peace in the valley. The study sought to determine whether these religious magazines challenge prevailing stereotype, promote mutual understanding or if they inadvertently contribute to Islamophobia and societal disruption. Moreover, the researcher aimed to explore how these publications influence public opinion and facilitate dialogue within the broader community.

Table 2. Cross Tabulation of Magazines for Analysis of Tone

Magazine	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
Mir e Karwa	36 (75%)	4 (8.3%)	8 (16.6%)	48
Tarjumanul Haqq	35 (72.9%)	3 (6.2%)	10 (20.8%)	48
Muslim	40 (83.3%)	1 (2%)	7 (14.5%)	48
Nusratul Islam	36 (75%)	3 (6.2%)	9 (18.7%)	48
Total	**76.5%**	**5.7%**	**17.7%**	**192**

The representation in the table 2 offers the following interpretations.

In the magazine *Mir-e-Karwa,* most of the articles (75%) have a positive tone, which suggests that the magazine tends to highlight positive aspects and stories. Moreover, they have a relatively small percentage (8.3%) of negative articles, indicating that they do not heavily emphasize negative themes. The remaining (16.6%) of the articles are neutral, which means they are likely presenting information without a strong positive or negative bias.

On the other hand, *Tarjumanul Haq* has a slightly lower percentage of positive articles, at (72.9%). This indicates they still have a predominantly positive tone, slightly less pronounced than "Mir e Karwa." They have a smaller percentage of negative articles (6.2%), suggesting that this magazine's negative themes are less emphasized. Also, they have a higher percentage of neutral articles, at 20.8%, which means the content has a more balanced perspective on various topics.

In the case of *Muslim,* the magazine has the highest percentage of positive articles, at (83.3%). This suggests that the magazine focuses heavily on highlighting positive stories and themes. They have a significantly lower percentage of negative articles, at only (2%), indicating a minimal emphasis on negative aspects. The remaining 14.5% of their articles are neutral, indicating a balanced presentation approach.

Lastly, *Nusratul Islam* has a similar distribution to *Mir-e-Karwa,* with 75% positive, 6.2% negative, and 18.7% neutral articles. This suggests they also have a predominantly positive tone, with a relatively small emphasis on negative themes. Overall, it becomes evident that the magazines exhibit a comparable distribution of themes, with a notable emphasis on positive content and a lesser focus on negative themes. This implies that the magazines strive to offer readers uplifting and inspiring content while minimizing the presence of negative elements.

Table 3. Frequency of Categories in Islamic Religious Magazines

S.No	Category	Mir e Karwa	Tarjumanul Haq	Muslim	Nusrat ul Islam	f (n)
1	Religious Practice	13	5	9	5	32
2.	Right Conduct	39	21	28	19	107
3.	Human Rights	10	15	4	3	32
4.	Islamic Belief	23	20	19	19	81
5.	Eschatological Narrative	9	2	0	6	17
6.	Islamic History	12	9	7	8	36
7.	Islam in Kashmir	3	0	1	2	6
8.	Islamic law	6	5	13	13	37
9.	Community Dynamics	8	11	7	10	36
10.	Islamic text	9	3	10	9	31
11.	Social issues	12	24	25	12	73
12.	Muslim Institutions	3	3	3	4	13
13.	Sacred Places	3	1	1	2	7
14.	Politics	10	25	1	4	40
15.	Family Life	6	1	5	6	18
16.	Personalities	13	4	9	7	33
17.	Education	1	2	6	3	12
18.	Theological Discourse	1	0	5	6	12
19.	Women's rights	8	6	8	5	27
20.	Connection with Divine	6	2	0	1	9

Note: f (n): Sum of each category across four magazines

The data reveals varying emphasis across the four magazines. Right *Conduct* and *Social Issues* are the most frequently addressed topics, while categories such as *Islam in Kashmir* and *Connection with Divine* appear less frequently.

3. Response to Research Questions

The interpretation aims to integrate the key findings in direct response to the following research questions:

a. To what degree do specific themes recurrently appear in Islamic magazines within the context of Kashmir?

In order to address the first research question, the primary objective set by the researcher was to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the content contained within the Islamic religious magazines in Kashmir. This analysis examined the frequency at which specific themes were presented in the publications. In examining the frequency of specific themes within Islamic religious publications in Kashmir, the study employed a quantitative analysis across seven dimensions of religion by Ninian Smart, each representing distinct themes and frames used in the study. Based on a combined analysis of content from four magazines, *Mir e Karwa, Nusratul Islam, Muslim,* and *Tarjumanul Haq,* a magazine-wise breakdown reveals nuanced patterns within the religious discourse.

In the analysis of religious content, themes from the practical and ritual dimensions appear with a combined prevalence of 16.14%, with *Mir-e-Karwa* showing the highest representation at 27.8%. In contrast, *Muslim* magazine covers this dimension the least, at 10.4%.

For the narrative dimension, themes are notably present, comprising 46.8% of the total content, with *Mir-e-Karwa* contributing the most at 64.5%, while *Tarjuman ul Haq* features a lower share of 25%. The experiential and emotional dimension shows more limited coverage, representing only 4.1% overall. *Mir-e-Karwa* is the sole publication with content in this dimension (12.5%), as *Muslim* and *Nusratul Islam* contain none.

The social and institutional dimension is a significant theme, covering 58.3% of the content across the publications, with *Tarjumanul Haq* having the most emphasis at 83.3% and *Mir-e-Karwa* somewhat lower at 41.6%. The ethical and legal dimension stands out as the most prominent, making up 64.5% of the total content, with *Mir-e-Karwa* again taking the lead at 77%. The doctrinal and philosophical dimension, representing 45.3% of the content, is covered relatively consistently across all magazines. Lastly, the material dimension shows limited focus, accounting for just 4.6% of the total content.

In summary, ethical and legal themes, along with social and institutional topics, are the most emphasized, appearing in 64.5% and 58.3% of the content, respectively. Narrative, doctrinal, and philosophical dimensions are moderately represented at 46.8% and 45.3%. In contrast, practical, ritual, material, experiential, and emotional themes are less frequently covered, with representation of 16.14%, 4.6%, and 4.1%, respectively.

Categorical Insights

1. Ethical and Legal Dominance: The Ethical and Legal theme is most important, appearing in 64.5% of the content. Most of the data categorized under this theme include Right Conduct, Human Rights, Women's Rights, Islamic Law, Family Life, and Parenting.

2. Social and Institutional Significance: This theme includes content about Human Rights, Women's Rights, Community Dynamics, Social Issues, Muslim Institutions, International Politics, National Politics and Kashmir Issue, Education, and Theological Discourse.

3. Narrative and Doctrinal Dimension: The Narrative and the Doctrinal dimensions emerge as moderately significant frameworks, making substantial contributions to the overall content. The narrative dimension encompasses categories such as Islamic History, Eschatological Narrative, Islam in Kashmir, Islamic Text, and Personalities. On the other hand, the doctrinal dimension includes content related to Islamic Belief and Attributes of God.

4. Underrepresented Themes: Practical and Ritual Dimension, Experiential Dimension, and Material Dimension are the least utilized frames. These themes include categories such as Religious practice, Connection with the Divine, and Sacred cities.

b. What is the overall treatment of tone in the Islamic magazines published by socio-religious organizations in Kashmir?

To address the second research question, the researcher conducted a qualitative analysis of all articles to investigate the manifestation of tone within each unit. These publications underwent a thorough examination, considering broader contextual factors such as cultural, social, and

religious influences. The analysis aimed to identify patterns, language choices, and rhetorical devices employed in the publications, contributing to the overall understanding of tone. The ascertained tones were subsequently categorized into positive, negative, and neutral descriptors. Finally, a comparative analysis was undertaken across various publications to discern any commonalities or variations in tone. The study also sought to investigate whether the tone could potentially contribute to stereotyping against Muslims or disrupt communal harmony.

Among the analyzed magazines, approximately 76.5% of the content was found to have a positive tone. These articles aimed to inspire readers and evoke positive actions within the community. About 17.7% of the content had a neutral tone, focusing on informative topics such as science, economy, education, and health. These articles aimed to provide information without eliciting strong emotions. Only 5.7% of the content exhibited a negative tone, which had the potential to evoke negative emotions, particularly about government policies. Overall, the distribution of tones in the magazines indicated a strong emphasis on positive content while minimizing negative elements. This reflects the magazine's commitment to uplifting and inspiring its readers.

Moreover, magazines have adopted an inclusive, respectful tone that promotes understanding. By presenting diverse perspectives, addressing sensitive topics with empathy, and avoiding negative or divisive language, magazines encourage readers to engage in thoughtful discussions and consider different viewpoints. This technique helps to build bridges of understanding and promote a sense of unity within the community.

For instance, instead of using a confrontational or judgmental tone, the *Muslim* magazine addresses social issues with empathy and understanding. While discussing ethical aspects, it has highlighted personal stories of prophets and saints in context to their challenges and contributions to society to encourage readers to enact the same.

Nusratul Islam addresses topics like race, caste, and creed in a sensitive tone. It strives to promote understanding and unity instead of perpetuating stereotypes or using divisive language. They have generally featured articles celebrating diversity and showcasing individuals from various backgrounds contributing positively to their communities. By doing this, it encourages readers to appreciate and respect different cultures and beliefs.

Furthermore, all four magazines have created a positive environment by presenting diverse perspectives on controversial issues. They include articles representing various viewpoints, allowing readers to engage in thoughtful discussions. By encouraging respectful dialogue and providing a platform for different voices to be heard, magazines foster a sense of unity and promote a more harmonious communal discourse.

c. How does the content of Islamic magazines impact community and social cohesion: promoting unity or causing division?

In context to research question three, the underlying objective of the researcher was to examine the role of Islamic religious publications in promoting social harmony and community cohesion in Kashmir. The researcher concluded that it's through religious teachings and religious practices that the notion of social cohesion comes into practice, and Islamic magazines in Kashmir

play a crucial role in influencing the community and promoting social cohesion. The framing techniques emphasize shared *religious experiences*, and portraying sacred places promotes unity among readers. However, the magazines must also navigate carefully when touching upon politically sensitive issues to avoid any provocative event within the community.

Magazine 1: *Mir-e-Karwa* places a strong emphasis on social cohesion through acts of charity and community engagement. The discussion on the ritual of *Walima* highlights the importance of unity and solidarity within the community. The magazine accentuates the significance of inclusivity by quoting Prophet Muhammad's stance on weddings, emphasizing the need to invite the rich and the poor. Exploring historical figures like Imam Abu Hanifa and the Sahaba inspires readers toward righteousness, compassion, and unity, reinforcing the magazine's commitment to fostering social bonds. The cross-cultural analysis further strengthens the argument, portraying Muslim culture as one that values community connection and support, in contrast to the individualism often seen in Western societies. The magazine advocates for community support initiatives such as microloan programs, skill-building workshops, and community funds, reflecting a commitment to address societal needs actively, thus fostering cohesion.

Magazine 2: *Tajumanul Haq* reinforces the role of *Zakah* (charity) as a crucial practice in promoting social cohesion. Giving *Zakah* has been portrayed as a means for Muslims to actively contribute to societal well-being, supporting various social welfare programs. The magazine suggests that *Zakah* fosters a sense of interconnectedness and solidarity among Muslims, highlighting the shared responsibility toward vulnerable members of society. Furthermore, the discussion on *Sadqa Fitr* emphasizes the role of collective charity in bringing Muslims together to support the impoverished. This act of G*iving* is portrayed as promoting empathy, unity, and compassion, ultimately strengthening community bonds.

Magazine 3: The shared reverence for religious sites and Islamic teachings can be a unifying factor in the Muslim magazine. It emphasizes social cohesion through congregational prayers, presenting them as opportunities for collective reflection and awareness of societal issues. The equal standing of individuals in the mosque symbolizes the values of social justice and equality within the Muslim community. The magazine suggests that congregational prayers inspire individuals to take action, advocate for marginalized groups, and work towards a more just society. This commitment to justice and equality reinforces the values of social cohesion and unity within the Muslim community.

Magazine 4: *Nusratul Islam discusses* practical measures to address community issues and challenges, emphasizing the importance of maintaining strong familial bonds. The magazine encourages kindness and support towards relatives, especially orphaned children, fostering harmony and cohesion within the community. By focusing on the practical aspects of community dynamics and relationships, *Nusratul Islam* promotes universal brotherhood while inculcating spiritual and moral values among people.

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The authors' contributions to the study are as follows: 50%, 30%, and 20%, corresponding to the order of authorship.
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Türkiye'de Dini Grupların Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığına Bakışı: *Altınoluk, Köprü* ve *İktibas* Dergilerinde Diyanet Tartışmaları

Ayşe POLAT[*]

Mahmut Bilal UZUN[**]

Öz

Bu makalede Türkiye'deki çeşitli dini grupların Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığına (DİB) bakışları basılı medya araçları olan dergiler üzerinden incelenmektedir. Erenköy Cemaati'ne ait *Altınoluk*, Nurculuğun Yeni Asya koluna ait *Köprü* ve radikal İslamcı Ercümend Özkan'la özdeşleşen *İktibas* dergileri 1990–2016 yıl aralığı ile sınırlandırılarak incelenmiştir. "Diyanet," "Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı," "laiklik" anahtar kelimeleriyle dergilerin arşivinde tarama yapılarak DİB ile ilgili yazılar tespit edilmiştir. İçerik analizi yöntemi ile metinlerde açık ve örtülü anlamlar sistematik olarak incelenmiştir. Söz konusu dergilerde öne çıkan ortak özellik, DİB ile ilgili az sayıda yazı olması, konunun ağırlıklı olarak laiklik ve özellikle baskıcı laiklik politikaları çerçevesinde ele alınmış olmasıdır. Ayrıca her üç dergi kendi dini yaklaşım ve ekolünü DİB ile ilgili değerlendirmelerinde doğrudan yansıtmaktadır. Tasavvufi bir dini yaklaşımı benimseyen *Altınoluk,* bir yandan DİB'in Türkiye'de laiklik ve din-devlet-toplum ilişkileri açısından sorunlarına ve çelişkilerine değinirken diğer yandan cemaatler üstü kuşatıcı bir kurum olarak DİB'in gerekliliği ve özerkliğinin önemine dikkat çekmektedir. Radikal İslamcı çizgideki *İktibas,* DİB ve laikliği reddederken; *Köprü,* demokratik laiklik savunusuyla dinin devlet, devletin din üzerinden baskıcı olmadığı bir model ile DİB'in özerkliğini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Sosyolojisi, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, Dini Cemaatler, İslamcı Dergiler

The Perspectives of Religious Groups on the Presidency of Religious Affairs in Türkiye: The Debates on the Presidency in the Periodicals *Altınoluk, Köprü* and *İktibas*

Abstract

This article examines the perspectives of various religious groups in Turkey on the Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA) through print media, specifically journals. The journals studied include *Altınoluk*, associated with the Erenköy Community; *Köprü*, affiliated with the "New Asia" branch of the Nur movement; and *İktibas*, associated with the radical Islamist figure Ercümend Özkan, covering the period from 1990 to 2016. Articles were identified through a keyword search using terms like "Diyanet" and "secularism." The content analysis method was used to systematically examine both the explicit and implicit meanings in the relevant texts. A key finding is the limited coverage of the of articles addressing the PRA PRA in these journals, with discussions mainly centered around secularism, particularly in relation to repressive secularist policies. Each journal reflects its own religious perspective in evaluating the PRA. *Altınoluk*, representing a Sufi approach, critiques the PRA's contradictions, while also emphasizing the PRA's necessity and autonomy as an inclusive institution. *İktibas*, with a radical Islamist stance, rejects both the PRA and secularism. On the other hand, *Köprü* advocates for democratic secularism, calling for non-coercive state-religion relations and stressing the PRA's autonomy.

Keywords: Sociology of Religion, Presidency of Religious Affairs, Religious Groups, Islamist Journals

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[*] Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi, e-mail: ayse.polat@bogazici.edu.tr, orcid.org/0000-0002-8739-6372, İstanbul, Türkiye

[**] Yüksek Lisans Öğrencisi, İstanbul Medeniyet Üniversitesi, e-mail: mahmutbilal95@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0001-9251-9050, İstanbul, Türkiye

Türkiye'de Dini Grupların Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığına Bakışı:
Altınoluk, Köprü ve *İktibas* Dergilerinde Diyanet Tartışmaları

MEDİAD
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Giriş

Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (DİB), din-devlet-toplum ilişkileri bağlamında Türkiye'deki en önemli kurumlardan biridir. 1924'te Diyanet İşleri Reisliği ismi ile kurulan ve Cumhuriyet'in ilk yıllarından itibaren kurumsal bir kimlik kazandırılan DİB, bugüne kadar kamuoyunda farklı pek çok tartışmanın odağında yer almıştır. Ancak DİB hakkında yazılı veya görsel medyada ne tür tartışmaların yer aldığı tespit edebildiğimiz kadarıyla sistematik olarak incelenmemiştir. Benzer şekilde Türkiye'de dini cemaat ve grupların DİB ile ilişkisi, oldukça az sayıda akademik çalışmada ve çok sınırlı ölçüde ele alınmıştır. Bu makale kapsamında Türkiye'de çeşitli dini grupların DİB'e bakış açısı, DİB hakkındaki görüş ve değerlendirmeleri, söz konusu cemaatlerin yazılı basın organları olan dergileri üzerinden incelenerek Türkiye'de din, medya, DİB ve dini gruplar gibi önemli konulara katkı sağlanması amaçlanmaktadır. Türkiye'de özellikle İslamcılık gibi dini oluşumlarda medyanın bilhassa dergilerin oynadığı temel rol düşünülürse (Sunar, 2019) çalışmanın önemi daha iyi anlaşılacaktır.

Bu makalede Türkiye'deki üç dini cemaatin uzun yıllardır yayımlanan ve söz konusu dini grupların görüşlerini topluma yansıtan dergileri üzerinden DİB'e bakışları ele alınmaktadır. Türkiye'deki dört büyük Nakşibendi dergahından biri olan ve Erenköy Cemaati olarak tanınan Sufi ekolün (Büyükkara, 2016) önde gelen yayın organı *Altınoluk* dergisi, Ercümend Özkan tarafından çıkarılan ve ölümünden sonra dahi onun görüşleri ile özdeşleşmeye devam eden, kendisini hem siyasi hem dini olarak radikal ve geleneğe karşı eleştirel İslamcı bir çizgide tanımlayan *İktibas* dergisi (Erkilet, 2017) ve "kültürel ıslahatçı olarak tanımlanabilecek" (Büyükkara, 2016) Nurculuk hareketinin öne çıkan kollarından Yeni Asya grubu (Arslan, 2011) tarafından çıkarılan *Köprü* dergisi bu çalışmada DİB ile ilgili yazıları bağlamında incelenmektedir.

DİB, Dini Cemaatler ve İslamcı Dergilere İlişkin Literatür

DİB ile ilgili akademik çalışmalar arasında Cumhuriyet döneminde DİB'i, din-siyaset ilişkileri bağlamında ve arşiv kaynaklarına dayalı olarak inceleyen çalışmalar öne çıkmaktadır. (Kara, 2019; Mardin, 1991; Toprak, 2019). DİB'in teşkilat yapısına ağırlık veren çalışmaların yanı sıra (Dursun, 1992), DİB'i hukuki olarak dinin alanın düzenlenmesi ve laiklik açısından ele alan çalışmalar da vardır (Gözaydın, 2020). DİB ile ilgili lisansüstü tezlerde de son yıllarda kayda değer bir artış görülmektedir.

Dini cemaatler hakkında Mardin'in Nurculuk çalışması öncü bir araştırmadır. 1989 yılında İngilizce basılan, 1992'de *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi Olayı: Modern Türkiye'de Din ve Toplumsal Değişim* adıyla Türkçeye çevrilen eserde Mardin (2017), hem Nurcu hareketin kurucusu Said Nursi'yi hem de onun vefatının ardından cemaatin gelişimini sosyolojik olarak ele almıştır. Nur cemaatinin farklı ekolleri hakkında sonradan çok sayıda lisansüstü tez yazılmıştır (Arslan, 2011). Türkiye'deki dini cemaatler hakkında genel çalışmaların (Çakır, 2017) yanı sıra Cerrahilik (Atacan, 1990), Işıkçılık (Tekin, 2017) gibi belirli cemaatlere odaklanan araştırmalar da yayımlanmıştır.

Belirli dini cemaatlerin yanı sıra tarikatlarla ilgili çalışmalar da mevcuttur. Örneğin, Nakşibendiliğin farklı coğrafyalardaki tarihsel gelişiminin yanı sıra tarikatın Türkiye'deki serencamı ele alınmıştır (Algar, 2019; Weismann, 2015). Ayrıca özellikle son dönemde İsmailağa Cemaati (Işık, 2021; Öğüt, 2022); İskenderpaşa Cemaati(Öztekin, 2022; Sözer, 2018), Erenköy/Altınoluk Cemaati (Açık, 2020a; Ermiş, 2018) ile ilgili lisansüstü çalışmalar yapılmıştır.

İslamcı dergiler literatürü incelendiğinde yapılan ilk ve önemli çalışmalardan biri Kentel'in (2004) "1990'ların İslami Düşünce Dergileri ve Yeni Müslüman Entelektüeller: Bilgi ve Hikmet, Umran, Tezkire" başlıklı makalesidir. 2010 sonrası yapılan pek çok çalışma İslamcı dergileri farklı yönleriyle ele alırken (Maviş, 2017; Sunar, 2019); hazırlanan lisansüstü tezler İslamcı dergilerde kadın, emek veya devlet tartışmaları gibi konulara yoğunlaşmaktadır (Karaman, 2020; Kılıç, 2016).

DİB, dini cemaatler ve İslamcı dergiler hakkındaki bu akademik çalışmalar, son yirmi yılda büyük bir artış göstermiştir. Yükseköğretim Kurulu (YÖK) Tez Merkezi'nin verilerine göre DİB'e ilişkin 179 lisansüstü tezden 167 tanesi 2000 yılı sonrasına aittir. Türkiye'deki Nakşibendi cemaatlere ve Nurculara ilişkin akademik tezlerin tamamına yakını 2016 ve sonrasında yazılmıştır. İslamcı dergilere ilişkin de benzer bir durum söz konusudur. Bu alanda yazılan 27 lisansüstü tezin tamamı 2016 ve sonrasına aittir. Yükseköğretim kurumlarının ve öğrenci sayılarının artışı, söz konusu durumu açıklayan bir etken olabilir. Ancak İslamcılık, muhafazakarlık, dini gruplar ve siyaset gibi konuların son yirmi yılda güncel ve akademik olarak daha fazla ilgi gördüğü de söylenebilir.

Müstakil olarak DİB ve dini cemaatlere ilişkin çok sayıda akademik çalışma olmasına rağmen, DİB ile dini cemaatlerin ilişkisine odaklanan çok az sayıda araştırma mevcuttur. Kutlu (2009), DİB ve Alevilik, Bektaşilik ve Caferilik ilişkisine odaklanmış, ancak DİB ve Sünni ekoller konusuna değinmemiştir. Şahin (2020), *Diyanet Dergisi* ile on bir İslamcı dergiyi siyaset, dış politika, ekonomi gibi çeşitli konular açısından karşılaştırmıştır. Bazı çalışmalar ise DİB ve dini cemaatler konusuna dini gruplar ve siyaset bağlamında sınırlı olarak değinmektedir. Örneğin, Kaya (2018), dini yapıların siyasetteki etkisinden Nurculuk ve Nakşibendilik bağlamında kısaca bahsetmektedir. Aybudak (2022) ise Türkiye'de dini cemaatler ile devlet arasındaki ilişkiyi laiklik sözleşmesi kavramı ekseninde değerlendirirken Nurculuğa değinmekle birlikte hiçbir dini cemaate spesifik olarak odaklanmamaktadır. Özetle, Türkiye'de dini grup ve ekollerin DİB hakkındaki görüş ve yaklaşımları çok sınırlı incelenmiş bir konudur.

Üç Dini Grup ve Dergileri

Türkiye'deki farklı dini grup ve oluşumların DİB'e bakışını karşılaştırmalı ele alabilmek için bu makalede incelenen Nakşibendi Sufi Erenköy Cemaati ve *Altınoluk* dergisi, radikal İslamcı Ercümend Özkan ekolü ve *İktibas* dergisi ve Nurculuğun Yeni Asya ekolü ve *Köprü* dergisi kısaca tanıtılacaktır.

Erenköy Cemaati kendisini Nakşibendiliğin Halidiyye koluna, silsilede Mevlânâ Halid-i Bağdadi'ye dayandırmaktadır. Yakın dönemde önce Esad Erbîlî ardından halifesi olan Mahmud Sami Ramazanoğlu, ardından Musa Topbaş ve son olarak Osman Nuri Topbaş cemaatin önderliğini yapmıştır (Açık, 2020). Ramazanoğlu, 1892 yılında Adana'da doğmuş; Daru'l Fünun Hukuk Mektebini bitirmiş, tekke ve zaviyeler kapatılınca Adana'ya geri dönmüş, ancak sonradan dergâhın başına geçmek için önce Beyazıt'a sonra hocası Esad Erbîlî'nin son yıllarını geçirdiği Erenköy semtine taşınmıştır (Çakır, 2017, s. 59). Cemaate Erenköy Cemaati/Dergâhı isminin verilmesi, Ramazanoğlu'nun hocasının ve kendisinin burada faaliyet yürütmesi sebebiyledir. Ramazanoğlu'nun ölümünün ardından Musa Topbaş cemaatin başına geçmiştir. Konya'da 1917'de doğan Topbaş, tüccar bir aileden gelmektedir. Dönemin önde gelen din âlimlerinden dersler alan Topbaş, 1950'de tanışıp sohbetlerine iştirak ettiği Ramazanoğlu'na 1956'da bağlanmış ve 1976'da ondan hilâfet almıştır (Açık, 2020, s. 14). Topbaş 16 Temmuz 1999'da İstanbul'da vefat edince cemaatin başına Osman Nuri Topbaş geçmiştir.

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Altınoluk, Erenköy Cemaati'nin yayın organı olarak 1986'dan beri aylık olarak yayımlanmaktadır. Güncel konulara oldukça sınırlı düzeyde yer veren, ağırlıklı olarak tasavvufi yazılar yayımlayan bir dergidir. *Altınoluk'un* yazı kategorileri bunu ortaya koymaktadır. Gönül Bahçesinden, Ayın Sohbeti, Canım Arzular Seni, Tasavvuf, Musahabe en çok yazı içeren kategoriler iken Türkiye Gündemi çok az, Dünya Gündemi ise daha yoğundur. Derginin editörlüğünü çok uzun bir süre Ahmet Taşgetiren yapmıştır.

Altınoluk'un çeşitli sayılarında Diyanet İşleri başkanları ile gerçekleştirilen mülakatların yanı sıra derginin yazarları arasında DİB'de görev alanlar da vardır. Örneğin, *Altınoluk'*ta en çok yazan yazarlardan biri olan Hasan Kâmil Yılmaz, 2010 yılında DİB başkan yardımcılığına atanmış, 2017 yılında ise İstanbul Müftülüğüne tayin edilmiştir. Bu açıdan değerlendirildiğinde Sufi Nakşibendi Erenköy cemaatinin, radikal İslamcı ve Nurcu ekollere göre insan kaynağı ve sosyal sermaye açısından DİB'e daha yakın olduğu söylenebilir.

Ercümend Özkan, 1938'de Kırşehir'de doğmuştur. 1959'da Ankara Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesini bırakarak Dil ve Tarih Coğrafya Fakültesine geçiş yapmıştır. Özkan'ın İslamcı fikriyatla ilk tanışması, 1960 yılında Ürdün kökenli İslamcı bir hareket olan Hizbu't Tahrir hareketi ile olmuştur. Özkan, amacı Suriye'yi ve Irak'ı da içine alacak bir hilafet devleti kurmak olan Hizbu't Tahrir hareketinin Türkiye'deki lideri konumuna yükselmiştir (Atalar, 2021, s. 16). Hizbu't Tahrir üyeliği yüzünden 1967 ile 1970 yılları arasında çeşitli hapis cezalarına çarptırılan Özkan, kendisinin kurduğu Basın Haber Ajansını vefatına kadar yönetmiştir (Atalar, 2021, s. 12).

Kendisini "radikal veya köktenci Müslüman" olarak tanımlamaktan çekinmeyen Özkan, geleneksel İslam'ı sıklıkla eleştiren yazılar kaleme almıştır. Özkan'ın geleneksel İslam eleştirisinin merkezinde tasavvuf yer almaktadır. Özkan'a göre (1996) tasavvuf; Yunan felsefesi, Uzak Doğu inançları ve Orta Asya'dan gelen Türk inançlarının İslam'ın içine sokulduğu ayrı bir dindir. Özkan (1996), İslam'da zahire tasavvufta ise batına göre hükmedildiğini, İslam dininde kullukta ilerledikçe sakınılan şeylerin çoğalmasına karşı tasavvufta mertebe kat ettikçe yükümlülüğün azaldığı gibi karşılaştırmalar üzerinden İslam ve tasavvufun farklılığına dikkat çeker. Özkan'ın geleneksel din eleştirisinin diğer odağını fıkıh ve mezhepler oluşturmaktadır. Birçok fıkhi eserin yüzlerce yıl öncesinin meselelerini çözmek için ortaya konduğunu, bu nedenle bunların bugün anlam ve işlevini yitirdiğini öne sürer (Erkilet, 2017). Özkan (1999), mezheplerin din gibi telakki edilmesini de reddeder.

Özkan, geleneksel olarak tanımladığı dini anlayış kadar hümanizm, sosyalizm, laik demokratik görüş gibi modern ideoloji ve görüşleri de reddeder. Özkan, bir kısım çağdaş ihya hareketleri gibi hem geleneksel(ci) hem modern(ist) düşünce ve pratikleri eleştirmektedir (Ali, 2012). Erkilet'e göre (2005) Özkan, Kur'an ve sünnet bazlı "arı duru bir İslam" hedeflediği gibi bu dini görüş onun siyasi mücadelesinin de temelini oluşturmuştur (s. 688). Özkan'ın düşüncesinde dini ve siyasi mücadelenin amacı İslam'ı hem sonradan eklenen geleneksel unsurlardan hem de güncel laik ideolojilerden kurtarmaktır.

Özkan, *İktibas'ı* kendi görüşlerini yaymak için neşretmiştir. *İktibas*, Ocak 1981'de yayın hayatına başlamış, siyasi ve dini olarak radikal ve geleneğe karşı bir İslamcılık ile özdeşleşmiştir (Erkilet, 2017). İlk dört senesinde 15 günde bir çıkan dergi, devam eden süreçte aylık olarak yayımlanmıştır. *İktibas*, pek çok farklı gazete ve dergiden derleme yazıların yanı sıra telif yazıları da

yayımlamaktadır. Dergi, güncel ve gündelik haber ve yorumlara, polemik yazılarına oldukça fazla yer vermektedir. *İktibas*'ın "yorum, kavram, düşünce" başlıklı alt bölümlerinde kavramlarla ilgili düşünsel yazılar olmakla beraber "gündem" başlığı altında güncel konulara ilişkin yorum yazıları daha ağırlıklıdır. Özkan, derginin her sayısında "Selam İle", "Yorum", "Kavramlar" ve "Okuyucu Mektuplarına Cevaplar" gibi bölümlerde kendi görüşlerini yazmıştır (Erkilet, 2017). 2010'dan itibaren internet ortamında da yayımlanan dergide bugün halen Özkan'ın eski yazılarına "Kavram" başlığı altında yer verilmeye devam edilmektedir.

Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son döneminde dünyaya gelen Said Nursi (1877-1960), Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kuruluşuna ve çok partili hayata geçiş sürecine kadar Türkiye'de yaşanan önemli hadiselere tanıklık etmiş biridir. Nursi'nin fikirlerinin şekillenmesinde içinde bulunmuş olduğu şartların etkisi yadsınamaz. Bununla birlikte Said Nursi kendi ıslahatçı, yenilikçi görüşlerini de ortaya koyarak Nurculuk hareketine önderlik etmiştir. Büyükkara (2016), Nursi ve Nurculuğu aşağıdan yukarıya, insan odaklı bir toplumsal ve dini reformu amaçlayan kültürel ıslahatçılıkla eşleştirir; bir taraftan Müslümanların dinleri hakkındaki yanlış anlayış ve pratikleri, bozulan dini geleneği değiştirmeyi amaçlayan ıslahatçılığın diğer bir yandan da seçmeci bir anlayışla moderniteden faydalanmayı benimsediğini ifade eder (ss. 135-139). Risale-i Nur külliyatı hem klasik tefsirden ayrılan yanları hem de iman ve insan odaklı toplumsal reform çağrısıyla ıslahatçı çizgiyi yansıtır. Bu eserlerinde Nursi, materyalist ve pozitivist akımları reddetmekle beraber anayasacılık ve meşrutiyeti savunur.

Nursi'nin vefatının ardından farklı Nurcu kollar oluşmuştur. Yeni Asya grubu, adını 1970'te yayın hayatına başlayan, Nursi'nin talebesi Zübeyr Gündüzalp öncülüğünde çıkarılan *Yeni Asya* Gazetesi'nden almaktadır. Gazete, demokrasiyi savunmayı, dinsizlik ve komünizmin mahiyetini ortaya koymayı, insanları ikna ile hak ve hakikate çağırmayı temel prensipleri olarak belirtir (Arslan, 2011). Yeni Asya grubunun en belirgin özelliği merkez sağ partilere açıkça destek vermesidir. Çakır'a (2017) göre Yeni Asya grubunun kanaat önderlerinden Safa Mürsel, "günümüz toplumlarının ya demokratik ya despotik olduğunu", "DP, AP, DYP çizgisinin alternatifinin despotizm olduğunu" savunmuştur (s. 101). Nitekim DYP lideri Süleyman Demirel ile Yeni Asya'nın *Köprü* dergisinde laiklik hakkında bir röportaj gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Köprü, 1977'de *İlme İrfana Umrana Köprü* ismiyle yayın hayatına başlamıştır. Ekim 1980'den bu yana Yeni Asya Yayıncılık tarafından *Köprü* ismiyle yayımlanmaktadır. Başlarda aylık olarak çıkan *Köprü*, 1994'te 46. sayıdan itibaren üç ayda bir kış, bahar, yaz, güz alt başlıklarıyla çıkmaya devam etmiştir. *Köprü*, akademik bir dergi olmamakla beraber dergideki yazıların kayda değer bir kısmı akademisyenler tarafından kaleme alınmaktadır. Ayrıca derginin akademisyenlerden oluşan bir danışma ve hakem kurulu bulunmaktadır. *Köprü'deki* yazıların bir kısmı doğrudan Said Nursi'nin görüşlerine dayanırken bir kısmı din, bilim, medeniyet, devlet, siyaset ve adalet gibi konulara odaklanmaktadır.

Yöntem

Bu makale kapsamında *Altınoluk*, *İktibas* ve *Köprü* dergilerinin DİB hakkındaki yazıları içerik analizi yöntemi ile incelenmiştir. Tek bir tanımı olmamakla beraber içerik analizi bir metnin barındırdığı "açık ve örtülü anlamları sistematik" olarak metne dayalı bir biçimde inceleyen, "metin temelinde yinelenen ve geliştirilen kategori sistemi ile çözümleyen ve göründen açık/aşikar olmayan bağlama yönelik çıkarımlar yapan bir araştırma yöntemidir" (Gökçe, 2019, s. 62). Niteliksel içerik

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analizinde metnin anlamını açıklamaya yönelik önce tümevarımsal sonra tümdengelimsel yorumlayıcı tema ve kategoriler oluşturulur (Mayring, 2000).

Dergilerin tüm sayılarını taramak mümkün olmayacağı için, araştırma 1990–2016 yılları ile sınırlandırılmıştır. Araştırma kapsamında incelenecek metinleri belirlemek için İslamcı Dergiler Projesi (İDP) ve *Köprü* dergisinin kendi arşivinde anahtar kelime taraması yapılmış ve makalenin konusuyla ilgili yazılar tespit edilmiştir. Bu kapsamda öncelikle, ilgili dönem aralığında "Diyanet," ve "Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı" anahtar kelimeleriyle tarama yapılmıştır. Daha sonra "laiklik" anahtar kelimesi ile de tarama yapılarak tespit edilen makaleler araştırmaya dahil edilmiştir. Son olarak dergilerin kapaklarındaki yazı başlıklarına bakılarak, belirtilen anahtar kelimelerin geçmediği ancak konu ile ilgili olduğu düşünülen yazılar incelenmiştir.

Öncelikle niceliksel olarak DİB ile ilgili yazıların toplam yazılar içindeki oranı belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır. *Altınoluk'un* 1990–2016 yılları arasındaki tüm sayılarından yazı sayısının ortalaması 28'dir. *Altınoluk'ta* en az 1990 yılında 15 yazı, en fazla 2006 yılında 39 yazı olduğu tespit edilmiştir. *İktibas* dergisinin arşivine internet sayfasındaki link üzerinden ulaşıldığından derginin tüm sayılarındaki yazı sayısı tam olarak hesaplanamamıştır. Ancak *İktibas'ın* bir sayısında yaklaşık 25 yazının yayımlandığı belirtilebilir. *Köprü'nün* 1990–2016 yılları arasında sayı başına düşen ortalama yazı sayısı 16'dır.

Dergilerin bu ortalama yazı sayıları, aylık çıkma süreleri (*Köprü* üç aylık *Altınoluk* ve *İktibas* aylık) ve 1990–2016 olmak üzere araştırma kapsamında belirlenen on yıl periyodu dikkate alınarak toplam yazılar hesaplanacak olursa *Altınoluk'ta* 5376, *Köprü'de* 1024, *İktibas'ta* 4800 yazının yayımlandığı belirtilebilir. Bu sayıların toplam yazı sayısının altında olan ortalama rakamlar olduğu da vurgulanmalıdır. Nitekim, *Altınoluk'un* 1990–2016 arasındaki tüm sayılarındaki yazı sayısı tek tek hesaplandığında toplam 8984 yazı yayımlandığı görülür.

Sayısal olarak bakıldığında dergilerin toplam yazı sayı içinde DİB ile ilgili yayınları azdır. DİB anahtar kelimesi ile İDP kataloğunda yapılan genel aramada *Altınoluk'ta* 44, *İktibas'ta* 60 yazı tespit edilmiştir. İDP kataloğunda yer almayan *Köprü'nün* kendi online arşivinde, DİB anahtar kelimesi ile yapılan taramada *sadece* bir yazı tespit edilmiştir. Her üç dergi için laiklik kelimesi ile yapılan taramada *Altınoluk'ta* 64, *İktibas'ta 241, Köprü* de 10 yazı tespit edilmiştir. Laiklikle ilgili tüm yazılar doğrudan DİB ile ilgili değildir. Bu açıdan niceliksel olarak üç dergide DİB hakkında az sayıda yayın olduğu söylenebilir.

Ancak yine de bu yazılar, niteliksel bir içerik analizi için yeterli malzeme sunmaktadır. Anahtar kelime taraması ile ilgili yazılar belirlendikten sonra bu metinlerde ortaya konulan fikir ve görüşler dergilerin temsil ettikleri dini ekoller de dikkate alınarak kapsamlı olarak incelenmiştir. Tespit edilen yazılar, kendi bütünlükleri ve dergilerin genel özellikleri dikkate alınarak özetleyici bir içerik analizine tabi tutulmuştur (Gökçe, 2019, s. 137).

DİB özelinde ilgili tartışmalar dini yaklaşım kadar Türkiye'de laiklik meselesi bağlamında gerçekleştiğinden dergilerin DİB'e bakışında dini ekollerin yanı sıra laiklik ile ilgili görüşleri de içerik analizine tabi tutulmuştur. Örneğin *Altınoluk, İktibas* ve *Köprü*, DİB'i kendi dini görüş ve yaklaşımlarının yanı sıra laiklik konusu etrafında da tartışmaktadır. Dergilerin DİB ile ilgili yazılarında öne çıkan temalar olarak laiklik ve farklı laiklik modelleri hakkındaki görüşleri analiz edilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Çalışmamıza dergilerdeki yazıların yazarların görüşlerini ifade edip derginin genel düşünce ve tavrını yansıtmadığı eleştirisi yöneltilebilir. Bu noktada yazarlar üzerinden dergilerin ve temsil ettikleri cemaatlerin DİB'e bakış açısını tespit etmenin bir kısıtlılık barındırdığı eleştirisi makuldür. Ancak ele alınan dergilerin genel tutumuna tek tek yazılar üzerinden değil bütüncül yaklaşılarak ulaşıldığı ve ilgili yazarların çoğunun söz konusu dergilerde en az bir yazısı yayımlandığı dikkate alınacak olursa tespit edilen yazıların analizde kullanılması geçerli bir yöntemdir.

Altınoluk: Çelişkili ama Vazgeçilemez Bir Kurum Olarak DİB

Altınoluk'ta DİB'e dair iki tema öne çıkmaktadır: DİB'in özerkliği meselesi ve çelişkili ancak vazgeçilemez bir kurum olarak DİB'in varlığı. DİB'in özerkliği konusu çeşitli yazılarda dolaylı olarak ifade edilmekle birlikte doğrudan konuyla ilgili yazı Hayreddin Karaman'a aittir. Karaman (1992), DİB'in hükümetlerden ve siyasetten tamamen bağımsız, hem ilmi hem de idari ve mali özerkliğe sahip olması gerektiğinin altını çizer. Karaman, Diyanet'e ait vakıfların kuruma tekrar tahsis edilmesiyle DİB'in mali özerklik kazanmasının gerekliliğini savunur. Ayrıca Karaman (1992), bir hükümet değişikliği olduğunda gerek DİB başkanının gerekse DİB'in kadro ve taşra teşkilatlarının da değiştiğinden, bu durumun imam ve vaizler dahil olmak üzere bütün bir DİB personeli arasında kayda değer bir endişe yarattığından bahsederek DİB'in idari ve siyasi bağımsızlığının önemini vurgular (s. 18). DİB başkanlarının seçimle atanmasını ve başkanların kuruma kadro alımlarında ilgililerin rızasını gözetmesini önerir. Karaman'ın DİB'i bağlamsal politika ve siyasetin dışında tutarak hem kurum ve mensuplarını korumayı hem de kurumun ilimden mali boyuta çok kapsamlı bir özerklik ihtiyacına dikkat çekerek DİB'i güçlendirmeye çalıştığı öne sürülebilir.

Altınoluk dergisinde, DİB'in özerkliği sadece siyasi olarak değil, dini alandaki diğer kurum ve aktörler açısından da değerlendirilmektedir. Dergide DİB başkanları ile yapılan röportajlarda DİB'in siyasetten ve cemaatler dahil diğer dini aktörlerden bağımsız, otonom bir üst kurum olması vurgulanmaktadır. Uzun yıllar DİB başkan yardımcılığı ve başkanlığı yapmış olan Tayyar Altıkulaç (1971-1976, 1978-1986) ve Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz (1992–2003) ile yapılan mülakatlarda DİB'in cemaatler üstü olmasının, doğrudan hiçbir cemaatle eşleştirilmemesinin önemi vurgulanırken DİB'in cemaatlerin eline geçmesine karşı teyakkuzda olunması gerektiği dile getirilmiştir.

Din hizmetini cemaatlere bırakmanın bir karışıklık ve siyasi çekişmeye sebebiyet vereceğini öne süren Altıkulaç (1993), DİB'in siyasi iktidarın emrinde olduğu izleniminin kurumu ve başkanları yıprattığını, bunun için yeni bir yasal düzenlemeye ihtiyaç olduğunu aktarır (s. 19). Yılmaz (1993), Altıkulaç'tan farklı olarak kendi görev süreci boyunca hiçbir siyasi baskı altında kalmadığını, dine karşı devletin çıkarlarını önceleyen herhangi bir fetva talebinin olmadığını öne sürmüştür. DİB'in "fitne çıkarmamaya çalışan" özenli "hassas" yaklaşımını vurgulayan Yılmaz (1993), DİB'in "ıslah edilmesi" gerekli yanları olmasına rağmen "hurafe ve bid'atlerden" toplumu arındırma misyonunu gerçekleştirdiğini ifade etmektedir (s. 9).

Gerek Yılmaz (1993) gerek Altıkulaç (1993) DİB'in gerçekleştirdiği görevin cemaatler tarafından tek başına karşılanamayacağını; Türkiye'deki dini cemaat, grup ve oluşumların çeşitliliği karşısında devletin dini alanı kontrol etme isteğini makul gördüklerini belirtmektelerdir. Bu açıdan aslında DİB'i dini alanda temel otorite olarak kabul eden başkanlar bir dini cemaatin yayın organıyla yaptıkları mülakatta cemaatlere tanınabilecek sınırlı alanı da doğrudan veya üstü kapalı benimsemektedir. Yılmaz'a göre (1993) cemaatler "hayır faaliyetlerini samimiyetle yürütüp" siyasetten uzak durmalı, ancak bir yandan da DİB ile sınırlı bir iş birliğine girmelidir (s. 10).

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1990'larda DİB başkanları ile yapılan röportajlardaki özerklik, cemaatler ve politika üstü bir kurum olarak DİB vurgusu, 2010'ların ortasında *Altınoluk* dergisinde gerekli ancak sorunları olan bir kurum olarak öne çıkmaktadır denilebilir. Nitekim, DİB başkan yardımcılığı ve DİB başkanlığı (2010–2017) yapmış olan Mehmet Görmez ile Altınoluk'ta yapılan iki röportajda Görmez (2015; 2016), DİB'in Türkiye'de dini anlatmakta yetersiz ve geri kaldığını, din görevlileri arasında adanmışlık ve gönüllüğünün kuvvetlendirilmesini, dini istismar eden gruplara karşı Kur'an ve sünnet temelli bir din anlayışını vurgular.

Altınoluk'ta vurgulanan özerklik fikrinin DİB'in kuruluşundan beri barındırdığı din-devlet-toplum ilişkilerine dair hem dini hem politik alan ve aktörlerden gelen baskı ve sorunları azaltmaya yönelik pratik bir öneri barındırdığı hem de aslında din ve devlet gibi alanların ayrışmasını benimseyen bir tavrı yansıttığı söylenebilir. *Altınoluk'un* genel olarak DİB ile doğrudan bir dini veya fikri çatışmaya girmekten kaçınmasının yanı sıra DİB'i farklı devlet kurumları açısından zor bir konuma sokacak tavırdan sakındığı öne sürülebilir. Bunun en çarpıcı örneklerinden biri, Anayasa Mahkemesinin başörtüsü yasağı karşısında Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulunun görüşünün sorulduğu yazıdır. "DİB'in Anayasa Mahkemesi ile polemiğe girmek istemeyeceği" öngörülerek başörtüsü hakkındaki soru, Anayasa Mahkemesinin görüşüne cevaben sorulmamıştır (Taşgetiren, 1994, s. 6). Bir diğer ifade Din İşleri Yüksek Kuruluna soru, Anayasa Mahkemesinin kararından bağımsız olarak yöneltilmiş gibi ifade edilmiştir. Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulunun başörtüsünü destekleyen ve İslam'ın bütüncül bir din olduğunu vurgulayan yanıtını (Taşgetiren, 1994, s. 6) yayımlayan *Altınoluk,* bir yandan konuyu gündeme getirerek bir devlet kurumu olarak DİB'e İslam'ı savunma alanı açmışken bir taraftan da DİB ile Anayasa Mahkemesi'ni doğrudan karşı karşıya getirmekten sakınan ılımlı bir çizgi benimsemiştir. Bu usûl, derginin genel çizgisiyle de büyük ölçüde örtüşmektedir.

Altınoluk, laiklik tartışmaları bağlamında bir taraftan DİB gibi kurumların barındırdığı çelişkileri ima ederken bir yandan da DİB'in vazgeçilemeyecek bir kurum olduğunun altını çizmektedir. Nitekim, DİB'in "tapu kadastro işleri" gibi bürokrasideki herhangi bir devlet kurumunun ismini çağrıştırmadan uzak, daha etkileyici bir kurumsal isme sahip olması gerektiğini öne sürmüştür (Taşgetiren, 1993). *Altınoluk'un* Kasım 1993'te "Diyanet: Bir Dokun Bin Ah İşit" kapak başlığı ile çıkan özel dosyasında DİB, çelişkileri ve kurumsal önemi açısından ele alınmıştır. DİB'in, Türkiye'de tartışmaların odağında oluşu, hiçbir toplumsal kesimi tam memnun edemeyip "İslam ve Müslümanların beklentileri ile sistemin yüklediği misyon" arasında sıkışıp kalmış bir kurum olduğu belirtilir (Taşgetiren, 1993, s. 3). Taşgetiren (1993), DİB'in dini kontrol altında tutmak için kurulduğunu, bağımsızlığı elinden alınmış bir kurum olduğunu vurgular.

Altınoluk'taki başka yazılarda da Cumhuriyet döneminin dini baskılayan ve yasaklayan tavrına dikkat çekilmektedir (Tan, 1992). Bu bağlamda DİB de laiklik ve İslam arasında sıkışmış, çatışma ve sancılardan kurtulamayacak bir kurum olarak karakterize edilir. *Altınoluk,* devlet ve din arasındaki sancılı ve adeta yapısal olarak çözülemeyecek uzlaşmazlıklar barındıran ilişkinin en azından farkına varılıp devletin laiklik politikalarını gözden geçirip halkın inançlarıyla hem genelde devleti hem özelde DİB'i daha barışık olmaya çağırmaktadır denilebilir. Nitekim Taşgetiren (1993), Türkiye'nin modernleşme sürecinin İslam'ı geriletilip Batılı değerlerin üstünlüğünün benimsenmesine yönelik baskıcı laiklik politikalara dayandığını, toplum ve devletin arasında gerilimli bir ilişkinin oluştuğunu, ortak payda olan İslam kimliğinin sistemden çıkarılmaya çalışılmasının toplumsal sorunları arttıracağını belirtir.

Altınoluk'taki farklı yazılar (Doğan, 1994; Taşgetiren, 1994) çeşitli laiklik modellerine dikkat çekerek dini özgürlükleri kısıtlayan "Türk tipi" laikliği eleştirip daha demokratik bir modeli savunmaktadır. Örneğin Taşgetiren,(2008) İslam dininin hayatın her alanını kapsayıcı yanını vurgulayarak dinin sadece özel alana ve vicdana indirgenmesini reddeden, demokratik bir laiklik ve dini alan savunusu ortaya koyar. Buradaki bütüncül ve aslî bir unsur olarak İslam anlayışı *İktibas*'a yakınken demokratikliği önceleyen laiklik vurgusu *Köprü'nün* görüşüne yakındır. Nitekim *Altınoluk'un* 2000'lerde yayımlanan sayılarında Türk tipi laikliği başka ülkelerdeki laiklik modelleriyle karşılaştıran yazılar artmıştır. DİB'in Avrupa Birliği entegrasyonuna yönelik hedef ve politikaları gibi konular üzerine çeşitli makaleler yayınlanmıştı r(Vezir, 2000). Bu yazıların çoğu, demokratik ve baskılayıcı olmayan, özgürlüklere daha çok alan tanıyan bir laiklik ve DİB modeli görüşünü yansıtmaktadır. Örneğin; Okumuş (2011), Türk laiklik politikalarını, Fransız modelinden ilhamla, "jakoben," tepeden inmeci ve dine müdahaleci bir çizgide olmakla niteleyip eleştirir (ss. 57-58). Okumuş, DİB'i doğrudan eleştirmemekle beraber devletin din eğitimini tekeline almasını eleştirir ve baskıcı laiklik politikalarının halkı takiye yapmaya ittiğini iddia eder (Okumuş, 2011, s. 58).

Altınoluk'ta DİB, bazen devletin dini kontrol etmek için araçsallaştırdığı, demokratik bir laiklikten uzak, özerk olmayan bir kurum olarak sunulurken bazen de inançlı halk ve laik devlet arasında köprü görevi görebilecek, cemaatler ve siyaset üstü vazgeçilemez bir kurum olarak sunulmaktadır. *Altınoluk'un* DİB'e karşı zaman içinde değişiklikler gösterebilen ikircikli bir yaklaşım sergilemekle beraber, temsil ettiği tasavvufi ekolün DİB ile doğrudan çatışmaya girmekten uzak, DİB'in itibarını gözeten, laiklik eleştirilerine rağmen Türkiye'de laiklik ve DİB'in gerekliliğine vurgu yapan bir çizgide yer aldığı vurgulanabilir.

İktibas: Laiklik ve DİB'in Kategorik Reddi

İktibas'ın DİB ile ilgili en öne çıkan tutumunun, laikliği İslam'la uyuşmayan bir sistem olarak reddedişi kapsamında DİB'i de kabul etmemesidir denilebilir. Bu görüş *İktibas'taki* pek çok yazıda aktarılmakla beraber, Özkan'ın "Laiklik ve Demokrasi" başlıklı yazısı bu fikrin en çarpıcı örneklerinden biridir. Özkan (1990), antik dönemden bugüne hem demokrasinin gelişiminden hem de laikliğin tarihsel seyrinden bahseder. İslam'da ruhban sınıfı olmadığı için Hz. Peygamber'in kurduğu düzenin kesinlikle ne teokratik ne de laik olmadığını vurgular. Özkan'a göre (1990) teokratik devlet "Allah'ın adamı olanların" devleti iken ruhban sınıfının olmadığı İslami düzende kimse "Allah'ın adamı değildir" (s. 12). İslam'da her insanın aracısız şekilde Allah'ın muhatabı olduğunu ifade eden Özkan (1990), bu açıdan tasavvufu da eleştirir. İslam'ın devlet yönetiminden bireylerin özel alandaki davranışlarına kadar her alanı kapsayan bir din olduğunu, egemenliğin demokraside halka, İslam'da ise Allah'a ait olduğunu belirterek İslam, demokrasi ve laikliğin birbiriyle uyuşamayacağını vurgular (Özkan, 1990, s. 13).

İktibas'ta Özkan'ın yanı sıra farklı yazarlar da benzer görüşler ortaya koymuştur. "İslam'ın bütüncül bir sistem olduğu" (Aras, 2011, s. 24), İslam'ın laiklikle örtüşemeyeceği, Müslümanların "laiklikten medet ummasına" yönelik politik arayışların hatalı olduğu (Durmuş, 2006, s. 19) şeklindeki fikirler *İktibas'ta* sıklıkla dile getirilmektedir. Durmuş (2006), devlet düzeninin dinle uyuştuğu, başörtüsü gibi dini pratiklere izin verildiği bağlamlarda bile Müslümanların "sistemi meşrulaştırma" çabasına girerek "ılımlı bir tavır" benimsemelerini doğru bulmaz (s. 18). Müslümanların sisteme teslimiyetini eleştirirken DİB'i de "itaat kültürüne katkı sağlayan" bir organ olarak değerlendirir. *İktibas,* 2002'de DİB ve ilahiyat fakültelerinden pek çok katılımcı ile düzenlenmiş Din Şurasını dini taleplerle devletin taleplerini uzlaştırma amaçlı bir organizasyon

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olarak değerlendirip dinin devletten üstünlüğüne vurgu yaparak bu toplantıyı ve DİB'i sertçe eleştirmiştir (Durmuş, 2002).

Bu çerçevede *İktibas* için DİB, laik bir rejimde kurulmuş bir devlet kurumu olarak hiçbir şekilde meşru görülemez ve görülmemelidir. *İktibas*'taki DİB ile ilgili yazıların neredeyse tamamı olumsuz haber ve yorum yazılarıdır. Bir yandan Etyen Mahçupyan'ın kendi gazetesinde yayımlanan "Öteki Diyanet de Resmileşiyor" başlıklı yazısını *İktibas* alıntı yazılar arasında yayımlayarak hem Türk laiklik tecrübesinin baskıcı yanına hem de DİB'in bu bağlamda şekillenmiş araçsal bir kurum olduğuna dikkat çekmektedir. Diğer bir yandan da Mahçupyan'ın (2005) resmi din anlayışı ve bunun dayatılmasına yönelik eleştirel fikrini ve DİB'in sadece "bu dünyanın değil öteki dünyanın da doğrularını belirlemeye çalışan" (s. 79) bir kurum olarak takdim edişini yayımlayarak DİB'i İslami hakikatleri ortaya koyan tek kurum olarak görme yaklaşımını reddettiğini ortaya koyar.

İktibas, DİB'in kurumsal itibarını zedeleyen, oldukça sert ithamlar içeren haber ve yazılar da yayımlamıştır. Bunlardan biri *İktibas*'ın aslında İslam ile laikliği uzlaştırmaya çalıştığı iddiasıyla eleştirdiği Refah Partisinin 1990'larda oldukça radikal ve tartışmalı fikirleriyle gündeme gelen, sonradan kendisinin Mesih olduğu iddiasında bulunan dönemin milletvekili Hasan Mezarcı'nın Diyanet Vakfı hakkındaki yolsuzlukla ilgili haber yazısıdır. Mezarcı (1992), Diyanet Vakfının hac organizasyonunda yolsuzluk yaparak haksız kazanç elde ettiğini öne sürmektedir. Kenan Evren döneminde çıkarılan hac yönergesi ile hac tekelinin Diyanet Vakfına verildiğini belirten Mezarcı (1992), hacca giden din görevlilerinin harcırahlarının verilmeyip söz konusu paranın vakfa aktarılarak çadır ve ev kiralamalarında usulsüzlük yapıldığını ve vakfın yolsuzluk yaptığını iddia edip TBMM'ye soru önergesi vereceğini ifade etmektedir (s. 47). Doğrudan DİB hakkında olmasa bile onunla bağlantılı Diyanet Vakfı hakkındaki bu habere *İktibas*'ın yer vermesi dikkat çekicidir.

DİB'le ilgili olumsuz bir diğer yazı *İktibas*'ın "Diyanet'e Güven Yok" başlıklı haber yazısıdır. Bu yazı radikal bir çizgide yayın yapan Yeni Akit gazetesinden alıntılandığı gibi ilginç bir biçimde yazının kaynağını "seküler" kimliğiyle öne çıkan Zülfü Livaneli'nin İzmir Sanayi ve İş adamları Derneğinin düzenlediği bir programda araştırmacı Bülent Tanla'nın anket verilerine dayalı konuşması oluşturmaktadır. Livaneli ve Tanla (2001), Türk halkının kurumlara duyduğu güveni ölçen araştırmanın sonuçlarına göre TBMM'ye güvenin 1999-2001 arasında %13 'lere kadar gerilediği gibi DİB'e duyulan güvenin de %36'dan %21'e indiğini belirtir (s. 72) . Herhangi bir bağlam vermeksizin bu güven kaybı tartışılmamakla beraber gerek Meclis gerekse DİB'e dair güvende kayda değer bir azalma olduğunu öne süren bu araştırmaya *İktibas*'ın yer vermesi, derginin DİB hakkındaki olumsuz görüşlerinin bir yansımasıdır.

Köprü: Baskılanmayan ve Baskı Aracı olmayan Din ve DİB

Köprü'de DİB hakkındaki yazılar, derginin temel özelliğini yansıtarak, bir yandan Said Nursi'nin fikir ve tutumlarına bir yandan ise çağdaş sosyal ve politik entelektüel tartışmalara dayandırılarak kaleme alınmaktadır. *Köprü'de* doğrudan DİB başlığıyla ele alınan yazılar diğer iki dergiden daha azdır. *Köprü, İktibas*'tan farklı olarak DİB ve laikliği temel olarak reddetmenin aksine demokratik laik bir düzende devlet ve din ilişkilerinin baskıcı ve araçsal olmayan bir çizgide inşa edilebileceğini vurgular. *Köprü'de* bir taraftan Türk laiklik modeli, erken dönem laiklik politikaları, Said Nursi'nin kendi hayat hikayesi üzerinden eleştirilip dini alana yönelik baskılar reddedilirken diğer yandan anayasal ve demokratik hukuka dayalı bir düzen savunulmaktadır. Dergi yazarlarından

Çakır'a göre (2002), dinin baskılanmaması gerektiği gibi dinin kendisi de bir baskı aracına dönüşmemelidir.

Köprü, devletin dini alandan tamamen çekilmesinin mümkün ve doğru olmadığı belirtirken DİB için "su işleri" kurumunu çağrıştıracak isimler yerine daha ciddi isimler verilmesini (Güleçyüz, 1994) ve DİB'in en azından kısmen özerk olması gerektiğini vurgular (Ergün, 2012). Ancak *Köprü,* bir taraftan da din hizmetinin sadece devlet tarafından değil, sivil toplum kuruluşları ve cemaatler tarafından da yürütülmesini savunur. Bu açıdan devletin din hizmetinde dindar kişi ve kurumların önünü açması, onların çalışmalarına engel olmaması gerektiği belirtilerek devletin DİB üzerinden din hizmetlerinde tek otorite olmaması gerektiği ima edilmiştir (Çakır, 2009). Benzer bir fikir birkaç yıl sonra yayımlanan, daha akademik bir yazıda da vurgulanmıştır. Hukukçu bir akademisyen olan Ergün (2012) tarafından hazırlanan söz konusu yazıda, laikliğin etimolojisi ve Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e tarihi seyri aktarıldıktan sonra laiklik, laisizm ve laikçilik kavramları tartışılmaktadır. Türkiye'de en azından bazı dönemlerde laikliğin İslam'a karşı bir ideoloji olarak uygulandığını belirten Ergün (2012), devletin dini değerleri dikkate almasının laikliğe aykırı olmadığını, dini bir yapının devlet ve toplumu esir almasının laiklikle çeliştiğini ifade eder. Cumhuriyet döneminde devletin tüm dinlere karşı tarafsız olmak, din devlet ilişkilerini ayırmak ve dinin kurumsal ve anayasal olarak kontrol edilerek siyasallaşmasının önüne geçmek için DİB'in kurulduğunu ancak bunun tam bir netice vermediğini belirtir. Ergün'e göre (2012) devlet din, din de devlet karşısında özerk olmalıdır. Bu çerçevede devlet kontrolünde bir kurum olan DİB, laik devlet anlayışına aykırıdır (s. 122). Dini cemaatlerin eğitim ve ibadet alanlarını kendilerinin yönetmesini, devletin sadece bir denetleyici olmasını önerir.

Ergün (2015) yılındaki yazısında da benzer şekilde devletin dini ve seküler ideolojilere karışmayıp, farklı dinleri anayasal güvence altına alıp tanımasını ve dini hayata müdahale etmeyip sadece hakemlik yapmasını vurgular. Nursi'nin görüşlerine benzer bir şekilde iman, ahlak ve adalet gibi değerlerin zayıf olduğu bir toplumda iktidar gücüyle dinin tebliğ edilmesinin etkili olmayacağını, aksine dini, suiistimale ve çıkar ilişkilerine açık hale getireceğini öne sürer (Ergün, 2015, ss. 118-119). Siyasal İslam'ı bu açıdan Kemalizm gibi tepeden inmeci, jakoben ve elitist olmakla itham eder (Ergün, 2015, s. 121). Özetle, Ergün özelinde *Köprü,* Türkiye'deki laiklik uygulamalarını toplumsal bir mühendislik olarak görüp eleştirmekle birlikte demokrasi ve laikliği reddeden *İktibas'*ı veya diğer radikal İslamcı görüşleri de şiddetle eleştirmektedir. Ergün'ün yazılarının *Köprü'deki* diğer yazılarla (Öktem, 1995) benzerliği ve derginin farklı sayılarında Ergün'ün ilgili yazılarına yer vermesi yazarın görüşlerinin *Köprü* tarafından da paylaşıldığı şeklinde değerlendirilebilinir.

Köprü'deki yazılar, devlet tarafından baskılanmayan, anayasal güvence altına alınan din politikaları ile demokratik laikliği savunduğu gibi bireyselleşmeyi de destekleyerek dindarlığın kişilerin kendi tercihlerine bırakılmasını vurgular. Örneğin, Çakır (2008), Nurculuğun tabandan yukarı bir dini hareket olduğunu, sivil toplum ve cemaatlerin bireysel dindarlaşmaya katkı sağlayabileceğini, ancak dini alanda zorlamanın doğru olmadığını öne sürer. 1995 yılında dönemin Cumhurbaşkanı Süleyman Demirel ile "Laiklik Üzerine" başlığıyla yapılan röportajdan da anlaşılabileceği üzere *Köprü,* Demirel'in laikliğin temel gayesinin din ve vicdan hürriyetini muhafaza etmek olduğu, laiklik ilkesinin dinsizlik anlamına gelmediği halde geçmişte yaşanan olumsuz tecrübeler sebebiyle böyle anlaşıldığı şeklindeki fikirlerini benimsemektedir. *Köprü,* Demirel'in (1995) demokrasi olmaksızın hukuka uygun bir laiklik olamayacağı görüşünü desteklemektedir.

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Sonuç

Türkiye'de en fazla tartışılan kurumlarından biri olan DİB hakkında pek çok çalışma olmakla birlikte dini grup ve cemaatlerin DİB'e bakışı, DİB'le ilişkileri yeterince incelenmemiş bir konudur. Bu makale kapsamında Sufi Nakşibendi, radikal İslamcı ve Nurcu üç dini cemaatin DİB hakkındaki görüşleri, DİB'e bakış açıları, sınırlı bir kaynak olmakla beraber, onların perspektiflerini yansıtan dergiler üzerinden ele alınmıştır.

Altınoluk'ta yer alan yazılarda sıklıkla Türkiye'de belirli dönemlerde uygulanan laiklik anlayışı eleştiri konusu olmuş, baskıcı laiklik politikaları yerine daha demokratik ve özgürlükçü modeller savunulmuştur. *Altınoluk,* bu açıdan laikliği tamamen reddetmeyip bunun yerine din, devlet ve toplum arasında uzlaşma sağlayacak dini alanın otonomisini tanıyan ancak bir taraftan da dini alanı denetleyip dini alandaki farklı aktörlerin çatışmalarını aşacak cemaatler üstü DİB gibi devlet kurumlarını savunmuştur. *Altınoluk,* Türkiye'deki çeşitli politikaları ve DİB'in bazı tutumlarını çelişkili bulmakla beraber DİB başkanlarıyla gerçekleştirdiği röportajlarda görüldüğü üzere DİB'in görüşlerini okurlarıyla paylaşmayı, DİB ile iş birlikler kurmayı doğru bulmuştur. Derginin temsil ettiği Erenköy Cemaati veya Sufi Nakşibendi ekolün DİB ile temelde bir sorunu olmadığı, DİB'in çeşitli sınırlılık ve çelişkilerini görmekle beraber demokratik bir laiklik anlayışı çerçevesinde DİB'i benimsediği söylenebilir. *Altınoluk*'taki yazılarda din ve ahlak alanındaki hizmetlerde tasavvufi yaklaşımların önemine dikkat çekilirken bir yandan da DİB'in cemaatler üstü bir çatı kurum olarak dini alandaki çalışmalarının önemine vurgu yapılmaktadır.

Said Nursi'nin demokrasi ve özgürlük temalı din yorumunu takip eden *Köprü,* Türkiye'deki laikliğin tarihsel süreç boyunca uygulanma biçimini eleştirmiş, özgürlükçü ve demokratik bir düzenin önemine sıkça vurgu yapmıştır. *Köprü*'nün diğer iki dergiden farklı olarak daha fazla akademik yönelimli olduğu söylenebilir. Ancak bu akademik ağırlığa rağmen *Köprü*'deki yazılar, Said Nursi'nin düşünsel mirasının dışına çıkmamaktadır. Dergideki DİB ve laiklik hakkındaki içeriğin büyük oranda anayasacılık, demokrasi ve özgürlük temaları etrafında süreklilik göstermesi Nursi'nin bu konulardaki vurgusuyla örtüşmektedir. *Köprü,* Diyanet'i tümden yok sayan bir yaklaşımda olmamıştır, ancak baskıcı bir laiklik anlayışıyla DİB'in sağlıklı işleyemeyeceğini vurgulamıştır. *Köprü*'deki çeşitli yazılarda, *Altınoluk'a* benzer bir şekilde, DİB'in mali ve siyasi özerkliğinin olması gerektiği ifade edilmiştir.

İktibas dergisinde ise diğer iki dergiden farklı olarak DİB'e ve resmi din siyasetine karşı keskin bir olumsuz tutum görülmektedir. *İktibas* hem dinin geleneksel yorumlarını hem de devletin resmî ideolojisini eleştirmektedir. *İktibas*'ta din ve devlet ilişkilerini ele alan neredeyse bütün yazılarda sert bir demokrasi ve laiklik karşıtlığı dikkat çekmektedir. *İktibas,* kendisinin temsil ettiği radikal İslamcı anlayışın, modern demokrasi ve laikliğin hiçbir biçimi ile barışamayacağını sıklıkla vurgulayarak DİB dahil sistemle her türlü uzlaşma arayışını reddetmektedir. Modern demokrasi ve laiklik çizgisinde olmanın "batıl" bir yol olduğu ifade edilmektedir.

Altınoluk ve *Köprü'deki* bazı yazılara yakın bir çizgi de *İktibas,* Türkiye'deki laiklik tecrübesini militanlık ve baskıcılıkla eşleştirmektedir. Ancak *İktibas*'ın sistemle ve sistemin parçası olarak dinin devlet tarafından araçsallaştırılmasının aracı olarak gördüğü DİB'e karşı hiçbir olumlu yaklaşımı söz konusu değildir. *İktibas,* DİB hakkında oldukça olumsuz haber ve yorumlara yer vermektedir. *İktibas*'ın muhalefeti, DİB'in ötesinde, Diyanet'in de parçası olduğu laik siyasal düzenedir denilebilir.

Üç derginin DİB hakkındaki yazılarında kendi dini görüş ve yaklaşımlarının etkili olduğu dikkat çekmektedir. Ancak aynı zamanda her üçünün de DİB'i ağırlıklı olarak laiklik bağlamında ele aldığı da görülmektedir. Bu açıdan çarpıcı biçimde üç dergide de DİB hakkında, örneğin DİB'in faaliyet alanları, yürüttüğü hizmet veya çalışmaların yeterliliği veya kısıtlılıkları, dini yorumlarındaki çelişki veya katkıları gibi somut konulara rastlanmamıştır. Üç dergi de DİB'i daha çok soyut siyasi tartışmalar, laiklik meselesi ekseninde ele almaktadır.

Dergiler, kendi dini grup ve cemaatlerinin görüşlerini yansıtan yazılar yayımlamaktadır. Bu açıdan Türkiye'de dini cemaatlerin DİB ile ilişkisinin incelenmesi için temel bir kaynak oluşturmaktalar. Ancak cemaatlerin DİB ile ilişkisi, DİB'e bakışı elbette dergiler haricinde farklı yazı kaynakları ve yazılı olmayan kaynaklar üzerinden çeşitli boyutlarıyla incelenmesi gereken önemli bir konudur. Bu makale kapsamında sınırlı bir biçimde de olsa üç dini grubun DİB'e bakış açıları kendi içlerinde müstakil olarak ve karşılaştırmalar yapılarak ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır.

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The Perspectives of Religious Groups on the Presidency of Religious Affairs in Türkiye: The Debates on the Presidency in the Periodicals *Altınoluk, Köprü* and *İktibas*

Ayşe POLAT[*]
Mahmut Bilal UZUN[**]

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA) was established in 1924. It is one of the most significant institutions in Türkiye and remains at the center of public debates concerning religion, politics, and secularism.

The Literature on the PRA, Religious Sects, and Islamist Journals

Numerous academic studies have examined the PRA from various perspectives, including its history, legal status, and role in politics. In the past decade, research has expanded not only on the PRA itself but also on Islamist journals, religious groups, and sects in Türkiye. However, there is a noticeable gap in comprehensive academic investigations into the relationship between the PRA and religious groups. This article aims to shed light on this topic by exploring the perspectives and ideas of various religious groups regarding the PRA through their periodicals. Periodicals play a key role in Türkiye for disseminating the ideas and perspectives of religious groups to broader public. They provide a valuable source to examine how Islamic groups perceive and engage with the PRA in Türkiye.

Three Religious Groups and Their Periodicals

To this end, three Islamic journals representing different religious groups in Türkiye were selected for examination in this study: *Altınoluk, Köprü*, and *İktibas*. *Altınoluk* is associated with the Nakshibendi Sufi Sunni order Erenköy Cemaati, *Köprü* represents the Yeni Asyacılar, a branch of the Nurcu movement, and *İktibas* is linked to the radical Islamist intellectual Ercümend Özkan and his circles.

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[*] Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Boğaziçi University, e-mail: ayse.polat@bogazici.edu.tr, orcid.org/0000-0002-8739-6372, İstanbul, Türkiye

[**] Master's Student, İstanbul Medeniyet University, e-mail: mahmutbilal95@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0001-9251-9050, İstanbul, Türkiye

Altınoluk has been published as a monthly periodical since 1986. Ahmet Taşgetiren has long served as the journal's editor. *Altınoluk*'s content is predominantly Sufi-oriented. The journal infrequently publishes essays on contemporary, daily news, and when it does, the focus is primarily on issues affecting the global Muslim umma, such as the Palestinian conflict.

İktibas has been published since 1981, initially as a bi-weekly and later as a monthly periodical. Its essays are more polemical, and it includes a significant amount of everyday news articles and essays sourced from other periodicals. *İktibas* is strongly affiliated with Ercümend Özkan, who defines his perspective as rejecting both traditional Islam and modern secularism and democracy. Özkan is critical of Sufism and advocates for adherence to a "pure" form of Islam. He also harshly criticizes modernity and contemporary political systems, including humanism, democracy, and laicism, viewing them as incompatible with his vision of radical Islamic purity.

Köprü has been published since 1994 every three months. *Köprü* publishes articles explaining Said Nursi's ideas, as well as more academic or scholarly articles on topics such as science, religion, culture, politics, and justice. Compared to the other two periodicals, it can be considered more academic. Its approach can be described as "cultural reformist," supporting bottom-up reform aimed at transforming people and society rather than the political system. Aligned with Nursi's views, *Köprü* criticizes despotism and authoritarian regimes while supporting constitutionalism.

Method

This paper focuses on these journals' issues from 1990 to 2016. To find relevant material in these journal issues, a keyword search was conducted using the terms "Diyanet," "Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı" (PRA), and "laiklik" (laicism) in both the Islamist Journals Project catalogue and the journals' online archives. A content analysis is undertaken in the articles identified in these journals. Themes and categories are created to find embedded meanings in each journal as well as across essays in all three periodicals.

One major finding of this study is that all three journals have produced only a limited number of articles or essays specifically addressing the PRA. Instead, they tend to discuss the topic in relation to broader issues of secularism and laicism in Türkiye. While all three journals emphasize the oppressive nature of laicism, their views on the PRA differ.

Altınoluk: The PRA as a Contradictory but Indispensable Institution

Altınoluk acknowledges the dilemmas faced by the PRA, noting that it often struggles to satisfy both religious groups and the state. The journal points out how the PRA is sometimes used by the state for political purposes, including the instrumentalization of religion. At the same time, it views the PRA as crucial for promoting Islamic services in the public sphere in Türkiye.

It is noteworthy that *Altınoluk* has published several interviews with former Presidents of the PRA, some of which were conducted while they were still in office. These interviews addressed polemical issues of the time, such as the headscarf ban. However, the journal never directly challenged the Directors' perspectives. Additionally, some of the most frequent contributors to *Altınoluk* are individuals who have held senior positions within the PRA. In this context, the journal can be said to have closer connections to the PRA compared to the other two journals and their affiliated religious groups.

Türkiye'de Dini Grupların Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığına Bakışı:
Altınoluk, Köprü ve *İktibas* Dergilerinde Diyanet Tartışmaları

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Altınoluk advocates for a more inclusive and democratic secularism that guarantees the full autonomy of the PRA. As a journal tied to a Sufi order, *Altınoluk* calls for the PRA to strengthen connections between religion, the state, and society.

İktibas: Secularism and The Categorical Rejection of the PRA

İktibas criticized the PRA as part of its broader rejection of laicism, democracy, humanism, and other modern political ideologies. *İktibas* rejects the PRA entirely, in line with its radical Islamist stance, which critiques both traditional Islam, including Sufism, and modern political systems. While all three journals are critical of the repressive politics of secularism and the state's pressures on practicing Islam in Türkiye, *İktibas* stands out for refraining from any attempt to negotiate between Islamic groups and the state. Instead, it advocates for the establishment of a pure Islamic perspective.

Köprü: Religion and the PRA as Neither Oppressed Nor a Tool of Oppression

Articles about the PRA in *Köprü* reflect the journal's core characteristic, being written both based on Said Nursi's ideas and attitudes, as well as contemporary social and political intellectual debates. *Köprü* advocates for a more democratic form of secularism. It publishes numerous articles on democracy, constitutionalism, and justice, emphasizing that the state should neither restrict religion nor use it as an instrument of oppression.

In *Köprü,* on one hand, the Turkish model of secularism, early secular policies, and pressures on the religious sphere are criticized through Said Nursi's life story, while on the other hand, a system based on constitutional and democratic law is advocated. According to the journal religion should not be repressed, nor should it become a tool of oppression itself. *Köprü* underscores the need for a more democratic version of laïcité in Türkiye and highlights the importance of granting religious institutions like the PRA full autonomy.

Conclusion

Altınoluk and *Köprü* aim to reconcile religious values with the political system. While critical of radical secularist policies, particularly repressive ones, they also highlight contradictions within the PRA but acknowledge its existence and institutional significance. They believe the PRA can serve broader religious purposes, transcending specific religious groups. *İktibas,* unlike the other two journals, reflects a sharp negative stance towards the PRA and official religious policy. *İktibas* critiques both the traditional interpretations of religion and the state's official ideology.

The journals publish articles reflecting the views of their respective religious groups and communities. In this regard, they serve as a primary source for studying the relationship between religious communities and the PRA in Turkey. However, the relationship of these communities with the PRA and their perspectives on it is a significant issue that should be examined through various written and unwritten sources beyond these journals. This article attempts to present, albeit in a limited manner, the perspectives of three religious groups on the PRA, both independently and through comparisons.

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Occult African Films as a Reflection of Resurrection Stories: A Socio-Cultural Perspective on Cameroonian and Nigerian Video Films

Floribert Patrick C. ENDONG[*]

Abstract

The African religious landscape is partly characterized by a plurality of vibrant neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Many of these movements are founded, led or influenced by perceived gifted individuals who claim to have had a firsthand experience with the spirit world through diverse mystical or paranormal means. Some of these means include near death experiences or resurrection from the dead. Although some research works have examined the relationship between the narratives of these gifted individuals and the socio-political discourse in Africa, very little attention has been devoted particularly to how their descriptions of the spirit world and the afterlife affect or reflect cinematic production in Africa. This paper seeks to fill this gap in knowledge through an examination of the ways in which resurrection and near death stories driving charismatic Pentecostalism are reflected in some Cameroonian and Nigerian video films. Using secondary sources and a qualitative content analysis of relevant films, the paper specifically attains two main objectives. In the first place, it examines how Cameroonian and Nigerian resurrection stories describe the spirit world and affect the popular culture in Cameroon and Nigeria; while in the last place, the paper examines how these stories are particularly reflected in Cameroonian and Nigerian films.

Keywords: The Spirit World, African Belief System, Spiritualism, Nollywood, Collywood, Cinematic Code, Occult Movies

Diriliş Hikayelerinin Bir Yansıması Olarak Afrika Okült Filmleri: Kamerun ve Nijerya Video Filmleri Üzerine Sosyo-Kültürel Bir Perspektif

Öz

Afrika dini manzarası, kısmen canlı neo-Pentekostal ve karizmatik hareketlerin çeşitliliğiyle karakterize edilmektedir. Bu hareketlerin birçoğu, ruhani dünya ile çeşitli mistik veya paranormal yollarla doğrudan bir deneyim yaşadığını iddia eden, yetenekli olarak algılanan bireyler tarafından kurulmuş, yönetilmiş veya etkilenmiştir. Bu yollar arasında ölümden dönüş veya ölümden sonra dirilme gibi deneyimler bulunmaktadır. Bazı araştırmalar, bu yetenekli bireylerin anlatıları ile Afrika'daki sosyo-politik söylem arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemiş olsa da özellikle onların ruhani dünya ve ahiret tasvirlerinin Afrika'daki sinema üretimini nasıl etkilediği veya yansıttığı üzerine çok az çalışma yapılmıştır. Bu makale, karizmatik Pentekostalizmi yönlendiren diriliş ve ölümden dönüş hikayelerinin bazı Kamerun ve Nijerya video filmlerinde nasıl yansıtıldığını inceleyerek bu bilgi boşluğunu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. İkincil kaynaklar ve ilgili filmlerin nitel içerik analizi yoluyla, makale iki temel hedefe ulaşmaktadır. İlk olarak, Kamerun ve Nijerya'daki diriliş hikayelerinin ruhani dünyayı nasıl tasvir ettiğini ve bu hikayelerin Kamerun ve Nijerya popüler kültürünü nasıl etkilediğini incelemektedir. İkinci olarak, bu hikayelerin özellikle Kamerun ve Nijerya filmlerinde nasıl yansıtıldığını ele almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ruhani Dünya, Afrika İnanç Sistemi, Spiritüalizm, Nollywood, Collywood, Sinematik Kod, Okült Filmler

[*] Dr., University of Dschang, e-mail: floribertendong@yahoo.com, orcid.org/0000-0003-1893-3653, Dschang, Cameroon

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Introduction

The African religious landscape is remarkably characterized by a plurality of vibrant neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements. This landscape is also culturally influenced by all manner of "end-time" prophets and perceived gifted individuals who claim to have had a firsthand experience with the spirit world. From Ghana through Congo and Nigeria to South Africa, there have actually emerged self-proclaimed oracles (of God) and "clairvoyant" religious figures and even mere devotees who claim to have used diverse mystical or paranormal means to discover and profoundly understand the spirit world. It is actually common to come across native priests, religious leaders, church founders and even charlatans who claim to have died and gone to such places as the afterlife, heaven or Satan's kingdom in spirit. Such religious figures also claim to have personally witnessed the maneuvers and powers of local deities or paranormal beings. The aforementioned religious entities are fond of making predictions and revelations that touch all aspects of human life in the societies where they subsist. They usually generate and popularize a discourse on the spirit world which re-enforces various tenets of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and re-echoes popular imaginaries and myths about the spirit kingdom. Thus, these resurrection story tellers fuel various forms of popular culture in African religious societies.

Although a number of research works have examined the relationship between the socio-spiritual acts/narratives of these gifted individuals (resurrection storytellers) and the socio-political discourse in Africa, very little attention has been devoted particularly to how their descriptions of the spirit world affect or is reflected in audiovisual and cinematic productions in Africa. This paper seeks to fill this gap in knowledge through an examination of the ways in which the resurrection and near death stories that drive charismatic Pentecostalism are reflected in some Cameroonian and Nigerian video films. Using critical observations, documentary analysis and a qualitative content analysis of relevant films, the paper specifically attains two main objectives. In the first place, it examines how Cameroonian and Nigerian resurrection stories' describe the spirit world and affect popular culture in Cameroon and Nigeria; while in the last place, the paper examines how these stories are reflected in Cameroonian and Nigerian video films.

Research Method

This paper is based on the descriptive research design. By definition, a descriptive research describes the characteristics of a phenomenon, population or situation without hinging on manipulation of variables or hypothesis testing (Aggarwal and Ranganathan 2019). As its name indicates, the descriptive research design entails making observations, and comparing and analyzing relevant data. It usually aims at answering such questions as what the phenomenon, group, situation or circumstance is? How the phenomenon occurs? Where and when it occurs; and so on. In line with this, the present research work sought to examine how resurrection stories are reflected in Cameroonian and Nigerian video films. To collect data, the paper hinged on three principal methods namely critical observations, documentary analysis and a qualitative content analysis of relevant Nigerian and Cameroonian occult films.

The critical observations part of the methodology consisted in extracting data from relevant true life events that recently happened in the Nigerian and Cameroonian socio-religious landscape. The events considered for the study are all related to the phenomena of resurrection stories in

Cameroonian and Nigerian religious movements and occult filmmaking in the two countries. The documentary analysis part of the methodology consisted in gathering data from secondary sources such as anthologies, journal articles, monographs and online publications. A modicum of attention was given to published books and articles written by Christian entities or spiritual leaders. The books and articles contain or document specific resurrection stories. Finally, the qualitative content analysis of films done in the course of the study consisted in extracting and analyzing both empirical and anecdotal evidence drawn from relevant occult films. These extracts from the movies were also used to buttress points made in the paper. The study considered only relevant occult movies that could be used to illustrate the influence of resurrection stories on Cameroonian and Nigerian video films.

In effect, given that the paper sought to show how local resurrection stories are reflected in relevant Nigerian and Cameroonian occult movies, the study hinged on critical observations and secondary data to explore popular myths fuelled by resurrection stories in Cameroon and Nigerian. The study thereafter hinged on the content analysis of relevant Cameroonian and Nigerian movies to show how the myths mentioned above are reflected in the two countries' video film production. In line with this, the study thematically organized the data collected through the three methods mentioned above, in four interconnected sub-headings namely. These subheadings correspond to four myths fuelled by resurrection stories in the two countries. They include: 1) the invisible world is hard to describe using common human language, 2) the physical and the invisible worlds are connected, but distant one from the other, 3) the visible and the spirit worlds are overlapping thanks to the existence of thresholds that permit transitions from one world to the other and 4) many spiritual leaders are representatives of the spirit world in the physical realm.

Resurrection Stories and Social Constructions of the Invisible Worlds in Cameroon and Nigeria

Nigeria and Cameroon are very religious countries. This religiosity – which simultaneously is fuelled and manifested by the proliferation of all manner of religious movements in the two nations – influences many aspects of life in both countries. Indeed, many communities tend to view everything from a spiritual or religious standpoint (Anderson 2012, Chiorazzi, 2015; Khan, 2017; Nguimfack, 2016). In line with this, Nbunwe (2016, p.17) observes that "It may be thought surprising that in spite of the impact of Christianity, Western culture and the improved level of education, the majority of people still believe in witchcraft, and that this phenomenon not only persists but is actually increasing".

Thus, most religious Cameroonians and Nigerians view the universe as an extremely complex phenomenon. This complexity makes scientific theories insufficient or only partially relevant to explain the origin and functioning of the universe. According to the popular fantasy in Cameroon and Nigeria, one must view the universe with a spiritual eye. In the two countries, both grassroots people and megacities dwellers believe in the existence of two worlds – one visible and the other one invisible. These two worlds exist in a parallel manner. The invisible world is the spirit world. It harbors transcendental or tutelary beings such as the gods/goddesses, the ancestors, the angels and evil spirits among others. These beings are visible only to people with special gifts (notably oracles, native prophets and "seers") or those who have gone through the necessary initiation to interact with these tutelary entities (Murray, 2015 Loe, 2012; Horton 1996; Baeke, 1986). Parallel to the invisible world is the physical world, which is the material world. The belief mentioned above is

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so diffused that it is observable not only in communities of animist, but across the main religious movements that exist in the two countries (Pementa, Tabenyang & Fubah, 2014).

Rampant religiosity and superstitions in the two countries have over the years, fuelled great obsession with knowing the workings and the contours of the invisible world and the afterlife. In line with this, stories aimed at demystifying deities and revealing the hidden allures of the spirit world have often been very popular in the two countries. These hard-to-swallow stories saturate cities of the two countries. They inspire the sermons of churches' founders and leaders as well as the doctrines of the many neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements (Ameh 2013). The trend is so accentuated that the Nigerian and Cameroonian Pentecostal religious discourse could be said to be in great part characterized by the urge to demystify the devils and the invisible world.

Thus, it is common to find members of Pentecostal or charismatic churches whose beliefs and constructions of the invisible world draw on resurrection stories. These are stories of people – mostly devoted Christians or repentant spiritualists – who claim to have either had "near-death-experience" or died momentarily and seen heaven or hell. On October 28, 2022 for instance, Nigerian elite newspaper *The Sun*, published the resurrection story of a certain Godwin Ageelu Amadu – a native doctor – who allegedly died on September 5 of the same year and resurrected three days later. According to the newspaper story, the native doctor allegedly visited heaven in spirit after his death. This visit made him discover various heavenly entities and "realities". The near-death experience also convinced him to convert to Christianity and start an evangelical mission. A similar resurrection tale was published in Nigeria's *Daily Post* on August 18, 2013. This tale purports that a retired Nigerian soldier, Kayode Sotunde, died in a ghastly motor accident on April 11 2013 and resurrected three days to the bewilderment of friends and relatives. Like Amadu (earlier mentioned in this paper), the retired soldier claimed in the newspaper story to have had paranormal experience with heavenly entities and to have inherited some supernatural powers before coming back to life.

In some of the bizarre and hard-to-swallow narratives mentioned above, the resurrected people are church figures. A case in point is Pastor Daniel Ekechukwu who allegedly died in a motor accident on December 29, 2001 and was later resurrected by famous German evangelist Reinhard Bonkke. Actually, Pastor Ekechukwu is said to have seen both heaven and hell during his short stay in eternity. In an interview granted the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) Reinhard Bonnke – who brought him back to life – evokes pastor Ekechukwu's experience in the afterlife thus:

> *An angel took him to show him Paradise. He showed him the mansions that are waiting for the saints. And he showed him hell. He saw the people in hell. He said one shouted to him, 'I was a pastor and I stole money. Help me to return the money.' He said it was so frightening to him that the angel turned to him and said, 'The prayer of the rich man in Luke 16 will now be fulfilled, and you will be sent back to earth as a last warning to this generation (cited in Christian Broadcasting Networks, 2024).*

One may easily notice that pastor Ekechukwu's description of hell is as gloomy as the Bible's own. However it is strangely not perfectly conform to popular Christian imaginations of hell. For instance, his depiction does not relay the popular belief that hell is characterized by a lake of fire. In his testimonial, Bonnke underlines this lacuna thus:

He said he saw no fire [in hell] but he said he saw these people cannibalizing themselves. Every time they had done it, the flesh seemed to jump back to the same places and then the torment started again. He said it was so horrible. He came back and said, "Heaven is real. Hell is real. Become serious with God. You need to be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ and live a holy life" (cited in Christian Broadcasting Networks, 2024).

In their narratives, authors of resurrection stories mostly represent heaven, hell and the afterlife in ways that are somewhat concurrent to biblical depictions. They also usually come up with strange doctrines and prophesies that usually elicit controversies and suspicions from spiritual watchdogs such as Christian associations. In 2022 for instance, the Christian Association of Nigeria (cited in Leonard 2022), issued some warning against resurrection narratives after the Amadu story (mentioned above) was trending on both traditional and new media in Nigeria. The Association – through its chairman Sunday Ennah – not only doubted the veracity of Amadu's story, but also called on the Nigerian Christian communities to desist from such tales. This warning was founded on the observation that resurrection tales tend to contradict the popular Christian belief that after death comes judgment. In line with the aforementioned suspicion, Sunday Ennah simply associated Amadu's tale with the Christian myths of end-time prophets and the ante-Christ. In his words, "There are many false prophets in the world today. They go about confusing the people, using the resurrection approach to possess wealth. I want to advise Christians to desist from such insinuation" (cited in Leonard, 2022 para 16).

In spite of their unusual, controversial and hard-to-belief nature, most resurrection stories are extremely attractive to Nigerian and Cameroon masses including non-Christians. This attractiveness is in part attributable to the ubiquity of a fetish mindset in the two countries (Abar 2019; Murray 2015, LeMarquant 2012). Authors of these resurrection stories usually become the talk of the town and their narratives often function as strong baits used by church founders to attract masses to their spiritual temples or ministries. In effect, church founders such as Helen Ukpabio (of Liberty Church), Emmanuel Eni (of Assemblies of God) and pastor Tsamma-Essomba (of Cameroon) have deployed such resurrection stories to propagate their own versions of Christianity. Resurrection stories have also inspired various forms of popular cultures in Cameroon and Nigeria. They are reflected in cultural productions ranging from religious music and advertising to literature and popular cinema.

Screening Resurrection Stories: Nollywood and Collywood's Representation of the Spirit World

Nigerian and Cameroonian video film industries respectively nicknamed Nollywood and Collywood are good peepholes into their respective societies of origin. Films from both industries reflect the popular religious beliefs prevailing in the two countries. These films are therefore likely to bear certain features of the resurrection stories that are ubiquitous in both countries. The Nollywood industry in particular sprang up in 1992 with the straight-to-video release of Chris Rapu Obi's *Living in Bondage*, an Igbo language film about blood money. In just few decades, the industry grew to a $590-600 million global giant (Oh 2014; New Africa Magazine 2013) having tentacles in the whole of Africa and in parts of the African diasporas in Asia, Europe, America and Caribbean countries. In a 2009 UNESCO report, Nollywood is ranked third largest film industry behind India's Bollywood and US' Hollywood. In a 2011 BBC report however, the industry is considered second to Bollywood. Thus, although many continental European and American audiences may know little or

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nothing about Nigerian movies, Nollywood is today counted among the largest film industries in the world. The industry produces more than 50 films per week and is the second major employer after government in Nigeria (Oh, 2014).

Collywood on the other hand saw the light of the day in 2008. It is hard to find reliable statistics on the industry. However, since its inception, the industry is known to have adopted the Nollywood model of cinematic production in various ways. This model is characterized by shoestring budget films that are shot rapidly, following non-conformist cinema paradigms. Scholars such as Zigoto (2012), Robold (2017), Santenera (2016, 2019) and Endong (2022) observe that issues such as small budget, philistinization and unprofessionalism in the industry usually lead to the production of movies marred by various technical issues.

Nollywood and Collywood thrive on a variety of filmic genres but occult and religious movies tend to be predominant in the two industries. No doubt, Nollywood in particular has often been branded the "specter of the occult". In effect, although most of the highly grossing films of both industries have been romantic comedies, the most visible films of both industries are stories about occultism. Thus, most Nollywood and Collywood films explore themes such as voodoo, black magic, demonic possession, blood money, ritual killing and the like. In other words, films from both industries have in various ways been regurgitating popular imaginaries about the spiritual world and the afterlife. This will be illustrated in this section through an exploration of four ways in which films from both industries reflect resurrection stories and represent the relationship between the visible and the invisible worlds. The section actually examines four myths often relayed by resurrection stories and reflected in Collywood and Nollywood occult movies. These myths include:

1) The invisible world is hard to describe using common human language,
2) The physical and the invisible worlds are connected, but distant one from the other,
3) the visible and the spirit worlds are overlapping thanks to the existence of thresholds that permit transitions from one world to the other and
4) many spiritual leaders are representatives of the spirit world in the physical realm.

Thus, the section analyses Nollywood and Collywood representation of the spirit world and the afterlife in the light of some resurrection stories generated by neo-Pentecostal and charismatic church leaders. The intention of this author in this section of the paper is not to validate the popular resurrection stories prevailing in Cameroon and Nigeria. This cautious attitude towards the resurrection narratives follows from the fact that, most of the stories may not be convincingly established or scientifically proven. Analyses in this section therefore seeks to rather argue that Collywood and Nollywood filmic representations of the afterlife, the multiverse and the spirit world are in line with some resurrection stories. Some of the resurrection stories considered here include Eni Emmanuel's (1996) *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness*, Tsala-Essomba's (1993) *Vas et Raconte ce que j'ai Fait Pour Toi*[1] and Ukpabio Helen's (1996) *The Seat of Satan Exposed* among others. Written by Christian authors, the stories mentioned above have overt religious undertones.

Happenings in the Spiritual World are Hard to Describe with Human Language

Resurrection stories most often exoticize the spirit world. This exoticization is done through sensational depictions that portray the invisible world as a place with so many extraordinary and unthinkable allures. These allures are either bizarre or extremely hard to describe in simple

quotidian terms. Like fairytales, and science fiction tales, these resurrection stories usually represent the spiritual ecosystem as a surrealistic one and a world that is hard to perfectly portray using (common) human language and storytelling techniques. In his book titled *"Delivered from the Forces of Darkness"*, Emmanuel Eni (1996) repeatedly makes allusion to this difficulty. In various parts of his book Eni underlines his inability to portray what he saw in the spirit world. In one such parts, he imperfectly attempts a description of a pact between him and a hybrid entity that was half woman and half spirit. The author writes that:

> Early one morning, she [a partly human and partly spirit being] told me there was an important ceremony to be performed in the house. At 2.00 a.m. she brought a crawling child, a girl, alive. Before my eyes, Alice [the hybrid entity] used her fingers and plucked out the child eyes. The cry of that child broke my heart. She then slaughtered the child into pieces and poured both the blood and the flesh into a tray and asked me to eat. I refused. She looked straight at me and what came out of her eyes cannot be explained in writing (Eni 1996, p.15-16).

In another instance, Eni tries, still in an imperfect way, to describe an initiation ritual that involved him in the spirit world. In his account, the author acknowledges that he is short of the right vocabulary to depict the extra-terrestrial things he saw in the spirit world. He writes that:

> After seven days of agony I was brought out and sent to a place called 'INDIA JUNGLE'. In this jungle, I saw different types of demonic birds; demonic because some had faces like dogs, some like cats, etc. Yet with wings. Inside this jungle was a cave, and this cave is only opened by these demonic birds. They opened the cave and I went inside. The things I saw are hard to explain. There were terrible creatures, some looked like human beings but with tails and without human faces, etc. This was another place of torture. The torture there could best be described as semi-hell (Eni 1996, p.18)

The surrealism and exoticized values mentioned above are reflected in numerous Nollywood and Collywood occult movies. A case in point is Chizoba Nwoye's *Mwammiri: Daughter of the Ocean* (2023) which reflects various tales about the mythical Mami Wata kingdom. Nwoye's film is about a spiritually gifted young girl called Mwammiri who, since her conception, is dedicated to Mami Wata, a water goddess believed to be the head of a spiritually powerful marine kingdom. Mwammiri loses her biological mother in her early childhood and is subjected to the wickedness of the human kingdom where she dwells. However, Mami Wata, her spiritual mother provides her protection anytime she is in danger. The water goddess also gives Mwammiri spiritual powers to heal all sorts of ailments using water. *Mwammiri: Daughter of the Ocean* reflects many myths about the surrealistic allures and accents of the Mami Wata's kingdom.

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Plate 1. Mwammiri visits the marine kingdom to receive instructions from Mami Wata

Mwoye's film reflects many myths around the allures of Mami Wata's spirit kingdom. It particularly reflects the bizarreness and surrealism associated with the spirit world in general and Mami Wata's marine kingdom in particular. This surrealism is shown in Plate 1 which gives a glimpse of the water goddess' kingdom. In this Plate, one can see that the human characters survive and even smoothly operate in an aquatic environment even though they are not fishes or semi-aquatic species. The surrealism is explained in greater details in the subsequent paragraphs.

It is important, from the outset, to explain that, according to Nigerian popular imaginations, Mami Wata's marine world is a place situated at the bottom of seas and other water bodies. It is accessed through mystical means by initiated people. In other world, social representations suggest that people go to that kingdom in spirit. Most resurrection stories – including Eni's *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness* –represent this marine kingdom as a place where human visitors need neither swim masks nor oxygen tanks for breathing. All human beings who find themselves in such a universe breathe normally, in spite of their prolong submersion into waters. This surrealist depiction is reflected in *Mwammiri: Daughter of the Ocean* particularly in the film's scenes showing the journeys of some characters to the marine kingdom. In the scene captured in Plate 1, Mwammiri the protagonist in the film can be seen in one of her journeys to the marine kingdom. The scene shown in the Plate 1 is designed to represent the myth that stipulates that Mami Wata's kingdom is accessed in spirit. This makes it possible even for non-aquatic beings to breathe normally and to naturally survive in the goddess' kingdom, given that their presence in that kingdom is only in spirit. Being submerged into water is in no way an obstacle to anyone who find themselves in the marine kingdom. Such people can act, interact and even transact with host spirits in the marine kingdom in spite of the aquatic environment. In the scene shown in Plate 1, Mwammiri is in a meeting with Mami Wata. Although frightful, bizarre and under the waters, the goddess's

world proves conducive to human living. Such a scene defies natural laws and is against all expectations.

The Visible and the Spirit Worlds are Connected but Distant one from the Other

Many of resurrection stories tend to represent the visible and the spirit worlds as universes that are distant (one from the other), but connected through mystical routes, paranormal itineraries and thresholds. This paradoxical notion is suggested in these resurrection stories through the mention of concepts such as teleportation, astral projection and spiritual journeys. These concepts are believed to constitute some of the means by which initiated people – notably sorcerers, cultists, native priests and spiritualists – move from one realm to the other. The aforementioned notion of distant but connected worlds is for instance evoked in the story of Ugeelu Amadu, a native prophet who allegedly died and came back to life three days after his death. The native prophet claims in his story published in Nigeria's *The Sun* that, he went to heaven during his three days in eternity. The native priest – who afterward turned to prophet – describes the spiritual world where he went to, as a place one can liken to another planet of the cosmos. In his words, "My journey to heaven was a tranquil one. […]The cloud opened up. I saw something like a giant golden satellite, suspended in space. I wouldn't know whether this is what the Bible calls heaven. There, I was greeted by a seven-feet tall angel. He stood in front of the gate" (cited in Leonard 2022, p.9-10).

Similarly, books such as Eni's (1996) *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness* and Tsama-Essomba's (1993) *Vas et Raconte ce que j'ai Fait pour Toi* [Go and tell the world what I have done for you], suggest this long distance separating the spirit from the physical world. Both Eni (1996) and Tsama-Essomba (1993) claim to have used teleportation and astral projection to move from the physical world to the spiritual realm. The two religious authors' accounts of their journeys to the spirit world are reminiscent of popular Cameroonian and Nigerian myths, which suggest that people with immense esoteric knowledge usually deploy mystical ships and vehicles to travel by night to the spirit world. It is actually not uncommon in both Cameroon and Nigeria, to stumble on newspaper stories or media reports which recount the misadventures of sorcerers who experienced terrible accidents during their nocturnal journeys to the spirit world (Kouenedji, 2021; Eni 1996; Baeke 1986). Cities in both countries are full of stories about witches who crashed on top of some houses' roofs and were even caught at the scene of their crash in the morning. Such witches are, in most cases, subjected to jungle justice.

Nollywood and Collywood filmmakers tend to tap into the aforementioned myths and resurrection stories. They represent astral projection and spiritual journeys as two of the means commonly used by both paranormal entities and human beings to move from one realm to the other. Films that depict this inter-realm movement are usually about protagonists and antagonists who journey to the spirit world in view of searching esoteric powers that will enable them influence the course of events in the physical world. A case in point is Andy Amaechi's *Igodo: The Land of the Dead* (1999) which recounts the story of an African village which is under the attack of sorcerers and evil spirits. To defeat their spiritual aggressors, the villagers chose seven of their most energetic men whom they send on mission to the evil forest. The ultimate objective of this mission is to recover a sword blessed with the extraordinary power to neutralize the evil spirits that are spiritually brutalizing the village. In Amaechi's film, the evil forest is used as a metaphor of the spirit world and the land of the ancestors. The film uses the metaphor of a physical journey to represent

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a spiritual undertaking. In effect, although represented in a physical form, the evil forest is a spiritual universe infested by various invisible powers that manifest though strange animals' or monsters' attacks. The adventurers in the film must brave the onslaughts of these evil forces to lay hand on the mystical sword. Unfortunately, out of the seven men sent on mission, only Igodo (played by Norbert Young) successfully accomplishes the task. Six of the adventurers are hunted down and killed by the predatory spirits and monsters of the evil forest. Andy Amaechi's *Igodo*, portrays the spirit world as a universe that is distant to the physical world, and accessible only through physical movement and psycho-spiritual maneuvers (the ability to perform the relevant ritual).

While Amaechi uses physical movement as a metaphor of spiritual journeys to the spirit world, other cineastes prefer to deploy the notion of astral projection. A case in point is Teco Benson who, in his *End of the Wicked* (1999), taps into the popular myth of sorcerers who fly into the spiritual world or astral-project themselves anytime they undertake a movement to the invisible realm. The movie actually tells the tale of a coven of witches and wizard who regularly meet with Beelzebub in the spiritual world. Their meeting is a platform for the planning and execution of satanic ploys against innocent people in the visible world. In Teco Benson's film, the notion of a spirit world which is distant to the physical one is clearly represented. So too is the notion that astral journey is the means by which both physical and invisible entities successfully move from one world to the other.

The Spiritual and the Physical Worlds are Interwoven

Another notion being popularized by authors of resurrection stories is that the spiritual and visible worlds are interwoven or overlapping in a complex way. This notion is constructed in two principal ways: 1) the use of concepts such as thresholds and strategic doors into the spirit world and 2) the use of the myth of emissaries from the invisible world. The first way mentioned above consists in suggesting that the spirit and the physical worlds meet at specific thresholds. By definition, these thresholds are earthly places or bodies that spiritually function as exit and entry points into the spirit world. They are kinds of spiritual doors. Some of these thresholds include spiritually charged places such as graveyards, shrines, evil forests and sanctuaries among others. Dyer (2016) explains the binding role of thresholds thus:

> The threshold has its guardians – gods and spirits who forbid entrance both to human enemies and to demons and the power of pestilence. It is on the threshold that sacrifices to the guardian divinities are offered [...] The threshold, [and] the door show the solution of continuity in space immediately and concretely; hence their great religious importance, for they are symbols and at the same time vehicles passing from one space to another. (p. 25)

In his book titled *"Vas et raconte ce que j'ai fait pour toi"*, pastor Tsama-Essomba (1993) corroborates the aforementioned notion of the threshold. In the book, Tsama-Essomba describes how graveyards used to serve as threshold or mystical doors to the invisible world. He explains how gaining access to the spirit world often entailed going at the middle of the night to the graveyard in order to perform the necessary rituals. The ritualistic acts always helped him open the gates of the invisible world. The acts also enabled him travel to Satan's kingdom. In his language, "He [Satan's prophet] had asked me to go alone to the cemetery at 11:30 PM so as to start the

incantations at exactly midnight. The prophet said that it was from the cemetery that I will get access to the spirit world" [My translation²] (Tsama-Essomba, 1993).

This notion of graveyards that spiritually function as threshold is represented in Chika C. Onu's 1996 horror movie titled *Karashika*. The film tells the story of a charming young woman (Karashika played by Bekie Ngozi) sent on earth by Lucifer (played by Obi Madubogwu) to accomplish various diabolic chores. Vested with immense satanic powers, Karahika serially seduces men, lures them into carnal sin and ultimately causes their death. She also successfully destabilizes some religious movements, derailing randy pastors and causing whole congregations to abandon the ways of God in favor of satanic doctrines. Her ultimate mission is to sow suffering and doom on earth. In the film, Karashika uses graveyards and tombs as door into the spirit world. In effect, anytime she travels for a meeting with Satan, she uses an old tomb found in a sinister graveyard as transit or entry point. This is reminiscent of the popular myth stipulating that cemeteries are thresholds into the spirit realm.

The notion of thresholds as convergence points between the physical and the spirit worlds is also conveyed in Chizoba Nwoye's *Mwammiri: Daughter of the Ocean* (earlier mentioned in this paper). The film contains many scenes where Mwamiri, the protagonist, visits the marine kingdom to receive instructions and spiritual powers from her spiritual mother Mami Wata. In such scenes, the village's main river functions as threshold into the spiritual world. Plate 2 shows how the film director uses visual effects to convey the aforementioned notion about threshold.

Plate 2. Mwammiri is back to the visible World

The notion of emissaries from the spirit kingdom is the second way used by authors of resurrection stories to convey the idea of a spirit world that overlaps with the physical one. Authors who evoke this notion, usually suggest that, although a distant place, the invisible world is paradoxically embedded in the physical one following at least two indicators. First, some envoys of the spirit kingdom cohabit with human beings on earth. This cohabitation in itself is evidence of the spirit world's presence in the physical world. The aforementioned envoys of the spirit world mingle with human beings, act in furtive ways and execute the designs of the supernatural forces they represent and serve.

Second, these envoys who are spirit in human clothing epitomize in themselves the embodiment of both the physical and the spirit worlds. In *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness,* Emmanuel Eni (1996) mentions the case of a certain Alice, whom he identifies as the person who

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introduced him to occultism and the spirit world. Alice is identified in Eni's book as a good example of such envoys from the spirit world who every day beats the vigilance of humans. The description of Alice is in line with popular social representations of emissaries from the spirit world. Eni (1996) writes:

> One night, I woke up in the dead of the night and found a boa-constrictor beside me. I wanted to shout but could not. Some nights, I would wake up to see Alice's body as transparent as a cellophane bag. Some nights, she would disappear and reappear [...] The outside world saw her as a very beautiful and harmless girl working with a big Bank but she was the devil's agent. There are a lot of Alices in the world today [...] (p. 12-13).

In another instance, Eni ameliorates his description of Alice. He writes: "That same night, at 2.00 a.m. (and this is the usual hour of meetings and dangerous operations by all the forces of darkness and their agents),Alice woke me up and revealed certain things to me. She said: 'I am not an ordinary human being. I am half human and half spirit but mainly of the spirit. What you see in my chamber is what I use during my prayers every morning, so that the spirits will guide me through the day'" (Eni 1996, p. 14).

This notion of envoys and emissaries from the spirit world is replete in Nollywood and Collywood occult movies. A case in point is Roland Thierry Ntamack's *Sur la route d'un ange* [standing on the way of an angel]. Released in 2011, the French language movie tells the story of a young man named Tony Essakara (Thierry Ntamack) who, on a fateful day, stumbles on a very beautiful lady Elia (Willy Mbo). A practicing Christain, Essakara has just attended church service and is on his way home. He is destitute and jobless, in spite of his impressive academic credentials. The young woman whom he encounters is a dove only on surface. Her real identity is that of a mermaid on mission to tempt him and lure him into carnal sins. Essakara soon develops sexual appetite for Elia (the mysterious beautiful lady), but little does he know that his new female friend is an evil spirit in human clothing sent on mission to destroy him physically and spiritually.

Thierry Ntamack's film reflects resurrection stories as well as the popular myths that suggest the existence of agents or emissaries from the spirit/invisible world who take the appearance of living beings – notably very attractive persons, seductive maiden/harlots or influential personalities – to lure their victims or targets (real humans) into various immoral and irreversible acts that may, in some circumstances, even provoke their demise. Through the character of Elia, Ntamack's film particularly brings to the fore the myth of Mami Wata, the water goddess who is believed to take the form of a seductive young woman to lure male victims into sexual intercourse and pull them into her spiritual kingdom.

The overlapping nature of the visible and invisible worlds is similarly evoked in Niyi Akinmolayan's *My Village People* (2021). This Nigerian film tells the story of a chronic womanizer, Prince (played by Bovi Ugbonna), whose weaknesses for women land him in a very complicated relationship with witches and water spirits. Prince's misfortune starts when he goes to his village for a brief sojourn. Despite his sister's warnings to not relate with his village people, the young man recklessly and randomly makes friendship with villagers and also makes advances to young girls including the daughter of the village's native prophet. His womanizer's allure attracts a coven of witches and some female carriers of water spirits (Mami Wata). These female characters seek both

revenge and romance with Prince. The young women's ambitions land the womanizer into a bizarre love triangle with marine spirits and witches.

Like in Ntamack's movie, the overlapping nature of the visible and the invisible worlds is portrayed in *My village people*. This is evidenced by two things: first, Niyi Akinmolayan actually foregrounds the popular Nigerian myth which stipulates that spirits and humans cohabit and interact in the same ecosystem. The human folk are by their religiosity, aware of the presence of their spirit counterparts meanwhile the latter is not only aware of the human presence, but seeks in various ways to shape human life in this ecosystem. Second, through the acts of the witches and the marine spirits in the film, Akinmolayan indirectly highlights the duality of the human body possessed by a marine spirit. This duality is revealed in the fact that the possessed human body simultaneously belongs to two worlds. Actually, the possessed human bodies of the women who seek revenge and romance with Prince in the film are characterized by the above duality. These bodies are symbols of the fusion of the visible and the invisible worlds.

Spiritual Leaders as Representatives of the Spirit Kingdom in the Visible World

Another trope in Nollywood and Collywood movies that is in line with resurrection stories is the idea that the spirit kingdom has its representatives in the visible world. These representatives operate as envoys with specific missions. They take human forms and mingle with the humans and execute various spiritual chores based on the purity or ungodliness of their origins. The emissaries that come from destructive deities accomplish negative assignments. For instance, they cause human deaths and resist rival spiritual enterprises (e.g. the conversion of masses to genuine Christianity and the prosperity of churches). These destructive emissaries also orchestrate various misfortunes on the earth. This trope is observed in Chika C. Onu's *Karachika* (earlier mentioned) which recounts the story of a female envoy of Satan, whose mission on earth is to destabilize Christian ministries and orchestrate untold sufferings in Christian homes. The same trope characterizes Helen Uppabio's *Highway to the Grave*, which is about another female envoy of the kingdom of darkness whose mission on earth is to seduce men and lure them into mortal sexual intercourse.

The myth of the religious leader or church founder who functions as a representative of the invisible world (Satan's kingdom) on earth is vindicated by Helen Ukpabio's (1996) purported eye-witness account of the spirit world in *The Seat of Satan Exposed*. In this book, Ukpabio claims to have served Lucifer in the spirit world along with Olumba Olumba Obu[3], the founder of a charismatic religious movement – operating in the south eastern part of Nigeria. The writer – who is also founder of the Liberty Church – additionally claims that many African church founders and leaders of Pentecostal/charismatic churches, function as ambassadors or representatives of Satan on earth. They make recourse to occult powers to run their Christian ministries. They go to the invisible world and enter into pacts with Lucifer. These pacts help them receive powers to operate all manner of miracles and wonders from the devil. With such powers, they can attract gullible masses of miracle-seekers into their churches. In return, the churchmen act as representative of Lucifer on earth. Their churches have the appearance of holy and powerful temples; but in reality, these churches are strategic arms of Satan's kingdom on earth. They function as systems aimed at recruiting Satan's followers and devotees. Ukpabio's account is only spiritually revealed; it is not scientifically proven, although Nigerian dailies seasonally publish stories of end-time neo-Pentecostal pastors controversially embroiled in issues of occultism and sorcery (Sammuel, 2021;

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Akure 2021; Nwaka 2020). On this basis, Liberty Church founder's book remains controversial. No doubt, the book has been questioned by many critics (Ngbea 2019; Moyo & Meer, 2014). In spite of its controversial nature, Ukpabio's account – like many other similar narratives about the invisible kingdom – are reflected in Nollywood films.

Conclusion

Cameroonian and Nigerian communities have always had an obsession with knowing what happens in the afterlife, the multiverse and the spirit world. This obsession has paved the way for the ubiquity and popularity of all manner of resurrection stories as well as myths that attempt an explanation of the invisible world and the paranormal. This paper has explored the various ways in which resurrection stories generated by some neo-Pentecostal and charismatic church founders contribute to the construction of social representations of the afterlife, the multiverse and the spirit world in Cameroon and Nigeria. The paper also examined how these ubiquitous resurrection stories reflect or relay some tenets of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and fuel popular cultures – notably popular cinema – in Nigeria and Cameroon. Specific attention has been given to four myths that are on the one hand, regularly evoked by these resurrection stories and on the other hand, reflected in Nigerian and Cameroonian video films. These myths include the beliefs that 1) the invisible world is hard to describe using common human language, 2) the physical and the invisible worlds are connected, despite being distant one from the other, 3) the visible and the spirit worlds are overlapping thanks to the existence of thresholds that permit transitions from one world to the other and 4) many spiritual leaders function like representatives of the spirit world in the physical realm. The paper has argued that Nigerian and Cameroonian films have reflected the aforementioned myths in their tropes and their storylines, as well as in the visual effects and other cinematic codes that they deploy.

The myths explored in this paper could be said to partially be fuelled or vindicated by resurrection stories published mainly by religious authors. Because of their non-scientific and non-empirical nature, both the myths and the resurrection stories are subject to controversy. Although popular and visible in the Nigerian and Cameroonian cinema, the myths and resurrection stories remained basically associated with religiosity or mere phenomenology. This paper focused on representations of resurrection stories in Nollywood and Collywood movies. Future studies may interestingly examine how audiences receive these filmic representations of resurrection stories.

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Notes

[1] The title "*Va et raconte ce que j'ai fait pour toi* » is Fench for « Go and tell the world what I have done for you ». According to Martin Tsala-Essomba the author of the book, these were the words of Jesus Christ who delivered him (Tsala-Essomba) from the claws of the devil after many years of servitude for Satan in the spirit world.

[2] Il m'avait dit de retrouver ma route tout seul et que je devais partir du cimetière. Il fallait que je me rende au cimetière a 23 h. 30, pour commencer mes incantations a minuit cinq.

[3] Olumba Olumba Obu is a religious leader who lived from 1918 to 2003. He is believed by his followers to have been God in the human form. These followers claim their leader is the Holy Spirit and that he is greater than Jesus Christ. Olumba Olumba founded the Brotherhood of the Red Cross and Stars, a movement which remarkably departs from many core tenets of Christian doctrines. Principally based in south-eastern Nigeria (particularly in the city of Calabar), the movement has over the years been somewhat controversial. Many Christian observers and critics associate it to a secret cult.

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Meta's Challenge with Olives and Watermelon:
The Case of Blocking Posts About Gaza

Nuran KIZMAZ ÖZTÜRK[*]

Abstract

Digitalization stands out as an important factor transforming social structures and forms of communication in today's society. Social media offers a socio-political ground for participatory democracy and an alternative to traditional media in a globalizing world. Recently, Israel's attack on Gaza and the massive genocide in the region have caused a great resonance on the internet and social media. The aim of this study is to examine the censorship mechanisms applied by social media platforms during Israel's attacks on Gaza. The main question of the research is how social media censorship mechanisms affect freedom of expression and digital activism. As a result of the research, it has been observed that since the first days of the war, especially on Facebook and Instagram, posts were removed biasedly, and the accounts of people who frequently posted such posts were slowed down, and their posts were algorithmically blocked from being seen. As a result of this process, users have tried to overcome this situation with visuals such as watermelons and olives, symbols associated with Gaza. Contradicting the idea that alternative new media creates a libertarian space, it created great disappointment and damaged the trust of users. The importance of the research lies in its demonstration of the effects of censorship on freedom of expression and digital activism in social media. The study will examine social media censorship in Gaza in detail through using a literature review methodology and discussing relevant figures. As a result, we will present examples of the efforts of social media users who are algorithmically censored, which we call symbolic subversion, to overcome this situation with symbols.

Keywords: Social Media, Symbolic Defeat, Culture of Surveillance, Censorship, Meta

Meta'nın Zeytin ve Karpuzla İmtihanı:
Gazze İle İlgili Paylaşımların Engellenmesi Örneği

Öz

Günümüz toplumunda dijitalleşme, toplumsal yapıları ve iletişim biçimlerini dönüştüren önemli bir faktör olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Küreselleşen dünyada sosyal medya, katılımcı demokrasi ve geleneksel medyaya alternatif olabilecek bir sosyo-politik zemin sunmaktadır. Yakın zamanda İsrail'in Gazze'ye saldırı düzenlemesi ve bölgedeki büyük soykırım, internette ve sosyal medyada büyük yankı uyandırmıştır. Çalışmanın amacı İsrail'in Gazze'ye yönelik saldırıları sırasında sosyal medya platformlarının uyguladığı sansür mekanizmalarını incelemektir. Araştırmanın temel sorusu sosyal medya sansür mekanizmalarının, ifade özgürlüğü ve dijital aktivizmi nasıl etkilediğidir. Araştırma sonucunda savaşın ilk günlerinden itibaren özellikle Facebook ve İnstagram'da yapılan paylaşımların yanlı olarak kaldırıldığı, sıklıkla bu tür paylaşım yapan kişilerin hesabının yavaşlatılarak paylaşımlarının görülme oranlarının algoritmik olarak engellendiği gözlemlenmiştir. Bu süreç sonunda kullanıcılar Gazze ile bütünleşen sembollerden karpuz ve zeytin gibi görsellerle bu durumu aşmaya çalışmışladır. Alternatif yeni medyanın özgürlükçü bir alan oluşturduğu düşüncesi ile çelişerek büyük hayal kırıklığı oluşturmuş, kullanıcıların güvenini zedelemiştir. Araştırmanın önemi, sosyal medyada sansürün ifade özgürlüğü ve dijital aktivizm üzerindeki etkilerini ortaya koymasında yatmaktadır. Çalışma, literatür taraması yöntemini kullanarak ve konuyla ilgili görselleri tartışarak Gazze'deki sosyal medya sansürünü inceleyecektir. Sonuç olarak, sembolik yıkım olarak adlandırdığımız algoritmik olarak sansürlenen sosyal medya kullanıcılarının bu durumu sembollerle aşma çabalarından örnekler sunacağız.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Medya, Sembolik Alt Etme, Gözetim Kültürü, Sansür, Meta

[*] Assist. Prof., Bayburt University, e-mail: nurankizmaz@hotmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0003-3913-8501, Bayburt, Türkiye

Introduction

Nowadays, information technologies have integrated all metal devices like magnets. With the discovery of the Internet, these information technologies have been incorporated into the network. The primary institutions of today's society, which Manuel Castells describes as a network society, are located around the network (Castells, 2013a). These networks increasingly connect every function and part of society (Dijk, 2012). Many institutions, from education to health, politics to economy, have been digitalized with the internet. With the transition of the Internet to Web 2.0, a new interactive level has been reached. The individual has become not only a producer but also a consumer in cyberspace. In other words, the user becomes the prosumer, a form of production-consumption culture adapted to new media in digital environments (Ritzer, 2015). This situation has opened the door to a new era in the internet age. Technology, which Zygmunt Bauman interprets as 'do-it-yourself slavery,' has started to progress depending on the labor rather than the user-friendliness of the tools. İn this way, the masses have managed to establish a faster and new communication network by interacting with social media channels (Bauman & Lyon, 2013). Thus, the masses have established a faster and new communication network by interacting with social media. With the possibility of mutual interaction, socialization has started in virtual space and time. Individuals have started to take a more active role in producing and consuming on this new platform. The most well-known of these platforms are Instagram, Facebook, Twitter(X) and TikTok. Through social media, communication has become more instantaneous and faster, reaching a wider audience.

In social media, individuals create a virtual identity and develop attitudes and behaviors towards the construction of this identity. At the same time, the formation of virtual communities and societies is a factor affecting society. Social media has influenced social movements by enabling the masses to collaborate. The claims of those who see the public representation of identities as a matter of freedom and justice find representation in this new media environment. İn this way, virtual interaction on social media has found its counterpart on the street. Various non-governmental organizations have used social media in social movements to synchronize activists, ensure fast communication, and reach large masses without cost. Thus, social movements occur from cyberspace to urban space (Castells, 2013).

With its lack of a centralized structure, this new instrumentality has given social media a new mission. In addition to expressing themselves, individuals in society have benefited from social media, which exhibits a more libertarian and democratic attitude, to share their views against power and authority, to express opinions in socio-political debates, and to organize and get up-to-date and accurate news from the agenda. Thus, social media platforms have assumed the role of alternative new media in the face of traditional media.

However, it is seen that the operability of new media is interrupted by elements such as disinformation, manipulation, perception management, and propaganda. In addition, Foucault's panopticon concept of surveillance culture has evolved into a more voluntary and participatory surveillance culture through social media. In the context of this surveillance culture, users are faced with a situation that is contrary to their expectations from social media platforms. The reflection of all these on the power and authority front appears as censorship, slowing down, blocking, and

surveillance. These four elements cannot be considered independently of each other. With surveillance as the key element, the other elements of censorship, blocking, and throttling have become political weapons against users of social media platforms. This is contrary to the accepted structure of social media platforms that promise to provide a democratic space.

Recently, censorship on social media has been the subject of considerable debate, especially after the US elections. The suspension of Trump's social media accounts pushed him into a spiral of silence, and attempts to discredit it caused the issue to peak. The spiral of silence is a theory that explains the tendency of individuals to remain silent about voicing an opinion contrary to that of the majority (Neumann, 2002). It has recently been observed that Meta, in particular, censored the sharing of the Israeli massacre in Palestine on social media. In addition to the posts of many news channels and social media users, Human Rights Watch (HRW) prepared a report and revealed the situation (HRW, 2023). Despite the claims of social media platforms to provide libertarian and decentralized information flow, they question their impartiality and credibility by censoring content in times of crisis, as we have seen in the Gaza Attacks. By analyzing the censorship, blocking, slowing down, and surveillance practices of social media platforms in Gaza, this study aims to discuss the contradictions of alternative new media in terms of transparency, neutrality, and user trust.

The aims of this study are to analyze the censorship mechanisms applied on social media platforms during the Israeli attacks on Gaza and to examine the effects of this censorship on users' freedom of expression and digital activism practices. The study aims to discuss the contradictions of censorship practices with alternative media ideals and to reveal the symbolic strategies developed by users to overcome this censorship.

This study has two main questions for this purpose:

1) Which censorship mechanisms were implemented by social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) during the Israeli attacks on Gaza, and how did these mechanisms shape their impact on users' content production and sharing?

2) What symbolic and alternative methods have social media users developed to overcome censorship mechanisms, and how can these strategies be evaluated in the context of digital activism?

This research will use literature review and case study analysis methods to examine the censorship mechanisms applied on social media platforms. In view of the studies on digital censorship and digital activism in the literature, the types of censorship (content removal, account slowdown, algorithmic manipulation) applied on social media, especially during the attacks on Gaza, will be identified and their effects on users will be analyzed. Furthermore, the symbolic resistance strategies developed by users against censorship will be discussed in the context of digital activism. Data will be collected and analyzed from academic sources and social media posts.

In this study, the problem of censorship of social media, which is expected to offer a libertarian airspace, is going to be analyzed within the framework of surveillance culture and digital activism. This topical issue is expected to contribute to the literature on new media studies and digital activism. The censorship mechanisms implemented by platforms such as Facebook and Instagram during the Israeli attacks on Gaza have led to the questioning of this libertarian structure. First of all, the types of censorship are emphasized, and the censorship applied to the posts about

the massacre committed by Israel's attacks on Palestineon social media is discussed. In this context, what is systematic online censorship? Why is censorship applied on social media so far from being transparent? Against this censorship, it is observed that social media users continue to support Palestine and condemn the massacre with the watermelon symbol integrated with the Palestinian flag, which activists also use in street protests. It will be revealed how there is a way out against this censorship in the algorithm as a digital activism/slactivism through symbolic overcoming. This situation is going to be discussed in the study, and the findings obtained will be analyzed through content analysis.

Alternative New Media and Digital Activism

With its decentralized and libertarian structure and potentials, such as easy access to information and knowledge, immunity from authority, and freedom of expression, the Internet is presented on a socio-political plane that can pave the way for participatory democracy and alternative new media that aims to become the eyes and ears of the public again against traditional media.

Traditional media is strongly connected with politics through its centralized and hierarchical structure. The internet has allowed individuals to produce content with its decentralized structure. The new media is differentiated from traditional media by providing more instant and faster insider information. It has changed its axis by taking news out of the focus of the traditional media, which is biased and proceeds on the path determined by its supporters on the political plane.

There are two approaches to mass communication in the social context;

1) The first one emphasizes technological developments and the libertarian side of technology

2) The other emphasizes the socio-economic and political aspects of technology.

In addition, there is also an approach that social media platforms are merely a tool.

New social movements have incorporated virtual elements into their actions by using developing communication and information technologies. With the transformation of social movements into internet-based action through the use of social media, the term "new" was added and used together with digital activism (Tani & Boztepe Taşkıran, 2018). With the transition of the Internet to interactive media, new social movements created by the masses by organizing through new media are referred to as digital activism (Aksu, 2017). Digital activism is a concept that refers to social movements harnessing the power of social networks in addition to traditional communication methods (Tuna & Türkölmez, 2023). The uniqueness of digital activism lies in the fact that its practitioners, the digital natives, are very different from previous generations. Digital activism has become one of the main ways of subjectivization in the political sphere and of influencing political actors in terms of its transformation into an instrument of control over power (Tuna & Türkölmez, 2023). Digital activism is the mobilization of civil society through internet-enabled digital platforms and mobile phones to participate in governance processes (Tani, 2019). According to the methods chosen by activists and their goals, digital activism is characterized by slaktavism/clitivism, taking sides/awareness activism, hacktivism, and citizen journalism (Köse, 2020).

From a technological progressivist point of view, the idea that the Internet will create a necessary and possible democratic environment is misleading. The focus is mainly on the emancipatory aspect of the Internet, which the decentralized nature of the Internet counts on. Nevertheless, this is the first perspective on the Internet. Another way of looking at this "liberating" aspect of the Internet is that it has an "anarchist" character. With this aspect, the internet has enabled people in society to express their ideas and thoughts more independently and demandingly against authority. Social movements such as the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, etc. can be given as examples. It can be said that this feature of the internet is used relatively more effectively, especially in strict regimes. Thus, the internet turns into a tool of control over authorities. Therefore, the progressive perspective and the tradition of technological determinism argue that the internet will bring about more democratic societies. On the one hand, the Internet rings the bells of democracy; on the other hand, it is seen to ring anti-authoritarian bells. However, the most ironic aspect of the Internet is that it was built mainly by anarchists but funded by the military. Both sides believed technology would fulfill their dreams (Bozkurt, 2000).

Censorship from Surveillance Culture to Super Panopticon

While the Internet has, on the one hand, provided a liberating ground -due to its structure, on the other hand, it has enabled the control and surveillance of too much information about individuals. In this way, the authorities can quickly obtain information such as an individual's ideology, opinion, and whether he or she is opposed to the government. It is known that information from what people eat to what they buy is processed and marketed for economic strategies through data mining. This situation brings to mind Foucault's panopticon metaphor (Foucault, 2011). The "panopticon," whose metaphor Bentham gave meaning to within the framework of power relations, continues to be a part of surveillance culture today (Çelik, 2022). The phenomenon of surveillance defines an instrumental process through which power is established to establish its hegemony and gain power and to protect and develop that power (Marshall, 2001). From the past to the present, surveillance culture has been transformed by replacing control, coercion, and fear with voluntariness and consent. Surveillance, in which consent gains importance, today consists of participation in which the surveilled is also a part (Lyon, 2013). Relatively comfortable and unperturbed control and surveillance by the authority are carried out continuously. In the new society where information is power, surveillance is embedded in the fabric of society. According to Foucault, the Age of Enlightenment, which discovered freedom, also discovered disciplines and modern society became a society dominated by "surveillance" and "discipline" (Foucault, 2011). The concept of surveillance, which Foucault puts forward in a very striking way, *"the systematic investigation or monitoring of the communication or action of one or more persons,"* has recently gained particular importance in parallel with the development process of information technologies such as the internet (Foucault, 2011). The structure conceptualized as a surveillance society breaks down the barriers against total/integrated control with the impact of new communication technologies and puts all social life under control with the increasing spread of technologies. The surveillance society thus constitutes a superpanopticon, a structure that allows the minority to monitor the majority, the majority to monitor the minority, and everyone to monitor everyone from anywhere. The superpanopticon, as an understanding of surveillance independent of space and time, can be used in many different fields such as the security of individuals with society, health care services, road and traffic analysis, easy and fast detection of criminals, design of smart buildings, and automation. Surveillance in the superpanopticon takes

place in two ways; first, it increases control by creating awareness and self-criticism in individuals through databases. The other is to provide the power to quickly recognize and control individuals by recording personal information (Dereli, 2020; Kavut, 2023).

Jean Baudrillard says "the image is violent. Because what happens there is the murder of the truth", pointing out that in an environment where everything is exhibited to be seen, there is actually nothing left to be seen (Baudrillard, 2024). In the risk society, the individual is not a victim of image but an image (Günerigök, 2018). In Nazife Şişman's words, "It makes itself transparent by holding the copyright of everyone's own life" (Şişman, 2016). By voluntarily placing themselves in the hands of their audience, individuals internalize control. This situation cannot be explained only by the high use of social media by young people; that is, it cannot be explained only as age-specific (Bauman & Lyon, 2013). But this does not mean that there is no external control and surveillance. In addition, virtual environments have a positive impact on mass movements. In addition, virtual environments have a positive impact on social movements. Virtual environments are effective in mass movements. Walter Lippman states that the words and images presented to the masses create a kind of virtual reality and effectively develop the desired behavior. Global social movements generally focus on "democracy, revolution, freedom, and peace." Social media can shape and direct social movements in which large masses participate more effectively. However, there are also disadvantages, such as surveillance and censorship (Dijk, 2012).

While social media platforms, which appear to be emancipatory, can tend to be independent of power and authority, they can also go in the opposite direction in today's surveillance society. Castells calls mass self-communication fundamentally based on horizontal interactional communication networks, which are difficult for governments and corporations to control (Castells, 2013). However, networks consist of horizontal connectivity and vertical hubs and nodes (Dijk, 2012). İt is seen that its emancipatory effect is realized within the boundaries presented to us and under control and surveillance. We are granted a virtual and yet managed area of freedom. This virtual medium is an area that differentiates according to ideology and culture and includes and enables digital surveillance and surveillance that is carried out unannounced. In the context of a culture of surveillance and control, it is also observed that the current dominant ideological understanding is suppressed.

Networks serve the efforts of governments and public institutions to record and control all citizens. In authoritarian states, this enables surveillance and censorship. In democratic states, it increases the power of public officials (Dijk, 2012). In order to manage social media platforms, states have developed methods of control and self-control and have introduced censorship, surveillance, and control mechanisms. Censorship has a political and policy background and emerges as a state intervention against political and ideological freedom of expression (Tekeli, 2021). Internet censorship, a new form of censorship, is defined as the practice of states controlling citizens' online activities, restricting the free flow of information, and violating the fundamental rights and freedoms of online users (Shukla & Moosavi, 2013). With the use of social media by power and authority, situations such as party formation, perception management, ideological collapse, or revolution emerge, especially in social movements. This situation affects meaning, ideology, culture, and perception. Here, individuals whose points of resistance are mentally weakened become ready to manipulate the content offered by mass media and do not question the

information imposed on them (Habermas, 2002). In this context, governments, administrations, political agents, and, as recent events have shown, large technological companies that want to shape or influence social movements resort to censorship, slowdowns, or blocking to influence the masses. There are different types of censorship on the Internet. These include technical blocking, slowing down, censoring search engine results, and restricting website content.

The intervention of nation-states and certain powers in access to the Internet shows that this issue cannot be evaluated solely within the framework of liberal freedom. There are also national and international organizations and initiatives (ITU-International Telecommunications Union/EU Convention on Cybercrime) that justify opposing every regulation on the Internet as censorship. It is expected that these organizations make regulations that prioritize political engagements.

Recently, one of the biggest examples of internet censorship took place during the 2020 elections. The recent US general elections clearly showed how much influence networks have on the relationship between politics and media. Donald Trump's posts were censored on social media. Trump's conflicts with social media and traditional media go back much further. In fact, his statements during COVID-19 were partially censored by Twitter and shared as sensitive content. During the elections, Trump's statements were countered by Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, claiming that his early victory announcements were shady. In this process, it was observed that Biden was favored, and some of the shady posts (related to Ukraine, private life, etc.) were removed from circulation. Trump openly criticized this situation, and he accused Facebook and Twitter of being the "third arm" of the Democrats, claiming that they supported the election campaigns of the Democrats.

The powerful and authoritarian structure of the big tech companies (Big Tech) and different platforms have started to be established to develop opposing discourses. Furthermore, again, applications such as Parler were removed from service after the raid on the US Congress because they were far-right. Twitter closed more than 70,000 accounts for similar reasons. Facebook removed all election-related posts with the hashtag "stop the theft." It is known that certain institutions control these big companies entering the equation. Looking at the censorship processes from this perspective, it is tough to claim that posts with high discursive power are unbiased and from within the society. We are confronted with a landscape quite far from the techno-liberal plane that the Internet is accepted to host.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to examine the extent and forms of censorship of pro-Palestinian posts on social media platforms during the Israeli-Palestinian war. The research will be based on qualitative research methodology, using literature review and case study analysis. The literature review will examine existing academic sources on digital activism, algorithmic censorship, and alternative media theories to identify the types of censorship applied on social media platforms and analyze the effects of censorship on digital activism. The study aims to concretely analyze the censorship applied in the context of the Gaza attacks with examples. In addition, symbolic resistance strategies against censorship, such as watermelon and olive symbols, will be evaluated in the context of digital activism. This research aims to understand the mechanisms of digital censorship and the effects of censorship on user behavior while at the same time revealing how

symbolic strategies developed in the face of censorship contribute to the debates on digital activism and freedom of expression

In this study, censorship allegations against the posts made on social media regarding the Israeli-Palestinian war that started on October 7, 2023, and the results of the reports published by human rights monitoring organizations on this situation are presented according to the types of censorship. Since sharing all the posts in the study is impossible, an example of each type of censorship is given. It will then discuss how the watermelon, a symbolic item, has become an essential element of resistance for activists to cope with and overcome online systematic censorship.

Findings

Palestine, including Jerusalem, which is considered sacred for all three Abrahamic religions, has been home to many tribes and civilizations throughout history. Palestine, which has a strategic position on the axis of oil and holy, is a fragile region in the Middle East, known as a bleeding wound from the past to the present. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict began after the Second World War when the Jews, who had been allowed to immigrate under the Ottoman policies of tolerance, declared their independence in Palestine and violated international law through occupation (Filiu, 2016). The Palestinian Conflict emerged as an international problem on a regional and global basis as a result of the Arab-Israeli Wars that followed (Yıldırım, 2021). On October 7, 2023, the Palestinian organization Hamas launched an attack on Israel in an operation called the "Aqsa Flood." With Israel's response, it turned into a war.

Israel's attack on Gaza and the war over the bombardment and genocide in the region have had a great repercussion on social media. Since the first days of the war, it has been observed that posts, especially on Facebook and Instagram, have been removed biasedly, the accounts of people who frequently post such posts have been slowed down, and their posts have been algorithmically blocked from being seen. In addition, fake and manipulative news showed that a psychological war had begun on social media through propaganda and perception management (Aydın, 2024).

Figure 1. Example of a restriction on content

The people and pages that experienced this situation tried to overcome this algorithm with a guidance method. In this process, the meta was deceived with images such as watermelon and olive, integrated with Gaza symbols. In this process, these social media platforms, accepted as alternative new media, have created great disappointment and damaged users' trust.

According to a 51-page report published by Human Rights Watch (HRW), Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, systematically censors pro-Palestinian content as seen figure 1 (Crabapple, 2023) and figure 2 (Warah, 2023) . Meta's content moderation policies and systems have increasingly silenced pro-Palestinian posts on Instagram and Facebook in the wake of Israeli attacks on Gaza, Human Rights Watch reported (Younes, 2023).
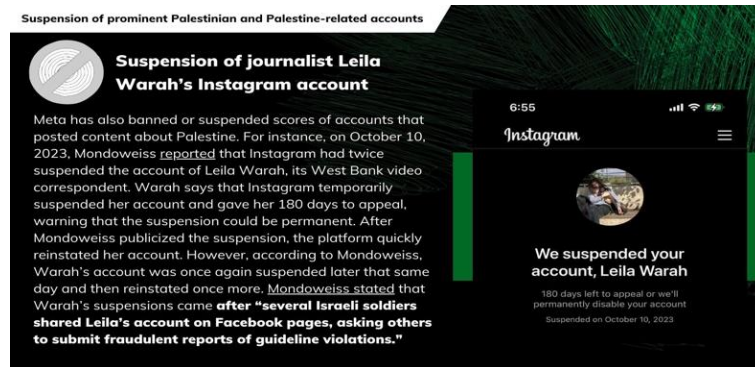

Figure 2. Example of account suspension

HRW accused Meta of erasing Palestinian suffering and limiting opportunities to tell the world what is happening in Gaza. Users of social media platforms owned by Meta say their posts calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and protection of civilians in the territory have been restricted, removed, or banned, as seen figure 3 (Mondoweiss, 2023). The removal of expressions of peaceful support for Gazans is the result of "flawed Meta policies and their inconsistent and erroneous application, over-reliance on automated tools to moderate content, and excessive government influence over content removal processes," HRW said (Younes, 2023)
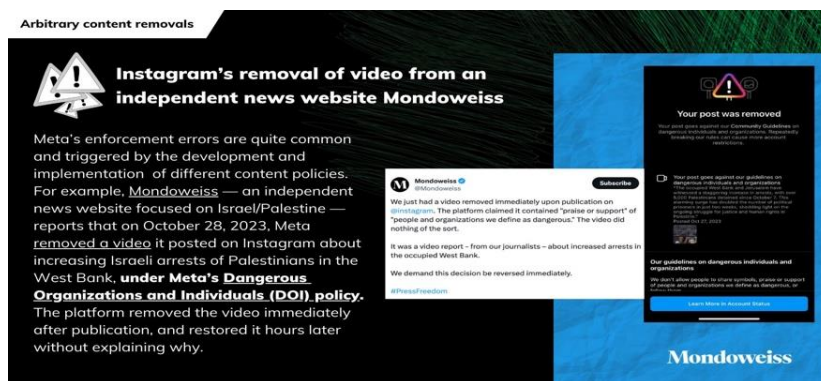
Figure 3. Example of Meta's content removal

In the report published by 7amleh in 2022, the digital censorship applied to the posts of pro-Palestinian and mainly activists was listed as account removal, restriction, warning, and limiting access visibility (7amleh, 2022). This shows that censorship has existed for many years and has not changed despite promises to fix it. After Meta asked for an independent body to investigate the issue after allegations of censorship, content removal, shadow banning, and suspensions during the Sheik Jarrah protests in 2021 as seen figure 4 (Soliiman, 2021), BSR (Business of Social Responsibility) published a report in 2022, "Human Rights Due Diligence of Meta Impacts in Israel and Palestine in May 2021", which found that "there is a negative human rights impact on Palestinian users' rights to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, political participation and non-discrimination, and therefore on Palestinians' ability to share information and opinions about

their experiences" (Allison-Hope, 2022). In response, Meta issued an apology and promised to rectify the situation as seen figure 5 (Stone, 2023), but the events of October 2023 proved to be a broken promise (Younes, 2023). The recurrence of such situations on Meta and some social media platforms, especially in times of crisis, suggests that Meta's opaque and discriminatory moderation rules are disproportionately applied to oppressed and marginalized communities.

Figure 4. A tweet during the Sheikh Jarrah protests

Social media moderation theories have four main systematic factors. The first can be seen as removing tweets mentioning groups designated as terrorist organizations (DOI Policy). In 2021, Meta's addition of Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is considered sacred for Muslims, to the list of dangerous people and organizations was a matter of controversy (Özkan, 2024). The problem is that the US government determines this list, and its framework is not shared transparently. The second issue is newsworthy content. The third is content removal requests from countries, including Israel. Rules' arbitrary and erroneous application is far from transparent, inconsistent, and discriminatory (Fatafta, 2024).

Figure 5. Description of meta manager about shadow banning

Censored hashtags such as "Fromtherivertothesea," "FreePalestine," and "IStandWithPalestine," as well as the Palestinian flag emoji, were caught in the online systemic censorship. Several prominent Palestinian accounts were suspended, as well as hate speech against Israel and the word Zionist.

Table 1. Standard models for analyzing online censorship according to HRW

Censorship Types Online	Description
Content Removal	Removal of posts, stories, and comments
Suspending or Deleting Accounts	Suspending or permanently removing accounts
Inability to Engage with Content	Restrictions on the ability to interact with content such as liking, commenting, sharing, and reposting stories for a set period ranging from 24 hours to 3 months
Unable to Follow or Tag Accounts	Restrictions on the ability to follow or tag other accounts
Restricting the Use of Features such as Instagram and Facebook Live	Restricting the use of features such as Instagram and Facebook Live, monetization, and recommending accounts to non-followers
Shadow Ban	Significant reduction in the visibility of a person's posts, stories, or accounts without notice, such as reducing distribution or access to content or turning off searches for accounts.

Belgium-based filmmaker and activist Thomas Maddens claims that a Palestinian video he posted with the word "genocide" suddenly stopped receiving engagement on the platform after an initial surge (BBC, 2024). "I thought I would get millions of views, but the engagement stopped," Maddens told Al Jazeera. Authors, activists, journalists, filmmakers, and ordinary users around the world have said that posts with hashtags such as "FreePalestine" and "IStandWithPalestine," as well as messages expressing support for Palestinian civilians killed by Israeli forces, are hidden by the platforms (Altın, 2024). "My account was shadowbanned yesterday after I posted an Instagram story about the war in Gaza," Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Azmat Khan said on X, adding, "Many of my colleagues and fellow journalists reported the same thing. This is an extraordinary threat to the flow of information and credible journalism about an unprecedented war." Such examples can be multiplied.
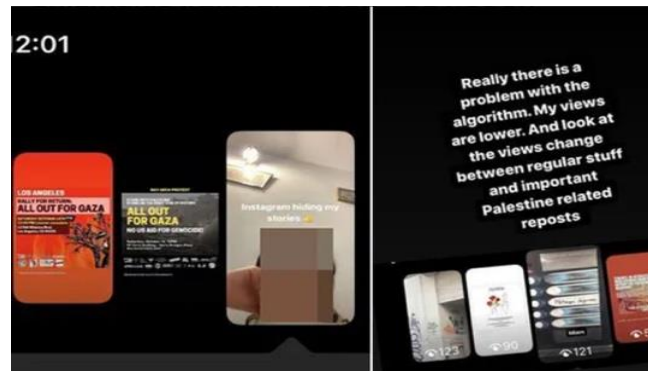
Figure 6. An example of a post expressing the decrease in the rate of views of posts about Gaza

Mohammad Darwish, as sees in figure 6 and figure 7 (Shankar, 2023), by creating an online tool to change how words are spelled to avoid online censorship;

As a community of developers, we have a principle that 'there is nothing that cannot be done with code.' So, I developed this tool in two versions, one in Arabic and one in English. The function of the tool is to change the form of sentences to make it harder for AI and Facebook algorithms to understand the meaning of the text.

Users are thus looking for ways to avoid the algorithm combined with artificial intelligence (Shankar, 2023).

Figure 7. An example of Meta's feedback to users is that Aksa has been added to the list of dangerous persons and organizations

The Symbolic Defacement as a Form of Internet Activism: Watermelon Emoji

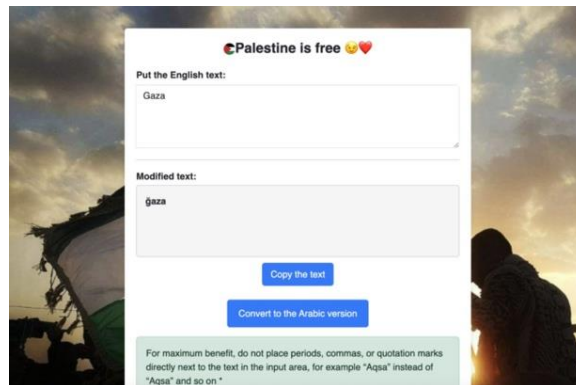Algorithmic moderation systems classify user-generated content based on matching or prediction, leading to a decision and moderation output (removal, blocking, account closure, etc.). According to Grimmelmann, algorithmic moderation is a control mechanism that facilitates collaboration and prevents abuses by shaping participation in a community (Grimmelman, 2015).

Despite the potential promise of algorithms and AI, automated moderation exacerbates the situation for three main reasons related to content policy enacted by social media platforms. First, in an attempt to increase transparency, it makes it harder to understand and audit a set of opaque practices. Restrictions on information have turned into an abusive model of less transparency and less accountability (Bambuer, 2012). The second is to complicate justice and equity issues in large-scale socio-technological systems. Finally, it is to ignore the fundamentally political nature of communication policies (Riley, 2013). Algorithmic moderation has the negative effect of reducing judicial transparency, making justice issues more complex, and promising positives on the problems of depoliticizing and obscuring complex political issues (Gorwa vd., 2020).

Symbolic subversion is a concept that refers to questioning and transforming the existing social order, norms, and values. In this context, Mike Featherstone, in his study of consumer culture, emphasizes the need to reshape traditions and cultural structures to produce new symbolic products. In this process, cultural experts transform the relationship between symbols and values by transferring meaning (Featherstone, 2007). Similarly, Erving Goffman, through his dramaturgical approach, addresses how individuals reconstruct social roles through performance. Goffman argues that individuals have the potential to both maintain and transform social norms through their performances (Goffman, 1956). This literature shows how the concept of symbolic subversion can be examined in the context of the critique and reconstruction of social norms.

Meta users have started a resistance against censorship by finding a way around content moderation policies. By using emojis of the Palestinian symbols Keyfe, Lemon, Watermelon, and Olive (or olive tree), users have managed to evade the algorithm in a symbolic subversion. On Instagram and Facebook, pro-Palestinian activists have posted by typing "G4z4" or using

watermelon instead of the Palestinian flag to avoid Meta's censorship (HRW, 2023). Thus, a consensus was achieved through emojis and symbols in the reactions shown on social media against the attacks in Gaza. Emojis respond to the need to express a lot with few words and gain meaning through visual indicators and social consensus (Demirci, 2024).

The watermelon became an essential symbol for Palestine even before October 7. In 1967, as a result of the Six-Day War, Palestine and Gaza came under Israeli rule. Under occupation, the Palestinian flag and its colors were banned. When the Palestinian flag was banned, young people started using watermelon slices, a popular fruit of the region, with the same colors as the Palestinian flag, to protest as seen figure 9 and figure 10 (BBC, 2023). After the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993, the Palestinian flag was recognized as the symbol of the Palestinian Authority. It was used in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. The watermelon symbol has thus become a tradition among activists and users of social media for decades in protests against censorship and symbolism. Many people continue to use watermelon slices to support Palestine, from everyday clothing to graffiti, from artwork to emojis on social media (Keskin, 2023). As seen figure 8 (BBC, 2023), the watermelon slice was drawn by artist Khaled Hourani in 2007 for his book "The Subjective Atlas of Palestine."
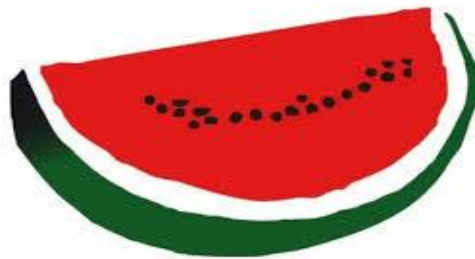
Figure 8. The watermelon slice was drawn by artist Khaled Hourani

Processes from the poem "In Praise of the Watermelon" by the American poet Aracelis Girmay, a poem dedicated to the symbolic meaning of the watermelon for the "Palestinian cause";

In Palestine, where waving the Palestinian flag is a crime,

Against Israeli soldiers,

Watermelon slices are raised,

Palestine's red, black, white, green.

Figure 9. An image from a demonstration in Tel Aviv: "This is not a Palestinian flag."

On TikTok, British Muslim comedian Shumirun Nesssa created watermelon filters and asked his followers to make videos using them. He said that the proceeds would be given to foundations helping Gaza. In the meantime, some social media users started using watermelon symbols instead of the Palestinian flag to prevent their videos and accounts from being blocked (BBC, 2023). Thus, over the years, the watermelon symbol became an essential symbol of activism.

Figure 10. Image of protesters in Jerusalem carrying watermelon slices symbolizing Palestine

Conclusion

The internet and social media are becoming increasingly important in a digital world. Within the network society, social media promises its users a libertarian and democratic ground. Nevertheless, this libertarian structure has become a culture of voluntary and participatory surveillance, called the super panopticon. As a result, censorship takes place algorithmically on social media platforms. These censorships restrict access to information, disrupt freedom of expression, and cause polarization and discrimination. As a result of online censorship, injustice, political obscurantism, and lack of transparency are harbingers of danger in the socio-political and economic spheres.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that content moderation policies and systems on Meta-controlled social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have silenced pro-Palestinian content following the attacks on Gaza (Alaca, 2023). In a 51-page report, Human Rights Watch (HRW) analyzed 1,050 cases of online censorship from more than 60 countries. In total, HRW found more than a hundred recurrences of six common patterns of censorship, including peaceful expression on the Palestinian-Israeli war. These include removing content, suspending or deleting accounts, being unable to interact with content, following or tagging accounts, and restricting using features such as the Live feature (HRW, 2023).

Against this censorship by Meta on social media, activists and users prevented systematic censorship online by using symbols and emoji. Instead of the pool of concepts censored through artificial intelligence and algorithmic moderation, they continued to express their views and opinions without censorship through emojis and symbols. This process, which continues by developing new ones to replace the methods that have been noticed, can be called 'symbolic subversion.' Thus, the watermelon emoji, which bears the same colors as the Palestinian flag, has become a symbol of peace and resistance against war all over the world. Language, symbols, discourse, and ideologies are essential actors in political culture that help us explain society and the

political system in terms of power and power relations. People have used this symbol as a powerful tool to show the world that they stand with Palestine. These symbols play a significant role in the construction of cultural identity and are embedded in the codes of society. It has been a symbol of resilience and determination in the Palestinian struggle.

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Meta'nın Zeytin ve Karpuzla İmtihanı:
Gazze ile İlgili Paylaşımların Engellenmesi Örneği

Nuran KIZMAZ ÖZTÜRK[*]

Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

Günümüzde dijitalleşme gün geçtikçe artmaktadır. Ağ toplumu olarak nitelendirebileceğimiz toplumsal yapı içerisinde etkileşimli medya çağın işaret fişeği olarak nitelendirilmektedir. Bu etkileşimli medyanın gündelik dili ağırlıklı olarak sosyal medya platformlarıdır. Başta Facebook, İnstagram ve Twitter olmak üzere çok çeşitli ve farklı işlevlere sahip olan sosyal medya platformları kullanıcıların gündelik hayat ihtiyaçlarının bir kısmını sanal uzam ve zamansallıkla karşılayarak farklı bir zemin sunmaktadır. Bu platform üzerinden daha hızlı, daha anlık ve geniş bir kitleye ulaşan sosyal medya, sokakta karşılığını araçsal bir ajan olarak sürdürmektedir.

Alternatif Yeni Medya ve Dijital Aktivizm

İnternetin Web 2.0 a geçmesiyle birlikte etkileşimli yeni bir düzleme geçilmiştir. Birey sadece tüketen değil aynı zamanda siber uzamda üretici konumuna geçmiştir. Bu durum internet çağında yeni bir dönemin kapısını aralamıştır. Böylece kitleler sosyal medya kanalları ile etkileşim kurarak daha hızlı ve yeni bir iletişim ağı kurmayı başarmıştır. Küreselleşen dünyada, merkeziyetsiz ve özgürlükçü olarak nitelendirebileceğimiz bu zemin, sağladığı bilgi ve enformasyona kolay erişim, otoriteden bağışıklık, ifade özgürlüğü gibi potansiyellerle katılımcı demokrasi ve geleneksel medyaya karşı yeniden halkın gözü kulağı olmayı amaçlayan alternatif yeni medyaya zemin oluşturabilecek bir sosyo-politik düzlemde sunulmaktadır.

Gözetim Kültüründen Süper Panoptikona Sansür

Ağlar, hükümetlerin ve kamu kurularının tüm vatandaşları kayıt altına alma ve kontrol etme çabalarına yaramaktadır. Otoriter devletlerde bu gözetim ve sansüre olanak tanır. Demokratik devletlerde ise kamu görevlilerinin gücünü arttırmaktadır. Algoritma ve yapay zekanın potansiyel vaatlerine rağmen sosyal medya platformları tarafından yürürlüğe konulan içerik politikası ile otomatik moderasyon durumu daha da kötüleştirmektedir. Birincisi şeffaflığı daha çok arttırmak gayesi ile şeffaf olmayan bir dizi uygulamanın anlaşılması ve denetlenmesini zorlaştırmaktır. Bilgi üzerindeki kısıtlamalar daha az şeffaf daha az hesap verilebilir kötücül bir modele dönüşmüştür.

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* Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Bayburt Üniversitesi, e-mail: nurankizmaz@hotmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0003-3913-8501, Bayburt, Türkiye

Teknolojide ilerlemeci anlayış ile örtüşen bir bakış açısı ile internetin zorunlu ve mümkün bir demokratik ortam hazırlayacağı düşüncesi yanıltıcı bir düşüncedir. Temelde internetin merkezsiz yapısının sağladığı özgürleştirici yönüne odaklanılır. Fakat bu internete karşı birinci bakış açısıdır. İnternetin bu "özgürleştirici" yanına bir diğer bakış açısı ise internetin "anarşist" karakterinin olduğu görüşüdür. Bu tarafı ile internet toplumda insanların fikirlerini ve düşüncelerini daha bağımsız ve talepkâr bir şekilde otoriteye karşı ifade etmelerini sağlamıştır. Arap baharı, Occupy Wall Street vs. gibi toplumsal hareketler buna örnek olarak verilebilir. Özellikle katı rejimlerde internetin bu özelliğinin nispeten daha etkin kullanıldığı söylenebilir. Böylece internet yöneticiler üzerinde bir denetim aracına dönüşmektedir. Dolayısıyla ilerlemeci bakış açısı ile teknolojik determinizm geleneği internetin daha demokratik toplumları ortaya çıkaracağını savunur. İnternet bir yandan demokrasinin çanlarını çalarken diğer yandan otorite karşıtı çanları çaldığı görülmektedir. Öte yandan internetin en ironik tarafı büyük ölçüde anarşistler tarafından inşâ edilmiş, fakat ordu için finanse edilmiş olmasıdır. Her iki taraf da teknolojinin rüyalarını gerçekleştireceğine inanmışlardır.

Metodoloji

Bu çalışmada İsrail- Filistin savaşı sırasında bireylerin sosyal medya üzerinden yapmış oldukları Filistin yanlısı gönderilere uygulanan sansürün hangi boyutta ve ne şekilde gerçekleştiğini araştırmayı amaçlanmıştır. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılarak verilerin analizinde literatür incelemesi tercih edilmiştir. Buna ek olarak örnek olay analizine dayalı teorik bir yaklaşım benimsenmiştir. Literatür taraması, dijital aktivizm ve algoritmik sansür konularında mevcut akademik kaynakların incelenmesini içermektedir. Bu teorik çerçeve sosyal medya platformlarının Gazze saldırıları sırasında uyguladığı sansürü anlamak için bir temel oluşturacaktır. Çalışmada Gazze özelinde yaşanan sansür olayları, literatürdeki kavramsal tartışmalar ile ilişkilendirilerek örnekler üzerinden analiz edilecektir. Araştırmada 7 Ekim 2023'te başlayan İsrail-Filistin savaşına dair sosyal medyalar üzerinden yapılmış olan paylaşımlara sansür iddialara ve bu durum hakkında yayınlanmış insan hakları izleme örgütü tarafından yayınlanmış raporların sonuçları sansür türlerine göre ortaya konmuştur. Çalışmada her sansür türüne bir örnek verilmiştir. Daha sonra çevirimiçi sistematik sansür ile bir başa çıkma ve alt etme biçimi olarak sembolik bir öğe olan karpuzun nasıl aktivistlerin önemli bir direniş unsuruna dönüştüğü ele alınmıştır.

Bulgular

İsrail'in Gazze'ye saldırı düzenlemesi ve bölgedeki bombardıman ve soykırım üzerine savaş, sosyal medyada büyük yankı uyandırmıştır. Savaşın ilk günlerinden itibaren özellikle Facebook ve İnstagram'da yapılan paylaşımların yanlı olarak kaldırıldığı, sıklıkla bu tür paylaşım yapan kişilerin hesabının yavaşlatılarak paylaşımlarının görülme oranlarının algoritmik olarak engellendiği gözlemlenmiştir. Bu süreç sahte, manipülatif haberler ve propagandalar ile algı yönetimi suretinde sosyal medya üzerinden psikolojik bir savaşın başladığını göstermiştir. HRW Filistin-İsrail savaşına dair barışçıl ifadeler de dahil toplamda altı ortak sansür modelinin yüzden fazla tekrar ettiğini tespit etmiştir. Bunlar: içerik kaldırma, hesapları askıya alınması veya silinmesi, içerikle etkileşime girememe, hesapları takip edememe veya etiketleyememe, 'Live' özelliği gibi özelliklerin kullanımının kısıtlanması olarak sıralanabilir. Özellikle sosyal medya platformunda Filistin destekçileri ve aktivistler (veya slaktivist) sosyal medya kısıtlamaları ile savaş suçlarının gizlenmeye çalışılmasına ve desteklerin kesilerek toplumsal hareketlere karşı daha evvel Filisitin bayrağını taşımanın yasaklandığı 1967'de meydana gelen Altı Gün Savaş'larının ardından tepki ve direnişin

sembolü haline gelen karpuz metaforu ile sansüre karşı tepkilerini ortaya koymuşlardır. Karpuz figürü Filistin için 7 Ekimden daha önce önemli bir sembol haline gelmiştir. 1967'de Altı Gün Savaşı'nın sonucunda Filistin ve Gazze İsrail yönetimine geçmiştir. İşgal altında Filistin bayrağının ve bayrağın içindeki renklerin taşınması yasaklanmıştır. Filistin bayrağının taşınmasının yasaklanası ile birlikte gençler bu durumu protesto etmek için bölgenin sevilen bir meyvesi olan ve Filistin bayrağı ile aynı renkleri taşıyan karpuz dilimleri kullanmaya başlamıştır. Böylece karpuz sembolü sansüre karşı on yıllardır protestolarda ve sembolik olarak sosyal medyada aktivistleri ve kullanıcıları arasında geleneğe dönüşmüş durumda. Birçok insan Filistin'e desteğini göstermek için günlük kıyafetlerinden duvar grafitilerine, sanat eserlerinden sosyal medyadaki emojilere kadar yaygın bir biçimde karpuz dilimi kullanmaya devam etmektedir. Meta kullanıcıları sansüre karşı içerik denetleme politikalarını aşmanın yolunu bularak bir direniş başlatmıştır. Kullanıcılar Filistin'in sembolü haline gelen Keyfe, Limon, Karpuz ve Zeytinin (veya zeytin ağacı) emojilerini kullanarak sembolik bir alt etme yöntemi ile algoritmadan kaçmayı başarmışlardır. Instagram ve Facebook'ta Filistin yanlısı aktivistler "G4z4" yazarak ya da Meta'nın sansüründen kaçmak için Filistin bayrağı yerine karpuz kullanarak paylaşım yapmışlardır. Sosyal medyada Meta'nın uygulamış olduğu bu sansüre karşı aktivistleri ve kullanıcılar sembol ve emoji kullanarak çevirimiçi sistematik sansürün önüne geçmişlerdir. Yapay zeka ve algoritmik moderasyon üzerinden sansürlenen kavram havuzunun yerine emoji ve semboller yoluyla görüş ve düşüncelerini sansüre takılmadan ifade etmeye devam etmişlerdir.

Sonuç

Sonuç olarak dijitalleşen dünyada internet ve sosyal medya gün geçtikçe daha önemli bir konuma sahip olmaktadır. Ağ toplumu içerisinde sosyal medya, kullanıcılarına özgürlükçü ve demokratik bir zemin vaat etmektedir. Fakat aslında bu özgürlükçü yapının süper panoptikon olarak adlandırabileceğimiz gönüllü ve katılımlı bir gözetim kültürüne dönüştüğünü görmekteyiz. Bunun neticesinde algoritmik olarak sosyal medya platformlarında sansürün gerçekleştiği görülmektedir. Bu sansürler bilgiye erişimin kısıtlanması ifade özgürlüğünün sekteye uğratılması, kutuplaşma ve ayrımcılığa sebep olmaktadır. Çevirimiçi sansürlerin sonucu olarak adaletsizlik, siyasetin belirsizleştirilmesi ve şeffaflık olmaması sosyo-politik ve ekonomik düzlemde tehlikenin habercisi unsurlardır. Sosyal medyada Meta'nın uygulamış olduğu bu sansüre karşı aktivistleri ve kullanıcılar sembol ve emoji kullanarak çevirimiçi sistematik sansürün önüne geçmişlerdir. Yapay zeka ve algoritmik moderasyon üzerinden sansürlenen kavram havuzunun yerine emoji ve semboller yoluyla görüş ve düşüncelerini sansüre takılmadan ifade etmeye devam etmişlerdir. Farkedilen metotların yerine yenilerini geliştirmek suretiyle devam eden bu sürece 'sembolik alt etme' denilebilir. Böylece Filistin bayrağı ile aynı renkleri taşıyan karpuz emojisi tüm dünyada savaşa karşı barış ve direnişin sembolü haline gelmiştir. Böylece Filistin mücadelesinde dayanıklılık ve kararlılığın sembolü olmuştur.

Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors

Araştırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütülmüştür.

The research was conducted by a single author.

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Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest

Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.

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MEDİAD

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Formation and Change of Beliefs through Online Environments: Analysis on the "Diyanet English" X Account

Ahmet KOÇYİĞİT*

Abstract

This study focuses on the formation and change of religious beliefs in the age of social media. Accordingly, this study aims to determine how social media is used in religious contexts. Another aim of the study is to reveal how the formation and change processes of religious beliefs are realized through social media tools. In line with these objectives, the official X account of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye - Presidency of Religious Affairs named "Diyanet English", which shares posts in English, was analyzed using the content analysis method. The posts made from this account between July 1, 2023 and July 1, 2024 were analyzed for the aim of the study using the MAXQDA 2022 package program. The data obtained within the framework of the analysis were coded and the subject distribution, sub-codes, and word cloud of the shared content were presented. When the findings and results obtained in the study were evaluated, it was determined that the Presidency of Religious Affairs shared mostly religious information, official statements, and content related to social and communal issues from the account in question. In addition, it was concluded that this account is not used actively, the posts were limited, and there was a lack of interactive use.

Keywords: New media, Religion, Faith, Presidency of Religious Affairs

Çevrimiçi Ortamlar Aracılığıyla İnançların İnşası ve Değişimi: Diyanet İngilizce X Hesabı Üzerine Analiz

Öz

Bu çalışma, sosyal medya çağında dini inaçların inşası ve değişimi üzerine odaklanmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda çalışmada sosyal medyanın dini bağlamda nasıl kullanıldığının belirlenmesi ve ortaya konulması amaçlanmıştır. Ayrıca sosyal medya araçları vasıtasıyla dini inaçların inşa ve değişim süreçlerinin nasıl ve ne şekilde gerçekleştiğinin ortaya çıkartılması çalışmanın bir diğer amacıdır. Bu amaçlar doğrultusunda çalışmada Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığının İngilizce olarak paylaşımlar gerçekleştirdiği "Diyanet English" resmi X hesabı içerik analizi yöntemi ile incelenmiştir. Bu hesaptan 1 Temmuz 2023- 1 Temmuz 2024 tarihleri arasında gerçekleştirilen paylaşımlar MAXQDA 2022 paket programı aracılığıyla çalışmanın amacı doğrultusunda analiz edilmiştir. Analiz çerçevesinde elde veriler kodlanarak paylaşılan içeriklerin konu dağılımı, alt kodları ve kelime bulutu ortaya çıkartılmıştır. Çalışmada elde edilen bulgular ve sonuçlar değerlendirildiğinde Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı söz konusu hesaptan çoğunlukla dini bilgilendirme, resmi açıklama, sosyal ve toplumsal konularla ilgili içerikler paylaştığı tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca bu hesabın güncel olarak kullanılmadığı, paylaşımların sınırlı olduğu, interaktif olarak kullanımın eksik olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yeni Medya, Din, İnanç, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı

* Assist. Prof., Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, e-mail: ahmetkocyigit@ohu.edu.tr, orcid.org/0000-0002-1276-1128, Niğde, Türkiye

Introduction

The new communication technologies that emerged in the 20th century and became the pioneers of change have drastically altered production systems. In addition to production systems, these technologies have contributed to the acceleration of digitalization in many other areas such as communication, interaction, and religion. The digital age we live in has digitized the global world and universal communication, and the speed of communication, interaction, and accessing news has greatly increased. Additionally, Web 2.0 technology (which allows users to be more active and engaged) enables user-oriented content production and allows individuals to create their own profile pages (Söğüt & Öngel, 2022). The widespread use of new media created by new communication systems has directly affected every aspect of human life. These communication technologies called social media, new media, and Web 2.0 have become an effective communication area. In addition, social media tools play an active role in setting the agenda of society, groups, and individuals and connecting them with these agendas. Additionally, new media are virtual environments where users can create their own profiles, publish self-produced content, and share their content with large communities (Blossom, 2009).

New media are the new-generation platforms of the internet where users can produce unique content. They have distinctive features such as being writeable, readable, updatable, fast, and free of charge. It would not be wrong to describe new media technology and writable web technology as a new domain of concepts, discourse, and ideas. New media increases the network effect and as a result of that, more users communicate as databases develop, applications become more functional, and they reach wider audiences (Musser & O'Reilly, 2007). New media technology appears as platforms where individuals can participate together, produce content, and come together around a specific purpose. Furthermore, it has many advantages in terms of enabling users to read, write, watch, share, and act in a coordinated manner on any subject.

Being one of the 21st century's most effective digital platforms, Web 2.0 channels provide serious advantages to individuals and organizations. Billions of users around the world use digital communication technologies and social networks to do research on products and services, exchange views on their hobbies and tastes, review products, become members of music and movie fan clubs, participate in political campaigns, promote religious beliefs, and create virtual friendships. Digital communication technologies, which are used extensively today, provide web-based communication opportunities and enable users to express their opinions, thoughts, comments, and likes online. In addition, Web 2.0 technology has provided the opportunity to combine the read technology on the web with the write technology. Web 2.0 is a combination of innovations in the internet and digital communication technologies. Many institutions, organizations, companies, and politicians want to use the advantages of these innovations and they are working to this end (Koçyiğit & Koçyiğit, 2018).

In the digital age, the rapid change and development in information and communication technologies, especially the widespread use of social media, has increased the speed of access to information and made news and information consumption extremely easy. The fact that user-generated content, information, or news reaches millions of people in a very short time shows how effective social media platforms are in the speed of information dissemination. The ease of access

to information and news, which is among the intended uses of social media platforms, draws attention as the most important aspect of these platforms.

Considering that 68.9 million people are social media users, 82 percent of the total population have access to the internet, and online news consumption is 84 percent in Türkiye (Digital, 2022), the importance of social media tools at the social level becomes evident. Although there are many different social media tools in use around the world, some have a much higher usage rate and impact than others. The platform "X" is one of the tools with a high utilization rate and level of impact. X not only covers a wide range of topics such as politics, sports, business, or entertainment, it also plays an important role in times of crisis. Today, X can set the agenda for almost every part of society, from individuals to institutions, and a topic that is a Trending Topic (TT) on X can become the agenda of the country, politicians, and even the entire nation. For this reason, social media platforms (especially X) are used as an effective communication tool by individuals, organizations, and governments.

Considering the characteristics of new media, it is possible to summarize the features of social media platforms and the benefits they provide to users with the development in digital communication technologies as follows (Musser & O'Reilly, 2007): Through mass connectivity, it provides users with interactive, symmetrical, fast and mass connectivity. With user-oriented control, users have increased control over information flow and content sharing. With user-centricity, rich interfaces designed for different experiences tailored for each user and web content that optimizes user interactions have emerged and social media users have become more active. The concept of openness provides the opportunity to access information and share it with more people. Thanks to its low cost, social media technology increases the activity of users with its ease of use and ability to contribute. Moreover, social media technology (which is flexible, editable, suitable for sharing and more suitable for achieving success through collaboration than controlling, has read-write technology, and enables dialogic structure) embodies unique digital communication features.

Considering the impact of the change created by the development of new media, this transformation has had significant effects in the field of religion and belief, as in almost every field of social life (Stout, 2011). Foremost among these effects, new media has helped to increase awareness of different beliefs and practices and promote religious pluralism by facilitating access to religious information (Hoover, 2006). In addition, new media have created new spaces for religious groups and individuals to express themselves. Social media platforms enable religious leaders to deliver preaches, prayers, and other religious content to large audiences. This allows religious knowledge and practices to transcend geographical boundaries and create a global network of interaction (Stolow, 2005). Moreover, new media has accelerated the process of individualization and personalization of religious beliefs. Unlike traditional religious communities, individuals can form and express their religious identities and beliefs on online platforms. For example, preaches posted on YouTube, religious discussions on Facebook and X, blog posts, and online religious forums help religious groups and individuals to promote and defend their beliefs (Hosseini, 2008).

Considering the studies on new media, religion, and belief in the related literature, Hosseini (2008) in his study on religion and media, mentioned the importance of religion, culture, and globalization. Arguing that globalization has a tangible impact on religion and beliefs, the author

mentions the inevitable changes in religious institutions, religious beliefs, and traditions. Hjarvard (2011) on the other hand, emphasizes the mediatization of religion today and discusses the relationship between media and religion as secularization. In his article, the author discusses the relationship between mediatization and secularization at three levels: society, organization, and individual. Knott & Mitchell (2013) in their study titled "The changing faces of media and religion", state that religion has undergone a major change and transformation with the new media technologies emerging in today's society. Kutlu (2024) in his study on online religion in Türkiye, states that new media has led to the emergence of new preachers who communicate religious and ethical values in a media-oriented way. Moreover, Kutlu (2022) in his study titled "Analysis of Fake Religious Posts on Social Media", states that posts with religious content on social media generally carry a sacred discourse, but some of them are unfounded.

Although the studies in the literature are similar to this study, this study differs from others in that it focuses on the formation and change of religious beliefs in the social media age and reveals how the formation and change processes of religious beliefs are realized through social media tools. This study focuses on the formation and change of religious beliefs in the age of social media. Accordingly, this study aims to determine how social media is used in religious contexts. Another aim of the study is to reveal how the formation and change processes of religious beliefs are realized through social media tools. In line with these objectives, the official X account of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye - Presidency of Religious Affairs (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı), (Diyanet English, 2024) which posts in English, was analyzed using the content analysis method.

New Media and Religious Representations

New media or social media are virtual environments where users can create their own profiles, publish self-produced content, and share their content with large communities. Some of this shared content affects the behavior of individuals in society directly and some indirectly. In this respect, social media can be defined as highly accessible communication technologies Blossom, (2009) that allow individuals to easily influence each other. On the other hand, social media is defined as: collaborative and online content Roberts & Kraynak (2008), virtual community Kim vd., (2010), content created by its own audience Comm & Burge (2009), and social content websites that allow participants to express themselves in online environments, communicate, participate in groups and contribute to these groups with comments and publications.

Gunelius (2011), defines social media as communication platforms created by utilizing web 2.0 technologies; online publications that emerge through conversations, relationships, and user participation. In another inclusive definition, Eley & Tilley (2009) refer to texts, images, audio content on forums, microblogs and blogs, and profile pages on social networking platforms as social media. There are hundreds of definitions of social media in the literature. Naturally, it is not possible to list all definitions here. For this reason, the definitions mentioned above are comprehensive and descriptive enough as they are agreed upon and accepted.

Social media platforms, or digital social networks, stand out with their user-oriented nature. These human-centered platforms allow all users to interact with each other. In addition to being the most important environments of writable web technology, social media platforms are channels

that are increasing in number of users and level of influence among digital communication tools. Since Web 2.0 technology includes applications that enable online and interactive communication, social media platforms are referred as the social aspects of new-generation digital information technologies (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008).

Blossom (2009), lists the characteristics of social media platforms as follows:

- They use next-generation web infrastructures that include measurable and accessible online technologies and techniques.
- Due to their online, dialogic, and interactive nature, they allow users to communicate with each other without the limitations of time and space.
- With their interactive feature, they have made it possible for web technologies to have read, write, and share features.
- The level of influence of social media platforms is quite high due to their multi-media nature and the fact that millions of users communicate with each other at the same time.

There are many social media tools and channels around the world for different purposes. Some of these tools are used all over the world, while others exist locally. Sites such as Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, and Wikipedia are among the leading sites used worldwide. Not all social media channels have a similar level of impact on communication processes. For an institution or organization to gain a place in the media and be on the agenda, it needs to make newsworthy discoveries or carry out activities and report them to the media. Additionally, not every social media channel or tool has the same impact on the target audience. For this reason, it is of great importance for an institution to choose the right tool to influence the thoughts, behaviors, and actions of the target audience. The right channels must be selected in order to attract the attention of individuals, to ensure that the messages are perceived, and to change the perceptions of the target audience (Koçyiğit, 2022).

It is necessary to highlight the platform "X", which is one of the most widely used social media tools in the world, as it includes the sampling process of the study. This platform is a medium where many agendas from politics, sports, business, entertainment, and religious issues are discussed. In fact, a topic that is a Trending Topic (TT) in X can even become the national agenda of a country. For this reason, it is seen that social media (especially today with channels such as X) can set or influence the agenda of individuals, institutions, and states. Even heads of state make their statements on this site today.

As today's societies are undergoing rapid change and digitalization, researchers (especially in the field of social sciences) have placed communication processes and technologies in a central position to explain the effects of this change on society and the processes of change. Castells, one of the most important representatives of this positioning, mentions that in order to understand and analyze societies, it is necessary to focus on their communication technologies (and therefore their media structures). Castells (2013) calls this new era "the age of informationalism", while characterizing today's societies as "network society". These technological changes have led to fundamental changes in society, the most important of which are changes in culture. Technological changes have led to the emergence of concepts such as mass culture, popular culture, and digital culture in society. With the concept of "Culture Industry", Adorno states that the mass media create a system and offer similar cultural products to the masses in unison (Adorno, 2008). On the other

hand, with the influence of mass communication technologies, the concept of popular culture is expressed as an ephemeral, short-term, ever-changing daily life culture and it includes many concepts such as music, art, sports, food and drink, fashion, politics, and social life.

Accordingly, technological developments and new media have created new spaces for religious groups and individuals to express themselves. Social media platforms enable religious leaders to deliver preaches, prayers, and other religious content to large audiences. This allows religious knowledge and practices to transcend geographical boundaries and create a global network of interaction. In addition, new media has also become a strategic tool for religious groups to promote themselves and defend their beliefs.

Recognizing the wide reach and interaction potential of social media, religious institutions or religious personalities actively use these platforms today. Social media allows religious leaders to deliver their preaches, teachings, and religious messages to large audiences, while at the same time establishing closer and continuous communication with their congregations. For example, platforms such as X, Facebook, and Instagram provide a platform for religious leaders to interact directly with their followers, answer questions, and engage in religious discussions. This digital interaction helps religious leaders and institutions to become more visible in society and disseminate religious knowledge to a wider audience. Furthermore, social media makes it easier for religious communities to connect with each other, build support networks, and coordinate religious activities. However, this process of digitalization brings with it a transformation of religious authority and traditional religious structures, requiring a redefinition of religious leadership and authority in the new media age.

Formation and Change of Beliefs in New Media

As mentioned above, Castells describes today's societies as network societies. In today's conditions, power relations, social roles, production, and distribution relations are better explained by the concept of network society. This is because there are relations in societies mediated by new communication technologies, and power, production, distribution, and social practices are determined by a networked technology. In other words, the determinants of relations in all segments of society are realized through new computer-mediated communication technologies. Moreover, structures such as political power and the nation-state have been replaced by new power relations today, determined by technological and computerized means. The best example of this is the technologically assisted uprisings and protests in different societies. In fact, the competition and power relations that have emerged between nation-states and technology giants in recent times, states taking certain measures against technology giants that exist worldwide, states trying to determine legal frameworks, and the emergence of power conflicts can be given as examples (Koçyiğit, 2022).

Today, the concepts of culture and media are in an inseparable relationship (Kutlu, 2023). This relationship manifests itself in the media's presentation of new lives to society, and in the process by which modern people make sense of the world and create images. The new symbols created by the media shape human life and create a new style of culture that includes thoughts and behaviors by creating a certain lifestyle. For this reason, this culture created by the media recreates and

shapes popular culture (Geçer, 2013). This reproduction is realized through the media and popular culture is reflected by the media in terms of its content and forms (McQuail, 1994).

In his book "Liquid Surveillance", Bauman states that while identities are ambiguous, unregulated, and self-ordained, they are transformed into symbolic entities based and centered on the image. As a result, virtual spaces have emerged and individuals have created their online spaces by creating posts according to their interests through digital media, such as websites and social media. Bauman conceptualizes these spaces as "virtual space", while Castells defines the communities in these environments as "virtual communities". In virtual space environments, virtual realities and identities are produced because the reality is blurred (Bauman, 2014; Castells, 2013).

Goffman (2016), on the other hand, states that the individuals present their selves and their thoughts virtually in the virtual space and virtual community environments. Goffman offers an explanatory approach using the example of theater to explain the atmosphere of digital culture in which the actors of virtual networks exist. According to Goffman, individuals put on a performance similar to a theater play staged by professional actors and these behaviors (which are expected to be taken seriously but are also contrived) have nothing to do with reality. Today, individuals present their selves with fake behaviors through virtual environments, and they make many of the actions they perform in daily life with contrived performances public through social media (Çakmak & Çavuş, 2018). Furthermore, Goffman, who considers the identity artificially presented by individuals as the image that they try to project to others, interprets people as the sum of all these actions and the product of all arrangements. This is similar to the fact that an individual is the sum of all the elements that they put on their online profile, such as photos, comments, posts, or the people they follow. By creating their own showcases on social media, individuals can share their personal information, world views, and even their private lives. As a result, the values that popularize user profiles which reach the highest number of likes at the end of the day, constantly share content and have a high number of followers or viewers, are composed of numbers, images, and impressions (Güzel, 2016).

New media tools have profound effects on religious practices and rituals, causing significant transformations in these areas. Through digital platforms, worships and religious rituals can be performed virtually, thus overcoming the limitations of physical space and time. For example, applications such as online preaches, virtual prayers, and digital pilgrimages enable individuals to fulfill their religious practices in a more accessible and flexible way. This process brings with it the individualization and personalization of religious practices. New media allows individuals to personalize their religious experiences, while at the same time enabling sharing these experiences with a large online community. As a result, religious practices and rituals are breaking out of traditional patterns and transforming into a more dynamic, individual-oriented structure with the influence of new media tools. This transformation contributes to the reshaping of religious life at the individual and collective level, enabling beliefs to be expressed and lived in more personal and diversified forms.

Method

This study focuses on the formation and change of religious beliefs in the age of social media. In this respect, the study aims to determine how social media is used in the religious context and to reveal how the formation and change processes of religious beliefs are realized through social

media tools. Qualitative content analysis technique was used to evaluate the study in line with its aim, to determine the context and level of the posts, and to make a systematic evaluation. Content analysis is a method for analyzing the content of various data, such as visual and verbal. It allows phenomena or events to be reduced to defined themes and categories for better analysis and interpretation (Harwood & Garry, 2003).

Content analysis is important because it offers the possibility to analyze the context and framework, level, structure, intention of communication and to identify the focus of the communicator group. Moreover, the fact that it provides a systematic approach that is appropriate for the entire data set makes this method valuable. Content analysis technique responds to all these needs to evaluate the data constituting the sample of the study in line with the aim, determine the context and level of the posts, and make a systematic evaluation (Koçyiğit, 2023). The selection of the Presidency of Religious Affairs as the sample in the study is strategically important. The Presidency was preferred because it is an official institution of the state, is an authorized institution in religious activities, has the authority to manage religious activities, and it has a certain social reputation.

In this regard, the following questions were sought to be answered in the study:

1. What is the content of the posts made on the official X account of the Presidency of Religious Affairs in English?
2. How does the Presidency of Religious Affairs use its official X account in English in the context of religious belief?
3. How does the Presidency of Religious Affairs use its official X account in English in the context of interaction?
4. How does the Directorate of Religious Affairs shape its religious activities through its official X account in English?
5. Which messages do the Directorate of Religious Affairs emphasize on its official X account in English?

Population and Sample

In this study, the official X account of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Religious Affairs "Diyanet English" constitutes the population of the study. Since the official X account of the Presidency was launched in December 2015, tens of thousands of content posts were made until the date of the study (Diyanet English, 2024). Given the immense difficulty of analyzing all this content both in terms of time and technical aspects, the study has been limited to the Presidency's posts made during the one-year period from July 1, 2023, to July 1, 2024. In addition, reposts, likes, comments, pictures, and videos were excluded. With the help of the categories and themes created based on the data, the Presidency's cultural belief and formation management strategies in online environments were identified. In addition, the content, topics, and word groups of the posts were included in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

In line with the aim and sample of the study, data were obtained from the data set through the MAXQDA 2022 package program, consisting of 72 posts on X Türkiye, shared by the Presidency

between July 1, 2023 and July 1, 2024. Data collection and analysis involves categorizing, defining, and interpreting the data obtained within the subject and time period that constitute the sample and limitations of the research according to certain codes. For this aim, the data obtained were analyzed and then interpreted using the MAXQDA 2022 package program. Accordingly, the data collection and analysis process of the study consists of collecting the data from X Türkiye, classifying the data, analyzing the data, and interpreting the data.

To evaluate each of the posts in the sample in accordance with the aim of the study, a coding chart was created through the MAXQDA program. The coding process refers to the process of creating themes, categories, and codes. These processes are important in terms of realizing a systematic content analysis process (Creswell, 2017). MAXQDA makes qualitative data analysis faster and easier. MAXQDA is an analysis tool that allows to import and analyze data from interviews, web pages, images, audio and video files, spreadsheets, bibliographic data, and social networks such as X.

In the course of this study, themes and sub-codes were created by the authors in order to analyze and interpret the data obtained, in accordance with the requirements of the study. In line with the data set obtained, five different sub-codes were identified under the main theme of Presidency of Religious Affairs. These sub-codes were identified as: "religious information", "activities", "official statements", "education", and "social and community issues".

Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability process in qualitative research differs from other studies. In the qualitative analysis process, validity and reliability are tested by external experts or when the same data is replicated under similar conditions and yields the same results (Fidan, 2016). Accordingly, in this study, instead of having the themes and code systems coded by a different coder (due to the difficulty of reaching an expert trained in the field, the high cost of working with a professional coder, and the time constraints), a second coding was performed by the researcher to ensure reliability. The findings obtained as a result of this coding, conducted at a different time and under the same conditions, were found to be compatible with each other to a great extent (88%).

Findings

The basic information and findings of the official X account of the Presidency of Religious Affairs "Diyanet English" (@diyanet_en), which was analyzed for the aim of the study, are given below. In line with the data obtained, the analysis of the content shared from the official X account of the Presidency, themes and sub-codes, code model, findings of the word cloud were added to the study in the form of tables and visuals. In addition, the results that emerged after the coding made in accordance with the data were interpreted in line with the aim of the study (Diyanet English, 2024).

Table 1. Diyanet English Official X Account Profile Information

Account Name	Diyanet English
X Address	@diyanet_en
Account Image	
Number of Posts	2611
Number of Followers	4689
Number of Following Accounts	22

| Location	Ankara/Türkiye
Website Address	diyanet.gov.tr/en

An analysis of the official X account page of the Presidency reveals that the account name is "Diyanet English" and the account address is "@diyanet_en". The creation date of the page is December 2015. The official page has 4689 followers and is following 22 accounts. As of July 2024, when the study was conducted, 2689 posts have been made on the page so far. In addition, a link to the official English-language website of the Presidency, "diyanet.gov.tr/en", is provided. In the description section of the page, it is written as "Presidency of Religious Affairs Official Account". The location set on the page is Ankara, Türkiye, while the profile photo features the official logo of the Presidency in red and white colors. Additionally, the logo and the name of the Presidency are displayed in red and white on the background photograph of the page (Diyanet English, 2024).

Figure 1. Code Model of the Study
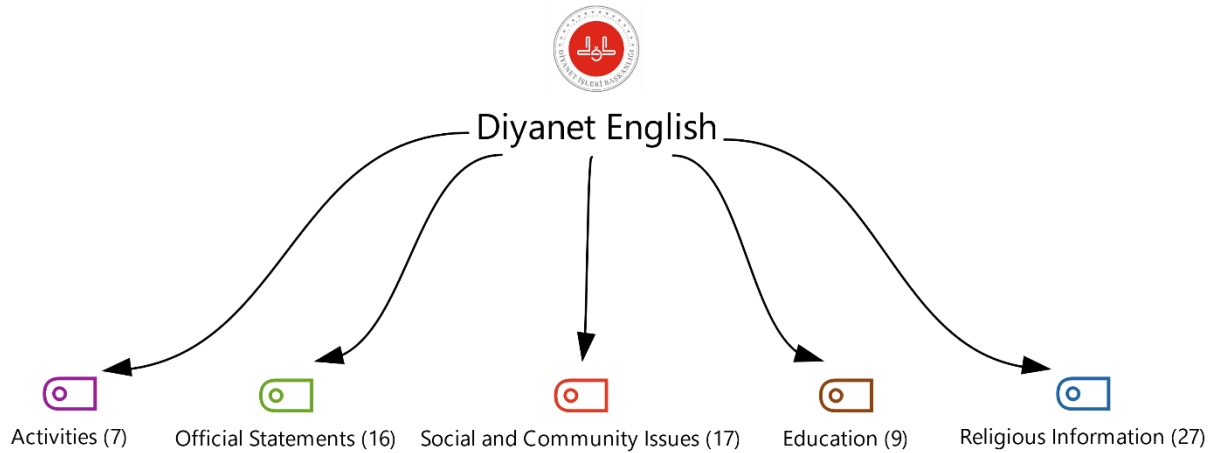
In line with the aim of the study, coding was carried out on the data to evaluate and analyze each post in the sample. After this coding process, themes and sub-codes of the study were created. The coding process is extremely important for the study as it involves certain stages and reveals meaningful relationships and connections in line with the results of the study. The code model created in accordance with the literature was analyzed within the framework of 72 posts. In order to analyze the obtained data, themes and sub-codes were determined. Accordingly, five different sub-codes were created under the main theme of "Diyanet English". These sub-codes are categorized as "religious information, activities, official statements, education, social and community issues". When the weighted code distributions of the posts were analyzed, it was found that the "religious information" (27) sub-code had the highest weight. The other codes are "social and community issues" (17), "official statements" (16), "education" (9), and "activities" (7). Accordingly, it is possible to state that the center of weight of the Presidency's posts is shaped around "religious information" and "social and community issues".

Figure 2. "Religious Information" Code - Sub-code Model
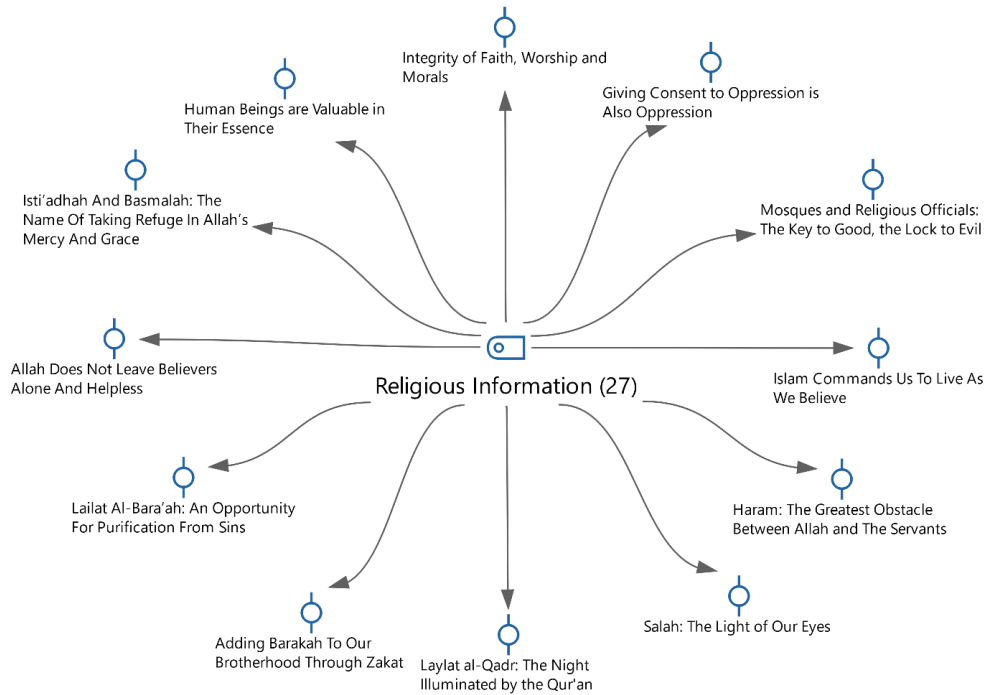
An analysis of Figure 2, which shows the Religious Information Code - Sub-Code Model, reveals that the Presidency made the most posts in this sub-code. In the posts, it is observed that information about the religion of Islam is shared generally. Within this context, it was determined that most of the posts were focused on religious information topics such as *Islamic belief, prayer, salam, Ramadan,* and *Friday*. Considering these results, it is observed that the official X account of the Presidency of Religious Affairs is mostly used to provide information on religious issues and to inform about the Islamic faith. In addition, posts were also made to explain the commandments and prohibitions of Islam.

**Figure 3.** "Social and Community Issues" Code - Sub-code Model
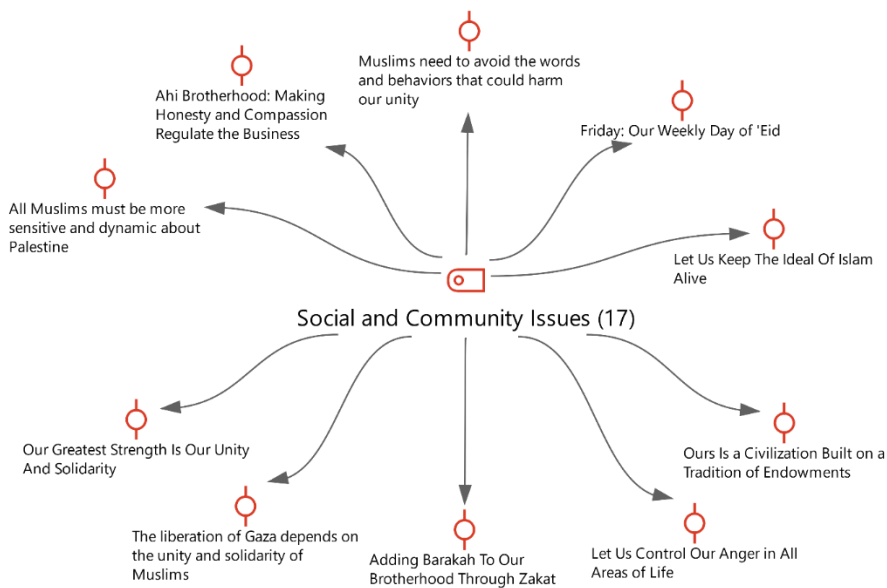
An analysis of Figure 3, which shows the Social and Community Issues Code - Sub-code Model, reveals that the Presidency attaches importance to social and community issues. When the shared contents were analyzed, it was observed that they were mostly focused on topics such as *family, civilization, brotherhood, unity, solidarity, homeland,* and *nation.* In this respect, it has been determined that the Presidency attaches importance to social and communal issues and makes efforts to convey these issues to the target audience. It is aimed to publicize and disseminate these themes in society, especially through online environments. Based on the posts, it can be said that raising awareness of these issues is a strategy of the Presidency.

Figure 4. "Official Statements" Code - Sub-code Model
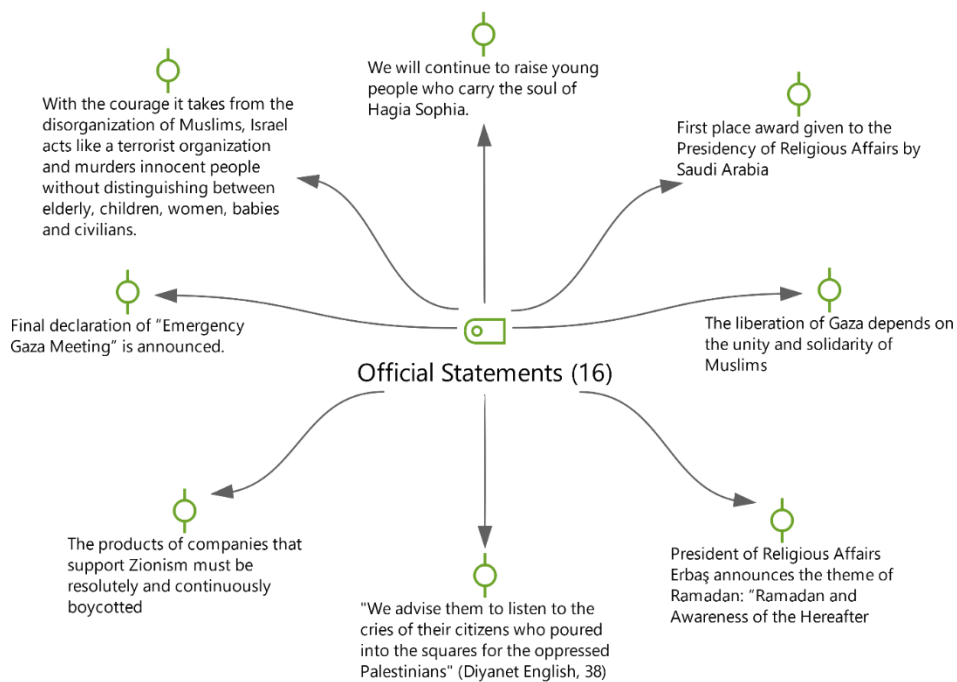
An analysis of Figure 4, which shows the Official Statements Code - Sub-code Model, reveals that the Presidency includes official statements in its posts, especially on issues that fall within the field of the Presidency of Religious Affairs and concern the society. In this respect, these posts are important in terms of informing and enlightening the public and ensuring communication. Official statements also increase the transparency and accountability of the organization. Transparency creates trust for both internal and external stakeholders, while accountability demonstrates that the organization's activities comply with ethical and legal standards. Moreover, official statements provide stakeholders with access to more accurate and up-to-date information about the organization. In crises, official statements protect the reputation of the organization by preventing misinformation and speculation. For all these reasons, they play an important role in the sustainability and long-term success of an organization.

Figure 5. "Education" Code - Sub-code Model
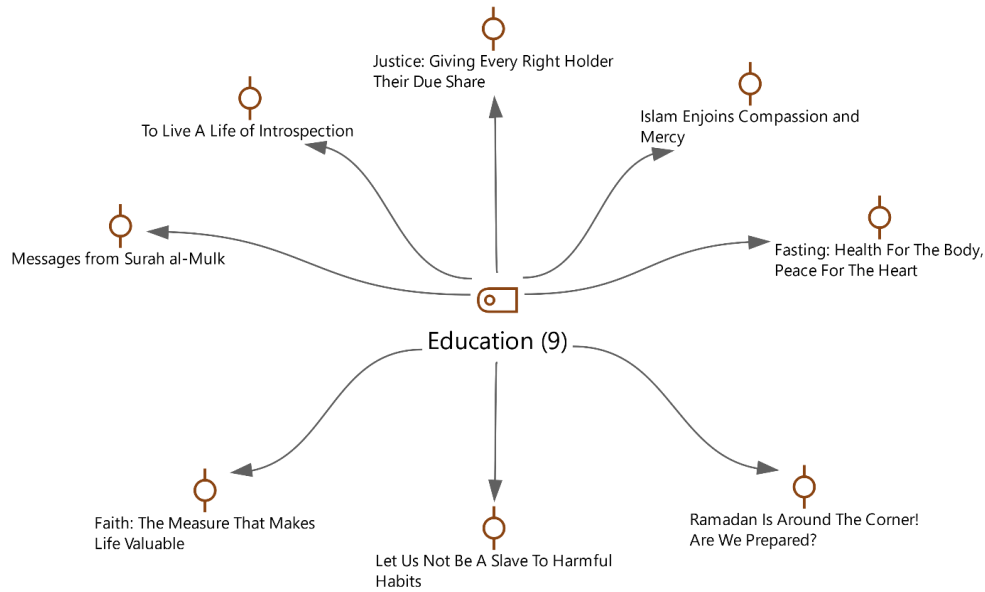
An examination of Figure 5, which shows the Education Code - Sub-code Model, reveals that the Presidency also shares information in the field of education. When the shared contents were analyzed, it was observed that educational processes and information in the religious field were provided. In this direction, it was determined that the frequency of posts was focused on topics such as Ramadan, Islamic message, justice, and life. Considering the importance that Islam attaches to the educational process, it is seen that the institution is sensitive to these issues and provides educational information to the target audience through the online environment.

Figure 6. "Activities" Code - Sub-code Model
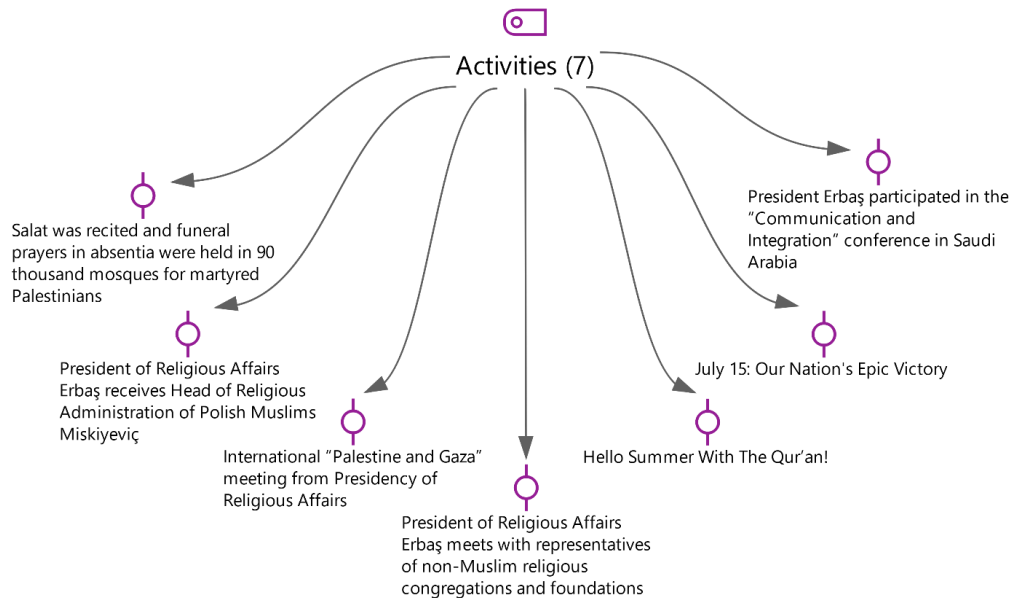
An analysis of Figure 6, which shows the Activities Code - Sub-code Model, reveals that the Presidency shares information on activities. In addition, the meetings and visits made by the President of Religious Affairs are among the posts shared on the account. Sharing an organization's activities on social media accounts is of great importance for modern communication strategies.

First of all, social media platforms enable reaching large audiences quickly and effectively, which increases the visibility and awareness of the organization. In this direction, the posts made by the organization are important in terms of visibility. Furthermore, social media posts can help build trust by providing transparent and continuous information about the organization's current activities.

Figure 7. Word Cloud of Posts

Based on the data obtained from the sample of the study, a word cloud analysis of the posts was conducted. The words were analyzed one by one and the most frequently used words were identified by excluding suffixes, numbers, dates, author names, verbs, adjectives, etc. The most frequently used words according to the word cloud analysis are shown in bold in Figure 7 above. The most frequently used words are visualized in order from bold to thin. According to the data gathered, it was determined that the most frequently used word by the Presidency in their posts was "religious".

Conclusion

As in every field, changes and transformations in social media or new media have led to changes in the religious field as well. With this digitalization process, processes of religiosity have also been introduced to the digital environment. Individuals and institutions that want to communicate in a religious sense have started to use social media frequently. In this direction, religious institutions that want to reach the target audience have started to benefit from the advantages of social media. The convenience of social media has led to the frequent use of this medium. There are many social media tools and channels around the world for different purposes. Some of these tools are used all over the world, while others exist locally. Sites such as Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, and Wikipedia are among the leading sites used worldwide.

Although there are many social media tools that have reached a certain potential in the world, the X platform is the most used one. This platform includes many agendas ranging from politics, sports, business life, and religion. Today, it can even set the agenda of governments. So much so that an issue that is on the agenda in X may even become the national agenda of another country. For this reason, it is seen that social media (especially today with channels such as X) can set or influence the agenda of individuals, institutions, and states.

Considering the analyses conducted on the coding of the data obtained from the official X account of the Presidency of Religious Affairs in English, it is observed that the Presidency is trying to use this medium effectively in the context of disseminating Islamic information. When the results of the study are evaluated, it is determined that the posts of the Presidency are generally focused in the "religious information" sub-code. In the posts, it is observed that information about the religion of Islam is shared generally. In this respect, it was determined that most of the posts were focused on religious information topics such as "Islamic belief", "prayer", "salam", "Ramadan" and "Friday". Subsequently, it was found that the posts were focused on the "social and community" sub-code. In this respect, it is possible to say that the Presidency attaches importance to social and communal issues. When the shared contents were analyzed, it was observed that they were mostly focused on topics such as family, civilization, brotherhood, unity, solidarity, homeland, and nation. It has been determined that the Presidency attaches importance to social and communal issues and makes efforts to communicate these issues to the target audience. The "Official Statements" sub-code is another area where the Presidency's posts are focused on. It was determined that the Presidency included official statements in its posts. Especially on issues that fall within the field of the Presidency of Religious Affairs and concern society, the institution shares official statements on its official X account. In this respect, these posts are important in terms of informing and enlightening the public and ensuring communication. In addition to these, the sub-codes "education" and "activities" indicate other topics on which the posts are focused.

In light of all these results, it is possible to say that the Presidency's X account in English is mostly used for informing, announcing, and explaining. Accordingly, it is observed that the Presidency uses the X account in the formation and promotion of Islamic religious beliefs. However, it has been concluded that the Presidency's X account in English is not used actively, posts are quite limited, and the interactive use of the account is lacking. It has been determined that the posts are limited in terms of interacting with the target audience and exchanging information. It is recommended that the Presidency should organize activities such as question-and-answer sessions, surveys, and call for participation in events to increase this interaction. The fact that the posts are made in English shows that the aim is to reach foreign audiences. To this end, interaction and interactive activities are of great importance in terms of reaching the target audience and getting their attention.

In conclusion, new media play an important role in the change and formation of religious beliefs. This content analysis of the official X account of the Presidency of Religious Affairs reveals how social media is used by religious institutions and the effects of this use on religious beliefs. These findings provide insights into how religious beliefs are reshaped through new media and how they have an impact at the societal level. This study aims to provide a foundation for future research and a broader perspective on the transformation of religious beliefs in the digital age.

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Çevrimiçi Ortamlar Aracılığıyla İnançların İnşası ve Değişimi: Diyanet İngilizce X Hesabı Üzerine Analiz

Ahmet KOÇYİĞİT[*]

Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

Yeni medya değişiminin yarattığı etki göz önüne alındığında bu dönüşüm, toplumsal yaşamın hemen her alanında olduğu gibi din ve inanç alanında da önemli etkiler doğurmuştur (Stout, 2011). Bu etkilerin başında yeni medya, dini bilgiye erişimi kolaylaştırarak farklı inanç ve pratikler hakkında farkındalığı artırmaya ve dini çoğulculuğu teşvik etmeye yardımcı olmuştur (Hoover, 2006). Ayrıca yeni medya, dini grupların ve bireylerin kendilerini ifade etmeleri için yeni alanlar yaratmıştır. Sosyal medya platformları, dini liderlerin vaazlarını, ibadetlerini ve diğer dini içeriklerini geniş kitlelere ulaştırmalarını sağlamaktadır. Bu durum, dini bilgilerin ve pratiklerin coğrafi sınırların ötesine geçerek küresel bir etkileşim ağı oluşturmasına olanak tanımaktadır (Stolow, 2005). Bunun yanında yeni medya, dini inançların bireyselleşmesi ve özelleşmesi sürecini hızlandırmıştır. Geleneksel dini topluluklardan bağımsız olarak, bireyler kendi dini kimliklerini ve inançlarını çevrimiçi platformlarda oluşturabilmekte ve ifade edebilmektedirler. Örneğin, YouTube'da yayınlanan vaazlar, Facebook ve X'deki dini tartışmalar, blog yazıları ve çevrimiçi dini forumlar, dini grupların ve bireylerin kendi inançlarını tanıtmalarına ve savunmalarına yardımcı olmaktadır (Hosseini, 2008). Türkiye'de toplam nüfusun yüzde 82'sinin internet kullandığı, 68,9 milyon kişinin sosyal medya kullanıcısı olduğu ve online haber tüketiminin yüzde 84 düzeyinde olduğu (Digital, 2022), düşünüldüğünde sosyal medya araçlarının toplumsal düzeydeki önemi ortaya çıkmaktadır. Dünya üzerinde pek çok farklı kullanıma sahip sosyal medya araçları bulunmasına karşın bazılarının kullanım oranı ve etki düzeyi diğerlerine oranla çok daha yüksektir. Kullanım oranı ve etki düzeyinin yüksek olduğu araçların başında ise X platformu gelmektedir. Siyasetten spora, iş hayatından eğlenceye kadar birçok gündemin konu edinildiği X, önemli bir işlev üstlenmektedir. Günümüzde bireylerden kurumlara kadar neredeyse her kesimin gündemini belirleyebilmekte ve X'de Trend Topic (TT) olan bir konu ülkenin, siyasilerin ve hatta tüm ulusun gündemi haline dahi gelebilmektedir. Bu nedenle sosyal medya mecraları-özellikle de X bireyler, kurumlar ve devletler tarafından etkin bir iletişim aracı olarak kullanılmaktadır.

[*] Assist. Prof., Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, e-mail: ahmetkocyigit@ohu.edu.tr, orcid.org/0000-0002-1276-1128, Niğde, Türkiye

Yöntem

Bu çalışma sosyal medya çağında dini inaçların inşası ve değişimi üzerine odaklanmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda çalışmada sosyal medyanın dini bağlamda nasıl kullanıldığının belirlenmesi ve sosyal medya araçları vasıtasıyla dini inaçların inşa ve değişim süreçlerinin nasıl gerçekleştiğinin ortaya çıkartılması amaçlamıştır. Çalışmanın amacı doğrultusunda değerlendirilmesi, paylaşımların bağlamının, düzeyinin tespit edilebilmesi ve sistematik bir değerlendirme yapılabilmesi amacıyla nitel içerik analizi tekniği kullanılmıştır. İçerik analizi, görsel ve sözlü veriler gibi çeşitli verilerin içeriğini analiz etmeye yönelik bir yöntemdir. Daha iyi analiz etmek ve yorumlamak için fenomen veya olayların tanımlanmış tema ve kategorilere indirgenmesini sağlamaktadır (Harwood & Garry, 2003). İçerik analizi, iletişimin bağlamını ve çerçevesini, düzeyini, yapısını ve niyetini analiz edebilme imkânı sunması ve iletişimci grubun odak noktasını belirleyebilmesi nedeniyle önemlidir. Dahası, veri setinin tamamına uygun bir sistematik ortaya koyması da bu yöntemi değerli kılmaktadır. Çalışmanın örneklemini oluşturan verilerin araştırmanın amacı doğrultusunda değerlendirilmesi, paylaşımların bağlamı ve düzeyinin tespit edilebilmesi ve sistematik bir değerlendirme yapılabilmesi için içerik analizi tekniği, tüm bu ihtiyaçlara cevap vermektedir (Koçyiğit, 2023). Çalışmada örneklem olarak Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığının seçilmesi stratejik olarak önem arz etmektedir. Başkanlığın devletin resmî bir kurumu olması, dini faaliyetlerde yetkili bir kurum olması, dini faaliyetleri yönetme yetkisinin bulunması, bireysel ve toplumsal olarak belirli bir itibarının olması sebebiyle tercih edilmiştir.

Bu doğrultuda çalışmada şu sorulara cevap aranmıştır:

1. Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı İngilizce resmi X hesabından yapılan paylaşımların içerikleri nelerdir?
2. Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı İngilizce resmi X hesabını dini inanç bağlamında nasıl kullanmaktadır?
3. Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı İngilizce resmi X hesabını etkileşim bağlamında nasıl kullanmaktadır?
4. Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı İngilizce resmi X hesabı üzerinden dini faaliyetleri nasıl şekillenmektedir?
5. Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı İngilizce resmi X hesabından hangi mesajları öne çıkarmaktadır?

Evren-Örneklem

Çalışmada Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı "Diyanet English" resmi X hesabı araştırmanın evrenini oluşturmaktadır. Başkanlığın resmi X hesabı 2015 Aralık ayında faaliyete geçmesi sebebiyle araştırmanın yapıldığı tarihe kadar on binlerce içerik paylaşımı gerçekleştirilmiştir (Diyanet English, 2024). Tüm bu içeriklerin hem zaman bakımından hem de teknik açıdan analizinin çok zor olması sebebiyle Başkanlığın 1 Temmuz 2023 -1 Temmuz 2024 tarihleri arasındaki 1 yıllık sürede yapmış olduğu paylaşımlar ile sınırlandırılmıştır. Bunun yanında repostlar (yeniden paylaşım), beğeni yorumlar, resim ve videolar kapsam dışında tutulmuştur.

Veri Toplama ve Analiz

Elde edilen veriler tarafından oluşturulan kategori ve temalar yardımıyla Başkanlığın çevrimiçi ortamlarda kültürel inanç ve inşa yönetimi stratejileri ortaya konulmuştur. Ayrıca paylaşımların içerikleri, konuları ve kelime grupları ortaya araştırmaya dahil edilmiştir. Araştırmanın amacı ve örneklemi doğrultusunda veriler X Türkiye üzerinden MAXQDA 2022 paket programı aracılığıyla

Başkanlığın 1 Temmuz 2023 -1 Temmuz 2024 tarihleri arasında paylaşmış olduğu 72 posttan oluşan veri setinden elde edilmiştir. Verilerin toplanması ve analizi araştırmanın örneklemini ve sınırlılıklarını oluşturan konu ve süre içerisinde elde edilen verilerin belirli kodlara göre kategorize edilmesini, tanımlanmasını ve yorumlanmasını içermektedir. Bu doğrultuda elde edilen veriler MAXQDA 2022 paket program aracılığıyla analiz edilmiş ve ardından yorumlanmıştır.

Bu doğrultuda "Diyanet English" ana teması altında beş farklı alt kod oluşturulmuştur. Bu alt kodlar; "dini bilgilendirme, aktiviteler, resmi açıklamalar, eğitim, sosyal ve toplumsal konular" olarak kategorize edilmiştir. Gönderilerin ağırlıklı kod dağılımları incelendiğinde, en yüksek ağırlığa dini bilgilendirme (27), alt kodunun sahip olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Diğer kodlar ise ağırlıklarına göre sırasıyla sosyal ve toplumsal konular (17), resmi açıklamalar (16), eğitim (9), aktiviteler (7) şeklindedir. Bu doğrultuda Başkanlığın paylaşımlarında ağırlık merkezinin dini bilgilendirmeler, sosyal ve toplumsal konular doğrultusunda şekillendiğini ifade etmek mümkündür.

Sonuç

Bu çalışma kapsamında ele alınan Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı resmi İngilizce X hesabından elde edilen verilerin kodlanması sonucunda ortaya konan analizler göz önüne alındığında ve çalışmanın sonuçları değerlendirildiğinde; Başkanlığın paylaşımlarının genellikle dini bilgilendirme alt kodunda yoğunlaştığı tespit edilmiştir. Paylaşımlarda genellikle İslam dini ile ilgili bilgilendirme paylaşımlarının yapıldığı görülmektedir. Bu doğrultuda paylaşım sıklığının İslam inancı, dua, selam, ramazan, cuma gibi dini bilgilendirme konularında yoğunlaştığı tespit edilmiştir. Ardından ise paylaşımların sosyal ve toplumsal konular alt kodunda yoğunlaştığı tespit edilmiştir. Bu doğrultuda Başkanlığın sosyal ve toplumsal konulara önem verdiğini söylemek mümkündür. Paylaşılan içerikler incelendiğinde daha çok aile, medeniyet, kardeşlik, birlik, beraberlik, vatan, millet gibi içeriklerde yoğunlaştığı görülmüştür. Başkanlığın sosyal ve toplumsal konulara önem verdiği ve bu konuların hedef kitleye ulaştırılması için çaba sarf ettiği tespit edilmiştir. Resmi açıklamalar alt kodu ise Başkanlığın paylaşımların yoğunlaştığı bir diğer alandır. Başkanlığın resmî açıklamalara paylaşımlarında yer verdiği tespit edilmiştir. Özellikle Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığının alanına giren ve toplumu ilgilendiren konularda kurum resmî açıklamaları resmi X hesabı üzerinden paylaşmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda kamuoyunun bilgilendirilmesi, aydınlatılması ve iletişimin sağlaması açısından bu paylaşımlar önem arz etmektedir. Bunların yanında eğitim ve etkinlikler alt kodları paylaşımların yoğunlaştığı diğer konuları göstermektedir. Tüm bu sonuçlar ışığında Başkanlığın İngilizce X hesabını daha çok bilgilendirme, duyuru, açıklama amacıyla kullanıldığını söylemek mümkündür. Bu doğrultuda Başkanlığın İslam dini inançların inşasında ve tanıtımında X hesabını kullandığı görülmektedir. Fakat Başkanlık tarafından İngilizce X hesabının güncel olarak kullanılmadığı, paylaşımların sınırlı olduğu, interaktif olarak kullanımın eksik olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır. Ayrıca hedef kitle ile etkileşimde ve bilgi alışverişi bağlamında paylaşımların yetersiz kaldığı tespit edilmiştir.

Çalışmanın sonuçları doğrultusunda başkanlığın etkileşimi artırmak için, soru-cevap oturumları, anket çalışmaları ve etkinlik katılım çağrıları gibi aktiviteler düzenlemesi tavsiye edilmektedir. Paylaşımların İngilizce olarak yapılması yabancı hedef kitleye ulaşmanın amaç edinildiğini göstermektedir. Bu doğrultuda etkileşim ve interaktif çalışmalar hedef kitleye ulaşmak ve onların dikkatini çekmek açısından çok büyük önem arz etmektedir. Sonuç olarak yeni medya,

dini inançların değişimi ve inşasında önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı resmi X hesabı üzerine yapılan bu içerik analizi, sosyal medyanın dini kurumlar tarafından nasıl kullanıldığını ve bu kullanımın dini inançlar üzerindeki etkilerini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bulgular, dini inançların yeni medya aracılığıyla nasıl yeniden şekillendiğine ve toplumsal düzeyde nasıl bir etki yarattığına dair bilgiler sunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, gelecekteki araştırmalar için de bir temel oluşturmayı, dijital çağda dini inançların dönüşümüne dair daha geniş bir perspektif sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

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Araştırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütülmüştür.
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MEDİAD

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PK Filminde Din, Dindarlık ve Tanrı Tahayyülü

Hüseyin Cihat ŞAHİN*

Öz

PK filmi üzerinden din psikolojisi perspektifiyle din, dindarlık ve Tanrı tahayyülü temalarının analiz edildiği bu çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden doküman incelemesi ve içerik analizi teknikleri kullanılmıştır. Filmde Hindistan'ın çok dinli yapısının betimlenebilmesi için Hinduizm, Budizm, Sihizm, Caynizm, Hristiyanlık ve İslam dinlerine yer verilmektedir. Fakat filmin konusu ağırlıklı olarak Hinduizm, Hristiyanlık ve İslam dini örnekleriyle işlenmiştir. PK filminin genel üslubunda hiciv tarzı görülmektedir. Bununla birlikte filmde kullanılan "Bizi yaratan Tanrı'ya inanın. O'na güvenin. Kendi yarattığınız sahte Tanrıları ise yok edin." repliğiyle filmin dini inanç konusunda doğrudan mesaj verdiği de görülmüştür. PK filminde yer alan eleştiri konuları dini lider (günümüz toplumundaki temsilcileri) ve din adamları, inanç esasları, bazı dini yönelimli halk inanışları, inanç sömürüsü, misyonerlik, din ve terör ilişkisi ve dış güdümlü dindarlık şeklinde kategorize edilmiştir. Yapılan analiz sonucunda filmde herhangi bir dine yönelik tebliğ ya da misyonerlik faaliyeti görülmemiştir. Ele alınan her bir dinin Tanrı tahayyülünün kendi düşünceleri etrafında objektif olmaya çalışılarak yansıtıldığı söylenebilir. PK karakterinin düşüncelerinin ve Tanrı tahayyülünün şekillenmesinde insanın gelişim ve dini gelişim evrelerine benzer bir sürecin izlendiği de söylenebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Psikolojisi, Din, Dindarlık, Tanrı Tahayyülü, PK Filmi

Religion, Religiosity and the Imagination of God in the Movie PK

Abstract

This study analyzes the themes of religion, religiosity and God-image from the perspective of psychology of religion in the bollywood movie PK. Qualitative research methods like document review and content analysis techniques were used in the study. In order to describe the pluralistic religious structure of India, the movie includes references to Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam. However, the plot of the movie mainly draws from examples of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. The genre of the movie PK is satirical. However, it is observed that the movie gives a direct message about religious beliefs with the idea that, "Believe in God who created us. Trust in Him and destroy the false Gods you have created." The criticism in the movie PK is directed towards religious leaders and clergymen, certain rituals of faith, some religiously oriented folk beliefs, exploitation of faith, missionary work, the relationship between religion and terrorism, and extrinsic religiosity. As per the research analysis, no preaching or missionary activity towards any religion is promoted in the movie. It can be concluded that each religion's God-image in the movie has been attempted to be portrayed objectively according to its own teachings. It is also observed that a process similar to the stages of human development and religious development is followed in the formation of the PK character's thoughts and God-image.

Keywords: Psychology of Religion, Religion, Religiosity, God-Image, PK Movie

* Arş. Gör., Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Üniversitesi, e-mail: cihat.sahin@erdogan.edu.tr, orcid.org/0000-0002-2681-0584, Rize, Türkiye

Giriş

Sinema, diğer iletişim araçlarına göre daha kısa sürede çok daha büyük kitlelere mesajını iletebilen; gelişen teknoloji ve platformlarla istenen her an ulaşılabilen; birbirinden oldukça farklı ve özgün düşüncelerin paylaşılabildiği, dikkate alınması ve akademik anlamda da önem verilmesi gereken bir sektördür. Günümüzde sinemanın pek çok film ve sahnesiyle insanın dini duygu, düşünce ve davranışlarını yansıtan, tartışan ve etkileyen bir sanat olarak karşımıza çıktığı ifade edilebilir. Din psikolojisi bilim dalı ise dini olguları psikolojik bakış açısıyla incelemekte, ruhsal yaşayış ve davranışlar içerisinde dini nitelik taşıyan her şeyi konu olarak ele almaktadır (Karaca, 2020, s. 29). Bu bağlamda din psikolojisi çalışmalarının sinema ve film analizlerine daha fazla yer vermesi gerektiği düşünülmektedir. İlgili düşünceden yola çıkılarak Bollywood sinemasının bir ürünü olan PK filmi bu çalışmada din psikolojisi perspektifiyle ele alınmıştır.

Araştırmanın temel problemi "PK filmi örneğinde din, dindarlık ve Tanrı tahayyülü kavramları beyaz perdeye nasıl yansıtılmıştır?" sorusu ile belirlenmiştir. Çalışmanın alt problemleri "PK filminde din kavramı nasıl ele alınmıştır?", "PK filminde dindarlık hangi açılardan ele alınmıştır?" ve "Tanrı imajı işlenirken PK filminde nasıl bir süreç izlenmiştir?" şeklinde sıralanmaktadır. Din psikolojisinin temel konularından olan din, dindarlık ve Tanrı tahayyülü kavramları bu çalışmada tema olarak kullanılmıştır.

Çalışmanın amacı PK filmi örneğinde din, dindarlık ve Tanrı tahayyülü kavramlarının beyaz perdeye nasıl yansıtıldığını, filmin din ve dindarlığa yönelik eleştirilerini ve varsa tebliğ ya da misyonerlik yapılan sahnelerini tespit etmektir.

Geniş kitlelere vermek istediği mesajları kolay ve hızlı iletme imkânı bulunan sinema alanında, din psikolojisinin ilgilendiği konuların nasıl işlendiğine yönelik yapılan çalışmalardan biri olması bu araştırmayı önemli kılmaktadır. Buna ek olarak modern toplumdaki dini algıya ve bireylerin kutsal ile ilişkisine dair bir perspektif sunması ile çalışmanın sinema ve din psikolojisi ilişkisine yönelik literatüre katkı sağlayacağı ve bu konuda yapılacak benzer çalışmalara referans oluşturabileceği umulmaktadır.

Çalışmada filmin içerik analizi Türkçe çevirisi incelenerek yapılmış; çevirinin doğru yapıldığı varsayılmıştır (Hirani, 2014b).

PK filminde ele alınan din, dindarlık ve Tanrı tahayyülü kavramlarının analizinde doğrudan istifade edilen isimler S. Freud, W. James, E. Fromm ve J. Piaget[1] olmuştur. Fromm'un din, dindarlık ve Tanrı tahayyülü konularındaki düşünceleri PK filminin arka planı ile paralellik göstermesi sebebiyle onun düşüncelerine din başlığı altında kısaca yer verilmiştir. Çalışmada incelenen filmler ise yalnızca PK filmi ile sınırlandırılmıştır.

Araştırma konusuna ilişkin yapılan çalışmalar PK filmi ile ilgili olanlar ve sinema-din psikolojisi ilişkisi bağlamındaki çalışmalar şeklinde iki açıdan ele alınmıştır. Din psikolojisi alanı dışında kalan sinema-din ilişkileri çalışmaları araştırmanın dışında bırakılmıştır. Sinema-din ilişkileri bağlamında Doç. Dr. Bilal Yorulmaz'ın pek çok çalışmasından (örn: 2016, 2018; 2020) istifade edilebilir. Yine bu bağlamda Ünal'ın (2015) ve Yıldırım'ın (2022) çalışmalarından da istifade edilebilir. PK filmi ile ilgili çalışmaları dini kodlar, semboller ve sinematik anlatı etrafında analiz yapanlar (Dural, 2018; Qadri, 2015; Umunç, 2022), kültürlerarası iletişim ve çok kültürlülük (multiculturalism) açısından ele alanlar

(Türkeri & Karslı, 2021; Ünalan, 2018) ve din felsefesinin bazı meseleleri ile klasik ve çağdaş problemlerin ilişkisi bağlamında ele alanlar (Ulukütük, 2015) şeklinde kategorize etmek mümkündür. Sinema-din psikolojisi ilişkisi bağlamında Mustafa Koç (2016) ve Yahya Aktu'nun (2016) çalışmalarına bu makalede yer verilmiştir. Her iki çalışmada da nitel araştırma yöntemleri ve doküman incelemesi tekniği kullanılmıştır. Koç, değer-yoksun dindarlık tipolojisi üzerinden dinsel ve etik değer duyarlılığı olmayan din görevlisi imajının Türk sinemasındaki psiko-sosyal arka planı, belirlenen sinema örnekleri bağlamında semantik olarak analiz etmiştir. Koç (2016), sonuç olarak din karşıtı sinema aktörleri tarafından Türk sinemasındaki din görevlilerinin bilinçli olarak olumsuz kalıp yargılar ile yansıtıldığı; dinsel ve mesleki kimlik ile uyuşmayan bir din görevlisi imajının çizildiği saptamıştır. Aktu (2016) ise "Ömür Dediğin" isimli belgesel programının terapötik bir öğe olarak din psikolojisinde kullanılan başa çıkma kavramlarıyla ilişkilendirerek açıklanmasını amaçlamış ve bu çalışmayla din psikolojisi alanında kullanılan kavramların öğretilmesi, pekiştirilmesi ve içselleştirilmesinde sinema eserlerinin faydalı olduğu sonucuna ulaşmıştır.

Çalışmada din, dindarlık ve Tanrı tahayyülü kavramları çalışma temaları ile bağlantılı şekilde ele alınmıştır. Sonraki başlıklarda yapılan içerik analizi sonucunda elde edilen bulgular, filmden alınan sahne görüntüleriyle birlikte aktarılmıştır.

Yöntem

Ulaşılmak istenen hedeflere bağlı olarak uygun araştırma desen ve yöntemlerinin seçilmesi araştırmanın gidişatını belirlemede önemlidir. Bağlam ve olguların derinlemesine anlaşılmasını sağlayacak detaylı betimlemelere yer verilmesi, davranışların nasıl ve neden gerçekleştiği sorularına cevap aranması sebebiyle bu çalışmada nitel araştırma deseni tercih edilmiştir (Büyüköztürk vd., 2021, s. 252-253).

Filmin arka planının daha net anlaşılabilmesi ve içerik analizinin daha isabetli yapılabilmesi için ilgili yayınlar (Büker & Topçu, 2019; Diken & Laustsen, 2019; Hockley, 2020; Kabadayı, 2020; Karadaş & Koca, 2020; Kaya, 2021; Monaco, 2021; Parsa, 2008; Sarmış, 2020; Sim, 2019; Yorulmaz, 2016; Yorulmaz vd., 2015) incelenmiştir.

Araştırma çerçevesinin daha net anlaşılması için onun farklı ölçütlere göre hangi sınıflandırmada olduğunu belirtmek önemlidir. Bu bağlamda çalışmayı temel aldığı felsefeye göre *nitel*, veri toplama tekniğine göre *belgesel (doküman)*, verilerin toplanma zamanına göre *anlık*, veri türüne göre *türetilmiş* ve araştırma düzeyine göre *betimsel* olarak sınıflandırmak mümkündür (Büyüköztürk vd., 2021, s. 12).

Verilerin Toplanması

Doküman incelemesi, araştırmak istenen olgu veya olgular hakkında bilgi içeren film, video ve fotoğraf gibi görsel materyallerin analizini kapsamaktadır. PK filmini ele alan bu araştırmada nitel veri toplama yöntemlerinden doküman incelemesi kullanılmıştır (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, s. 189-190).

Verilerin Analizi

Çalışmada içerik analizi tekniği kullanılmıştır. İçerik analizi, "desen, tema, varsayım ve anlamlar çıkarma çabası içinde, belirli miktarda materyalin dikkatli, ayrıntılı, sistematik bir biçimde incelenmesi ve yorumlanması" şeklinde tanımlanabilir (Berg & Lune, 2015, s. 344). Bu bağlamda

çalışmada konu ve amaca uygun kodlar belirlenmiştir. Yapılan analiz sonucunda din psikolojisi literatürüyle ilişkili kodlar belirlenmiştir. Bunlar; saplantılı davranışlar, dindarlık, Tanrı tahayyülü, din değiştirme, Hristiyanlık, Hinduizm, Caynizm, Sihizm, İslam, dini fıtrat, ibadet, terör, din, dinin fonksiyonu, dini duygu, gelişim, dini gelişim, güven, kıyafet tercihleri ve ibadethaneler şeklindedir. Kodların değerlendirilmesi neticesinde, çalışma planında din, dindarlık ve Tanrı tahayyülü kavramları tema olarak tercih edilmiştir. Çalışmanın bulgu ve yorumları da ilgili temaların her biri için ayrı ayrı ele alınmış ve filmdeki kronolojik sıraya göre hazırlanmıştır.

Din ve Dindarlık

Din kelimesinin kökeni hakkında etimolojik olarak farklı görüşler yer almaktadır. Türkçede din, doğaüstü güçlere, çeşitli kutsal varlıklara, Tanrıya inanmayı ve tapınmayı sistemleştiren toplumsal bir kurum şeklinde tanımlanmaktadır (TDK, 1988, s. 378). Psikolojide ise din, insan davranışına yön, yaşama anlam veren kutsal veya doğaüstü bir (veya birden çok) güç ve yaratıcı kavramına dayanan inançlar, semboller ve törenler sistemi manasında kullanılmaktadır (Budak, 2000, s. 214).

Fromm'a (2019) göre önemli olan, insanın bir dine ya da Tanrıya inanmış olup olmaması değil; sevgiyle yaşayıp yaşamadığı ve gerçeği düşünüp düşünmediği meselesidir. O, çalışmasında, din terimindeki kavramsal belirsizlikten kurtulmak adına kendi din anlayışını ifade eder. Fromm'a göre din, Bir grup tarafından paylaşılan ve kişiye kendine bir yön bulmasını sağlayacak bir zemin ve bir tapınma nesnesi sunan düşünceler ve eylemler sistemidir. Fromm dini, *yetkeci (otoriter)* ve *insancıl (hümanistik)* olmak üzere ikiye ayırır. Yetkeci dinde insan, kendini aşan bir şeye teslim olur. Bu dinde en büyük erdem itaat; en büyük günah ise itaatsizliktir. Bu sistemde teslim olunan kutsal nasıl her şeye gücü yeten, her şeyi bilen bir yapıdaysa teslim olan insan da aynı derecede güçsüz ve önemsiz olarak tasarlanır. Yetkeci dinde insan, yalnızlık ve eksiklik duygusundan kurtulup korunaklı hissederken bunun bedeli olarak bağımsızlık ve kendiliğini yitirir. Fromm'a göre toplumdaki bir önder, halkın sevgisini kazanan bir politikacı, devlet, ırk gibi olgular da tapınma nesnesi hâline gelerek *laik yetkeci dinleri* oluşturabilir. Bu durumda yetkeci dinlerde olduğu gibi insanın değeri önemsizleşir. Yetkeci dinlerde insanların hayat ve mutlulukları, ölümden sonra hayat, onur, namus ya da insanlığın geleceği gibi idealler uğruna feda edilebilir. İnsanları denetim altında tutan bu tarz sembollere yönelik ileri sürülen amaçlarda her yol mübah olarak gösterilir (s. 20-43).

İnsancıl dinler insanı ve insanın kendini gerçekleştirmesini merkeze almaktadır. Bu tür dinlerde insan, kendini ve evreni anlamak için zihnini kullanmak ve geliştirmek zorundadır. Birey, yetkeci dinlerdeki boyun eğme tutumundan ziyade insancıl dinlerde 'sevme' yeteneğini geliştirmelidir. İnsancıl dinlerde amaç, kendini gerçekleştirmek ve güç elde etmektir. Bu dinlerde inanç, kişinin kendi duygu ve düşünceleri sonucunda elde ettiği deneyimlerdir. Yetkeci dinlerde genel ruh hâli suçluluk duygusu iken insancıl dinlerde hâkim olan duygu sevinçtir. İnsancıl dinlerde eğer varsa Tanrı, insanın kendi doğal yeteneklerinin ve ulaşabileceği ideal noktanın sembolüdür. Fromm (2019), erken dönem Budizm ve Taoizm'i, İsa, Sokrates ve Spinoza'nın öğretilerini, Yahudilik ve Hristiyanlık dinlerindeki bazı eğilimleri (gizemcilik gibi) ve Fransız Devrimi anlayışını insancıl dinlere örnek olarak göstermektedir (s. 43.-44).

Sonuç olarak çalışmada Fromm'un (2019) "bir grup tarafından paylaşılan ve kişiye kendine bir yön bulmasını sağlayacak bir zemin ve bir tapınma nesnesi sunan düşünceler ve eylemler sistemi" şeklindeki din tanımı operasyonel olarak kullanılmıştır (s. 31). Freud, James, Piaget ve Fromm'un

düşüncelerinin araştırma konusuna yönelik yansımaları 'Bulgular ve Yorum' başlığında örnekler aracılığıyla aktarılmıştır.

Dinin tanımlanmasında karşılaşılan güçlükler dindarlığın tanımında da karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Türkçe sözlükte dindar, *dini inancı güçlü, din kurallarına bağlı (kimse), mütedeyyin* şeklinde dindarlık ise *dindar olma durumu* olarak ifade edilmektedir (TDK, 1988, s. 379). Dindarlık kavramının da din gibi değişken bir yapıya sahip olması, araştırmacıların kültürü ve dindarlığı tarif ederken tercih ettikleri kriterler, ortak bir dindarlık tanımının yapılamamasının temel sebeplerini teşkil etmektedir. Din psikolojisinde dindar, *hayatını inancıyla bütünleştirmeye çalışan birey* (Karaca, 2020, s. 69), dindarlık ise *bir dine inanmak, inanç ve pratik uygulamalara dönük bilgilere sahip olmak, bunları içselleştirerek kişiliğin bir parçası hâline getirerek tecrübe etmek, yaşam felsefesinin oluşmasında dini merkeze oturtmak ve tercihleri bu doğrultuda şekillendirerek oluşan oryantasyon süreci* ve *bir dine mensup olma, dinle ilgili olma ve onu belli bir düzeyde yaşama* şeklinde tarif edilmektedir (Apaydın, 2016, s. 68; Sevinç, 2020, s. 10).

Dindarlığın ne anlama geldiği, bireyin dindarlığının nasıl tespit edilebileceği ya da dinin, insan yaşamının hangi alanlarını ne seviyede etkilediğine yönelik tartışmalar, dindarlığın boyutları meselesini ortaya çıkarmıştır (Turan, 2017, s. 114). Dindarlığın da din gibi değişken bir yapıya sahip olması, araştırmacının kültürü ve dindarlığı tarif ederken tercih ettiği kriterler, kavramın tarifinde olduğu gibi boyutlandırılması meselesinde de çeşitliliğe yol açmaktadır. Dindarlığın boyutlandırılmasına yönelik din psikolojisi alanındaki ilk araştırmalarda çoğunlukla basit tanımlamaya (evet-hayır, hep-hiç gibi) dayalı kategorik yaklaşım kullanılmıştır. Araştırmacıların bu yaklaşımı kullanmadaki temel dayanağı, insanlara yönelik "Ya dindardırlar veya değildirler." ya da "Allah'a inanıyorlar veya inanmıyorlar." şeklindeki yargılarıdır (Karaca, 2020, s. 87). 1960 yılı sonrasında basit tanımlamaya dayalı kategorik yaklaşımlar, gerçeklerin gizlenebilme ihtimali, farklı dinî yönelimler olsa bile aynı kategoriye koyma zorunluluğu olan durumlar, dinî hayatın iç yüzü hakkında yeterli bilgiyi yansıtmaması ve benzeri gerekçelerle (Karaca, 2020, s. 88) yerini dindarlığın çok boyutlu olarak ele alınmasına bırakmıştır. Günümüzdeki tartışmalar dindarlığın çok boyutlu olup olmamasından ziyade boyutlarının neler olduğu, nasıl ölçüleceği ya da geliştirilen ölçeklerin ne derece güvenilir ve geçerli olduğu konularında yapılmaktadır (Şahin, 2007, s. 20). Bu bağlamda günümüzde dindarlık düzeyini belirlemeye çalışan ölçekler çok boyutlu bir yönelim aracılığıyla Glock ve Stark, Faulkner ve Dejong, King ve Hunt gibi Batılı araştırmacıların etkisi altında yapılmakta; Guttman ve Likert ölçeklerinden yararlanılarak hazırlanmaktadır (Günay, 2006, s. 44). Türkiye'de dindarlık ölçekleri ile ilgili yapılan tez çalışmalarında tercüme ölçeklerden özgün ölçeklere doğru bir geçiş söz konusudur. Ülkemizde Uysal'ın (%30), Allport ve Ross'un (%21), Karaca'nın (%14) ve Kula'nın ölçeği en çok kullanılan dindarlık ölçekleri arasındadır (Baynal, 2020, s. 278). Bunun yanı sıra dindarlığın boyutlandırılması ile ilgili pek çok teklif karşımıza çıksa da araştırma konusuna daha uygun olması sebebiyle çalışmada yalnızca Glock ve Stark tarafından teklif edilen beşli yaklaşım ve Allport'un iki boyutlu dindarlık yaklaşımı kullanılmıştır (Allport & Ross, 1967; Stark & Glock, 1974).

Tanrı Tahayyülü

Gerek sosyal bilimler gerekse din bilimleri literatüründe Tanrı ile ilgili hangi kavram ve terimlerin tercih edileceği meselesi önemli bir konu olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Tanrı ile ilgili yapılan çalışmalarda kullanılan ifadelerin temelde *Tanrı kavramı* (the concept of God) ve *Tanrı tasavvuru* (the God's image) etrafında şekillendiği söylenebilir. Teolojik yaklaşımda daha çok *Tanrı*

kavramı tercih edilirken psikolojik yaklaşımın *Tanrı tasavvuru* kelimelerini tercih ettiği söylenebilir. Tanrı kavramı ile daha çok *varlığı ya da yokluğu metafiziksel çıkarımlarla tartışılan*; Tanrı kelimesinin entelektüel ve zihinsel sözlük tanımı kastedilmektedir (Hayta, 2019, s. 52-54). Tanrı kavramı, çoğunlukla ikincil düşünce süreçlerinde üretilen, günlük yaşantımıza etkisi olmayan, teolojik veya bilişsel Tanrı anlayışına vurgu yapmaktadır (Mehmedoğlu, 2011, s. 29). Tanrı kavramı duygu içermemesi, salt bilgi düzeyinde olması, Tanrı hakkındaki inançların bilgisini, rasyonel ve genel bilgileri içermesi gibi sebeplerle Tanrı tasavvurundan ayrılmaktadır. Nitekim Tanrı tasavvuru, Tanrı'yla ilgili duygu yüklü zihinsel temsillerdir. Psikolojik ve duygusal düşünceleri, hatıraları, içsel tecrübeleri kapsar. Tanrı tasavvurları kişisel deneyimler ve duygu yüklü zihinsel simgeler ve temsillerden oluşur. Bu değerlendirmelerin değişmesinin Tanrı kavramındakilere göre daha zor ve yavaş olduğu söylenebilir (Hayta, 2019, s. 54).

Aralarındaki farklara rağmen bu çalışmada da olduğu gibi genellikle aynı anlamda kullanılan, daha çok *imge, tasavvur, imaj ve tahayyül* kelimeleri ile ifade edilen *Tanrı tasavvuru olgunlaşma düzeyine göre Tanrı hakkında bireyin iç dünyasında oluşan duygu, düşünce ve imgelerin dinamik örüntüsü* şeklinde ifade edilebilir (Hacıkeleşoğlu & Karaca, 2021). İnsanların din ile ilişkileri çerçevesinde kazandıkları bireysel tecrübeler, anlamlandırma süreçleri ve dini bilginin elde edilme safhaları gibi pek çok bireysel ve sosyal faktör, Tanrı tasavvurunun nasıl anlaşıldığı noktasında etkilidir. İlgili faktörler vasıtasıyla imge, tasavvur, imaj ve tahayyül arasında da ince farklar oluşabilmektedir. Örneğin İslam dini açısından Allah'a suret ya da biçim izafe etmek uygun bir yaklaşım olmadığı için inanç sahibi kişinin Allah ile ilgili bilişsel ve duygusal kurgularını ifade etmek amacıyla tahayyül kavramını kullanması daha uygun gözükmektedir. Tahayyül kelimesinin asla emin olunamayacak bir *zan* durumunu ifade etmesi ve kişinin de hem somut hem de soyut düzlemde Allah ile ilgili olarak zihninde tasarladığı şeylerden emin olma imkânı bulunmaması, çalışmada tahayyül kavramının tercih edilmesinin sebebidir (Karaca & Hacıkeleşoğlu, 2020).

Bulgular ve Yorum

PK Filminde Din

Filmde konu edilen dinlerin her birine yönelik tanıtım ve eleştiri yapıldığı görülmekle birlikte hiçbir dinin pozitif yönleri öne çıkarılarak misyonerliği ya da tebliği yapılmamaktadır.

Şekil 1'deki örnek sahnede de görüldüğü gibi PK filminde konu edilen dinleri Hinduizm, Budizm, Sihizm, Caynizm, Hristiyanlık ve İslam şeklinde sıralamak mümkündür. Filmde belirtilen dinlere Hindistan'ın dini durumunu yansıtması amacıyla yer verildiği söylenebilir.

Şekil 1. Farklı Dinlerin Ele Alındığı Bir Sahne

PK filminde öne çıkan dinlerin Hinduizm, Hristiyanlık ve İslam dini olduğu söylenebilir. Bu düşüncenin oluşmasında, söz konusu dinlere filmde sistematik olarak farklı açılardan yer verilmesi etkili olmuştur. Örneğin Hinduizm (Hirani, 2014a, s. 17:35, 55:25, 1:04:16), sonra Hristiyanlık (Hirani, 2014a, s. 20:00, 58:00, 59:39, 1:04:43) daha sonra da İslam (Hirani, 2014a, s. 60:00, 1:00:32, 1:04:34, 1:06:20, 1,23:58, 2:10:36,) izleyiciye tanıtılmıştır. Buna ek olarak her bir dinin kapsamındaki belirli konular eleştirilmiştir. Şekil 2'de olduğu gibi dinlerin tanıtımında genellikle ideolojilerinden ziyade o dine ait görsel ve işitsel motiflere ağırlık verilmiştir. Hinduizm'in tanıtımında öne çıkan unsurlar; Tanrı heykelleri, Tanrı resimleri, Ganj nehri ve vimona gibi kutsal mekânlar ve törenlerdir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 17:35, 26:50, 55:25, 1:04:16, 45:45).

Şekil 2. Hinduizm Dininde Tanrı Ganesha'nın Heykelinin Gösterildiği Sahne

Hristiyanlığa vurgu yapılırken çan sesleri, haç kolyesi, kilise ve törenler kullanılmıştır (Hirani, 2014a, s. 19:58, 1:07:28, 59:39, 1:04:42). Bunun bir örneğini Şekil 3'te görmek mümkündür.

Şekil 3. PK Filmi Kilise Sahnesi

Müslümanların tanıtımında ise cami, ezan sesi, namaz ibadeti, kıyafetler ile hilal ve yıldız sembolü tercih edilen başlıca öğeler arasındadır (Hirani, 2014a, s. 1:01:12, 1:23:58, 1:06:20, 1:45:16). Müslümanların günlük yaşantısının yansıtılmasına yönelik bir örneği Şekil 4'te görmek mümkündür.

Şekil 4. PK Filminde Yansıtılan Müslüman Mahallesinden Bir Sahne

PK filminde yapılan din temasındaki eleştirileri de belirli kategorilerde toplamak mümkündür. Bunlar dini lider (günümüz toplumundaki temsilcileri) ve din adamlarına, inanç esaslarına, dini eğilimin biyolojik kaynaklı olması hakkındaki düşüncelere, ibadet niyetiyle icra edilen halk inanışlarının davranışsal boyutuna, inanç sömürüsüne, misyonerliğe, din-terör ilişkisine ve dış güdümlü dindarlığa eleştiriler şeklinde sıralanabilir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 17:17-2:01:53). Bunlara ek olarak Fromm'un (2019) düşüncelerinde karşılaşılan yetkeci din ile laik yetkeci dinin de eleştirilerine değinildiği söylenebilir (s. 41-43).

PK filminde dini lider ve din adamlarına yönelik eleştirilerin sebebi olarak temelde insanların çıkar amacıyla yanlış yönlendirilmesi gösterilmektedir. Nitekim bu duruma farklı dinlerden örnekler verilmiştir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 1:31:43, 1:43:57, 1:44:52, 1:45:14). Yapılan inceleme sonucunda doğrudan inanç esaslarına yönelik eleştirinin yalnızca Hristiyanlık dininde yapıldığı söylenebilir. Şekil 5'te söz konusu eleştirinin nasıl yapıldığı filmdeki sahne ile gösterilmiştir.
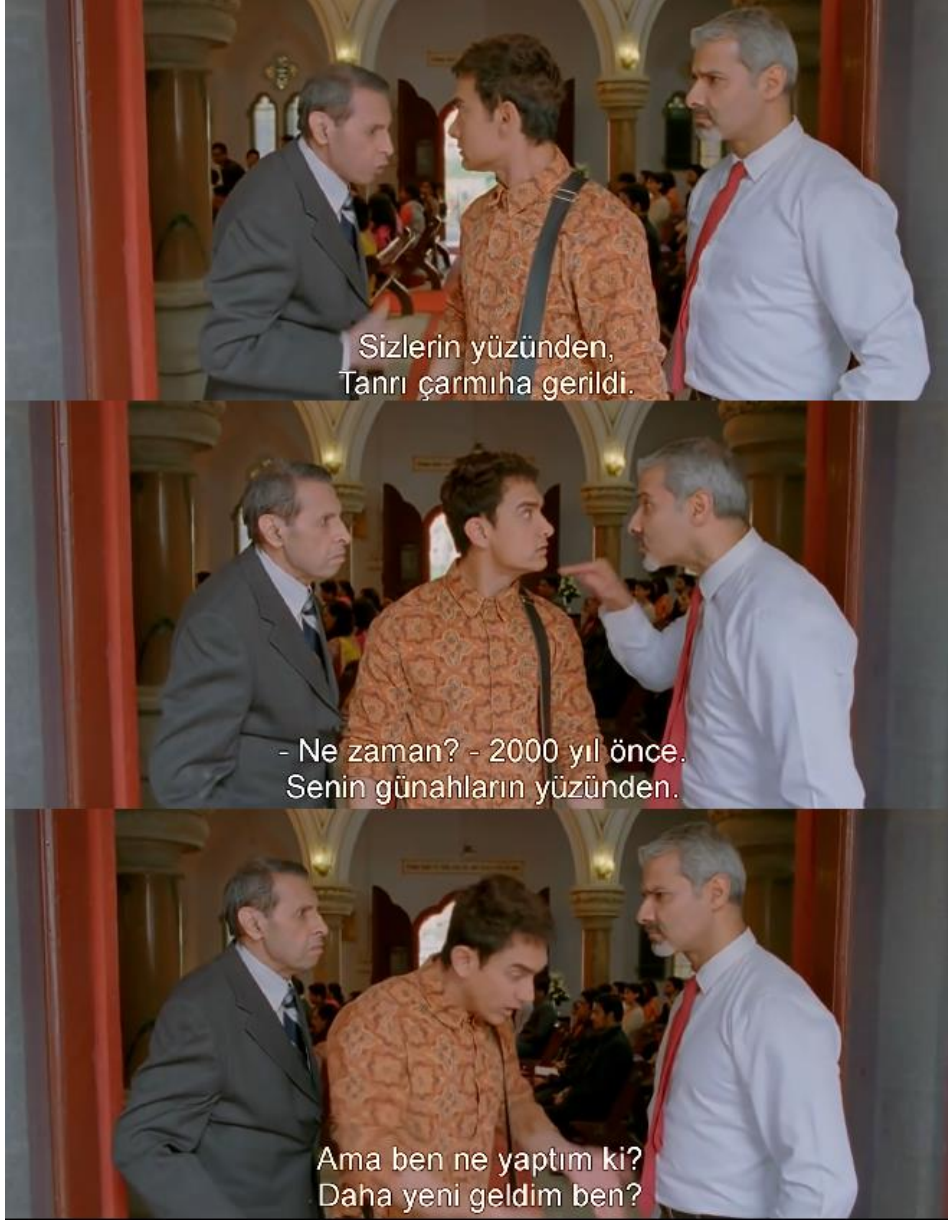
Şekil 5. PK Filminde Hristiyanlık Dini İnanç Esaslarına Eleştiri

Dini eğilimlerin biyolojik kaynaklı olduğuna dair düşünceler (Karaca, 2020, 75-77) görsel bir işaret ekseninde ele alınmış ve bir doğumhanenin bakım ünitesi sahnesinde gerçekleştirilmiştir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 1:03:20-1:03:52). Bu sahnede PK, dikkatlice yeni doğan bir bebeği inceler. İçeri bir doktor girip ne yaptığını sorduğunda *din işaretlerini* ve *Tanrının etiketini* aradığını söyler. İşaret veya etiketleri araması, bebeğin hangi dine ait olduğunu saptamak; dolayısıyla buradan da kendisi için doğru olan dini tespit etmek istemesi sebebiyledir. Bununla birlikte aynı sahne için, inanç geni ya da Tanrı geni gibi vasıtalarla dinin dünya genelinde yaygın olmasına yönelik düşüncelerin de sorgulandığı söylenebilir.

PK filminde ibadet niyetiyle icra edilen halk inanışlarının dini davranışa yansıyan kısımları ya da din için yapılan aşırılıklar konusu da eleştirilmiştir. Bunlara örnek olarak Şekil 6'daki gibi Tanrı heykellerinin sütle yıkanması, tapınağa yuvarlanılarak ya da diz üstüne gidilmesi ve ağaca ip bağlanması verilebilir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 1:05:34, 1:07:32, 1:07:53). Bunlara ek olarak filmde Hz.

Hüseyin'in şehit edilmesinin anıldığı *Kerbela Matemi* etkinliklerinde Şiilerin yumruk, zincir ve bıçak kullanarak kendi vücutlarını harap etmesine yönelik bir sahne de bulunmaktadır (Hirani, 2014a, s. 1:06:45).

Şekil 6. PK Filminde Tanrı Heykelinin Süt ile Yıkanması Sahnesi

İnsanların dini hassasiyetlerinden faydalanıp onlar üzerinden maddi ve manevi kazanç elde eden ve inanç sömürüsü yapan insanlar da PK filminde eleştirilmiştir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 53:50, 1:32:00, 1:45:31). Allport'un dış güdümlü dindarlıkta tarif ettiği insan tipi PK filmindeki ilgili sahneler ile oldukça yerinde yansıtılmaktadır. Filmde dikkat çekilen ve dış güdümlü dindarlıkla ilişkilendirilebilecek bir başka nokta ise din-terör ilişkisidir. Şekil 7'de de görülebileceği üzere filmde Müslümanlarla bağdaştırılarak bir terör eylemi sahnesi kullanılmıştır. Filmde bu eylemin dini korumak amacıyla gerçekleştirildiği vurgulanmıştır (Hirani, 2014a, s. 2:01:53-2:03:55). Naimi (2018) çalışmasında bu tarz terör saldırılarını "sağ motifli" olarak nitelendirmiş; dini temellerin kullanılarak eylemlerin yaptırıldığını; dini kendi çıkarları doğrultusunda anlamlandırarak zulme kılıf uydurduklarını, teröre dini mesnet göstererek eylemlerine meşruiyet kazandırmaya çalıştıklarını ve dini istismar ettiklerini ifade etmiştir. (Naimi, 2018, s. 60-62).


Şekil 7. PK Filminde Sahnelenen Terör Saldırısı

PK filmi, diğer eleştirilerle bağlantılı olarak aslında temelde kurumsal din adına yapılan eylemleri eleştirmektedir. Nitekim filmin ortalarında dinlerin kurumsal yönüne tepki ve bunları terk edişin sembolize edildiği bir sahne de bulunmaktadır (Hirani, 2014a, s. 1:17:06). Yine bu bağlamda ana karakter vasıtasıyla inançlarla ilgili düşüncelere de yer verilmektedir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 2:06:48-2:09:04); "Bizi yaratan Tanrı'ya inanın. O'na güvenin. Kendi yarattığınız sahte Tanrıları ise yok edin".

Çalışmada din teması içerisindeki son konu dinin fonksiyonu üzerinedir. Filmin son sahnelerinde Freud'un *Bir Yanılsamanın Geleceği* kitabındaki düşünceleri (2019, s. 59) ile benzer biçimde, dinin eleştirisinin yanında bazı fonksiyonlarının da kabulüne yer verilmektedir. İlgili sahnede dinin umut aşılama ve anlam verme fonksiyonlarına vurgu yapıldığı söylenebilir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 2:05:57).

PK Filminde Dindarlık

Dindarlık teması ile ilgili filmde dikkat çekilen birinci nokta Allport'un dini yönelim biçimini belirlemek için teklif ettiği iç güdümlü-dış güdümlü dini yönelim konusudur. Kısaca bireyin, dini kendi menfaati için bir fayda vasıtası olarak kullanması anlamındaki dış güdümlü dini yönelim (2014, s. 13), filmin pek çok sahnesinde vurgulanmıştır (Hirani, 2014a, s. 28:25, 55:25, 1:03:00). Dış güdümlü dini yönelime Şekil 8 örnek olarak gösterilebilir. Yukarıda belirtilen pek çok sahnesiyle PK filminde, kurumsal din adına yapılanlar kadar bireylerin dindarlık adına yaptıklarını sorgulamaları gerektiğine de vurgu yapıldığı söylenebilir.
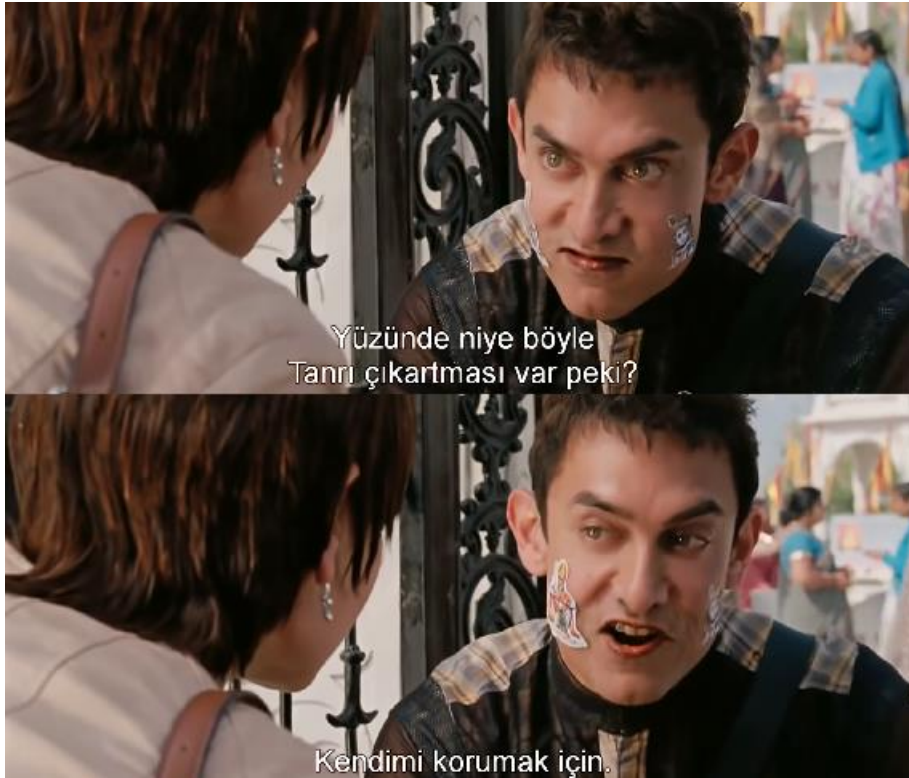
Şekil 8. PK Karakterinin, Yüzüne Vurulmaması için Tanrı Hanuman ve Krişna'nın Resimlerini Kullanması

PK filminin, işlediği konunun hassasiyeti sebebiyle tasvirlerinde çok dikkatli ve seçici davrandığı görülmektedir. Örneğin dindarlığı konu edindiği sahnelerde yalnızca Şekil 9'da gösterilen geleneksel bakış açısıyla ibadetlerin yansıtılması ile yetinilmemiş, dindarlığın pek çok boyutuna da vurgu yapılmıştır. İnanç boyutuna 2:08:48'den, bilgiye 52:30'dan, ibadete 1:04:18'den, duyguya 1:08:44'ten ve etkiye 45:45'ten başlayan sahneler örnek olarak verilebilir (Hirani, 2014a).

Şekil 9. PK Filminde İbadet Boyutu ile İlgili Örnek Sahneler

Hinduizm üzerinden örneklendirilen, insanların din adına yaptıkları bazı dini davranış ve halk inanışları çalışmanın dindarlık temasında belirlenen son konusunu oluşturmaktadır. PK filminde özellikle din adına yapılan bazı davranışların doğrudan eleştirildiği görülmektedir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 1:26:56-1:27:40). Eleştirilen dini davranışlara Tanrıların süt ile yıkanması, tapınaklara yuvarlanılarak ya da dizlerin üzerinde gidilmesi, türbelere kutsallık atfedilmesi ve ağaçlara ip bağlanması örnek olarak verilebilir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 1:07:55, 1:05:34, 1:07:32). Filmde de konu olan İslam'ın yanlış anlaşılmasına mahal verdiği için Kerbela Matemleri kapsamındaki Şiilerce yapılan yumruk, zincir ve bıçak kullanarak kendi vücutlarını harap etmeye yönelik uygulamalar da bunlara dâhil edilebilir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 1:06:45).

PK Filminde Tanrı Tahayyülü

Filmde farklı dinlerin müntesiplerine ait Tanrı tahayyüllerinin olabildiğince objektif bir şekilde izleyiciye sunulmaya çalışıldığı söylenebilir. PK karakterinin bakış açısından Tanrı ile ilgili ilk düşünce onun, insanlarla birlikte yaşamasıdır. Tanrının insanlarla iletişim kuracak milyonlarca *evi* vardır. Filmin ilgili sahnesinde tapınak, kilise ve cami gibi kutsal kabul edilen mekânlar ev olarak tanımlanmaktadır (Hirani, 2014a, s. 52:15). Objektif bakıldığında filmde verilen mesajlardan birinin "Dinleri birbirine üstün kılmaya çalışmıyoruz." şeklinde olduğu rahatlıkla ifade edilebilir. Örneğin filmde PK'in, Tanrı'ya ulaşma çabası içerisinde ümitsiz bir haldeyken:

"Lütfen… Ellerimi kavuşturup mu yoksa dizlerimin üstünde mi ya da alnım secdede mi konuşayım sana? Çanla mı uyandırayım seni? Yoksa hoparlör ile mi? Gita'yı mı Kur'an'ı mı İncil'i mi okuyayım? Her müdürün başka söylüyor. Kimi ille de pazartesi oruç tutulur kimi Salı diyor. Kimi güneş doğduktan sonra kimi

battıktan sonra yemek yenmez diyor. Kimi ineğe tap diyor kimi onu kurban et. Kimi yalın ayak tapınağa yolluyor kimi ayakkabıyla kiliseye. Hangisinin doğru olduğu hakkında hiçbir fikrim yok. Artık dayanamıyorum...''

ifadelerini kullandığı bir sahneye yer verilmektedir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 1:08:44). Bu ve bunun gibi pek çok sahneden hareketle her dinin kendine özgü inanç, ibadet ve Tanrı tahayyülü etrafında ele alındığı görülmektedir.

Filmde insanın gelişim ve dini gelişim evrelerine benzer bir sürecin de izlendiği söylenebilir. Örneğin Piaget (2016), çocukların kendi dünyalarını algılama biçimlerinin çocukluk dönemi boyunca sistematik bir şekilde değiştiğini, bilişsel gelişimin çocuklar büyüdükçe bir dizi evrelerden geçerek ilerlediğini öne sürmüştür (s. 81-84). Bu evrelerle birlikte insandaki din ve Tanrı algısı da değişime uğramaktadır (Karaca, 2016, s. 28-29). Filmde PK de bebekler gibi bu dünyaya çıplak gelmiştir. PK karakterinin görüldüğü ilk sahnede dikkat edilirse tepkileri çevreyi tanımak üzerinedir. Bu davranış, Piaget'nin (2016) bilişsel gelişim teorisinde *duyuşsal-devimsel* evreye tekabül etmektedir (s. 27-30). PK bir süre sonra konuşmayı öğrenmiştir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 48:53). İşlem öncesi evrenin özellikleri filmin bu kısmında yansıtılmıştır. Aynı döneme yönelik başka bir dikkat çekici unsur ise PK'in dil öğrenene kadar bir yerlinin bakımına ve gözetimine ihtiyaç duyduğu sahnelerdir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 41:40-50:40). Piaget'ye (2016) göre çocuk, bu dönemde ailesine bağımlı bir haldedir. Algıladığı şeyin realiteye eşit olduğu bu dönemde algısal olarak bir boyuta odaklanan çocuk, iki ya da daha fazla boyut arasında düzen sağlama yetisinden yoksundur (s.81-84). Filmde bu durum *para esprisi* ile anlatılmaktadır. PK, bir şekilde üzerinde bir adamın olduğu (Mahatma Gandhi'nin resmi) kâğıt ile yiyecek alınabildiğini keşfeder. Daha sonra üzerinde o adamın resmi olan her şeyi biriktirir. İki ya da daha fazla boyut arasındaki ilişkiyi kuramadığı için Şekil 10'da da görüldüğü üzere resimleri de para gibi algılar (Hirani, 2014a, s. 37:40-38:56).

Şekil 10. PK Karakterinin Gandhi Posteriyle Havuç Satın Almak İstemesi

PK'in zihnindeki, çocuklardaki gibi somut düşünce evresine denk bir Tanrı tahayyülü filmin birkaç noktasında yansıtılmıştır (Hirani, 2014a, s. 52:14-55:15, 59:46, 1:11:00). Bu dönemde her inanç, ibadet ve Tanrı mutlak olarak haktır, sorgulanmaz. Piaget'ye (2016) göre, çocuklar bu evrede mantıksal kuralları ve sınıflandırmaları kullanabilmekte; ancak bunları sadece somut olay ve objelere uygulayabilmektedir (s.84-94). Bu evrenin filmde yansımalarını bulmak mümkündür. Örneğin PK, tapınaktan isteği kabul olmadığı için bağışını geri almak ister. Tanrı kavramının insanlar için kutsal olduğunu anladığından yanaklarına Tanrılarının suretlerini yapıştırır. Tapınağın bağış kutusundan para çaldığını zanneden görevliler PK'e vurmak istediğinde o, resimleri görevlilere gösterir ve onlar da PK'e vurmaktan vazgeçerler (Hirani, 2014a, s. 26:25-27:05).

PK karakteri, zamanın ilerlemesi ve yaşadıkları sonucunda *soyut işlemler dönemine* geçmiş ve Tanrı ile ilgili düşünceleri olduğu gibi kabul etmek yerine sorgulamaya başlamıştır. İnsanların karanlık, bencil ve ikiyüzlü olabildiklerini gördükçe PK'in zihnindeki sorgulama aracılığıyla bir sonuca ulaşmıştır: Aslında dünyada iki Tanrı bulunmaktadır. Birincisi, insanların çıkarlarına hizmet edip onları bulunduğu kötü konuma razı olmaları için umutlandıran, sorgulatmayan, cahil bırakan, absürt istekleri ve paraya ihtiyacı olan *insanın yarattığı* Tanrıdır. Bu Tanrı, insanları korku ve ümit ile yönetmektedir. İnsanlara *wrong number* (yanlış numara) vermektedir. Bu Tanrının dininde üç kuruşa satın alınan bir mantra insanları kötülüklerden koruyabilir ya da onları çok zengin edebilir. Eşyaları altına çevirebilen dini bir lideri olsa bile insanlardan bağış toplayabilir. Kişi hastalandığında tavsiye olarak hastaneyi değil, Tibet'in binlerce basamaklı tapınağına seyahati önerebilir. İnsanları yanlış yönlendirebilir; "Müslümanlar ihanet eder." ve "Müslümanlar teröristtir." diyebilir. Hinduları hırsızlıkla suçlayabilir. "İş bulmak için inek beslemelisin." ya da "Hristiyan olmazsan lanetlenirsin." şeklinde tavsiye ve uyarılarda bulunabilir (Hirani, 2014a, s. 19:00, 56:00, 1:44:01, 1:04:31, 1:08:04, 2:08:10,).

İkinci Tanrı tahayyülünde yaratılmış olan insandır. Yaratıcı olan Tanrı, kulunun isteğini yerine getirmek için absürt şartlara ihtiyaç duymaz. İnsanlar tarafından korunmaya muhtaç değildir. Maddi gereksinimlere sahip değildir. Tüm evren hâlihazırda O'nun tarafından yaratılmıştır (Hirani, 2014a, s. 1:27:25, 2:08:10). Bunlarla birlikte PK'in ifadelerindeki iki Tanrıyı farklı şekilde yorumlamak da mümkündür. Burada kastedilenin aslında tek bir yaratıcı Tanrı olduğu; insanın düşünceleri sonucunda *kurgulanan* Tanrının ise aslından ayrı tutularak *insanın yarattığı ikinci Tanrı* şeklinde ifade edildiği söylenebilir.

Sonuç ve Öneriler

PK filmi üzerinde yapılan içerik analizleri sonucunda filmde herhangi bir tebliğ/misyonerlik faaliyetine rastlanılmamıştır. Hindistan'ın çok dinli yapısının betimlenebilmesi için Hinduizm, Budizm, Sihizm, Caynizm, Hristiyanlık ve İslam dinlerine filmde yer verildiği görülmüştür. Dünya üzerinde yaygın dinlerin neredeyse tamamına yer vermesi açısından filmin Hindistan üzerinden kurgulanması son derece anlaşılabilir bir durum olsa da Yahudiliğin dışarda bırakılmasının bilinçli bir tercih olup olmadığı belirlenememiştir. Hindistan'daki nüfus oranları göz önüne alındığında Hinduizm, Hristiyanlık ve İslam dininin filmde ön plana çıkarılması ise normal bir durum olarak değerlendirilebilir.

PK filmindeki eleştiri kategorilerini dini lider (günümüz toplumundaki temsilcileri) ve din adamları, inanç esasları, ibadet adı altında icra edilen halk inanışları, inanç sömürüsü, misyonerlik, din-terör ilişkisi, yetkeci din ve dış güdümlü dindarlık oluşturmaktadır. Araştırma sonucunda doğrudan inanç esaslarına yönelik eleştirinin yalnızca Hristiyanlık dinine yönelik hiciv tarzıyla yapıldığı söylenebilir.

Filmde dinin daha çok umut ve anlam verme fonksiyonunun ön plana çıkarıldığı gözlemlenmiştir. Bireyin dini kendi menfaatleri için fayda vasıtası olarak kullanması anlamındaki Allport'un dış güdümlü dini yönelim sınıflamasına filmin pek çok sahnesinde yer verildiği ve eleştirildiği görülmüştür. Bu bağlamda PK filminin, kurumsal din adına yapılanlar kadar bireysel dindarlık adına yapılanların da düşünülmesini amaçladığı söylenebilir.

PK filminde her bir dinin Tanrı tahayyülünün kendi düşünceleri etrafında objektif olmaya çalışılarak ele alındığı ve sahnelendiği söylenebilir. PK karakterinin düşüncelerinin ve Tanrı tahayyülünün şekillenmesinde de insanın gelişim ve dini gelişim evrelerine benzer bir sürecin izlendiği görülmektedir.

Ana karakter olan PK'in bireysel dini gelişim yolculuğunun sorgulama aşamasına ulaştığı ve *insanların yarattığı Tanrı*'dan ziyade *evreni yaratan Tanrı*'ya doğru yöneldiği söylenebilir. Buna paralel olarak PK karakterinin zihninde Tanrı tahayyülünün de son şeklini aldığı ifade edilebilir. Ona göre dünyada iki tanrı bulunmaktadır. Birincisi, insanların çıkarlarına hizmet edip onları bulunduğu kötü konuma razı olmaları için umutlandıran, absürt istekleri olan, sorgulatmayan, cahil bırakan, korkutan, tehdit eden ve paraya ihtiyacı olan *insanın kurguladığı Tanrı*'dır. İkinci Tanrı ise *yaratıcı* konumundadır. Yaratıcı olan Tanrı, kulunun isteğini yerine getirmek için absürt şartlara ihtiyaç duymaz. İnsanlar tarafından korunmaya muhtaç değildir. Maddi gereksinimlere sahip değildir. Tüm evren hâlihazırda O'nun tarafından yaratılmıştır.

PK filmi bağlamında din, dindarlık ve Tanrı tahayyülü konularını ele alan bu çalışma, gelecekte yapılacak araştırmalar için yeni sorular ve tartışma alanları ortaya koymaktadır. Yapılacak araştırmalar için birkaç öneri burada ifade edilebilir. Öncelikle bu çalışma yönetmenin hayatı ile daha önceki filmleri dikkate alınmadan gerçekleştirilmiştir. Konuyla ilgili yapılacak yeni çalışmalarda bu değişkenler de araştırmaya dahil edilebilir. Buna ek olarak bu araştırmada belirlenen kod ve temaların sahne süreleri hesaplanıp fikir vermesi açısından en azından nominal düzeyde istatistikleri çıkarılabilir.

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Son Notlar

[1] Özellikle çocuk psikolojisi ve gelişim dönemleri hakkındaki düşünceleri PK karakterinin gelişiminin analizinde ve Tanrı tahayyülünün anlaşılmasında oldukça faydalı olmuştur.

Religion, Religiosity and the Imagination of God in the Movie PK

Hüseyin Cihat ŞAHİN[*]

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Today, the cinema has emerged as an art form that reflects, discusses, and influences human religious feelings, thoughts, and behaviors with numerous films and scenes. The scientific branch of religious psychology examines religious phenomena from a psychological perspective, addressing anything within spiritual experiences and behaviors that carries religious qualities. In this context, it is believed that religious psychology studies should pay more attention to cinema and film analyses. Based on this idea, the film PK, a production of the Bollywood cinema, is examined from the perspective of psychology of religion in this study.

The fundamental research problem is determined as the question, "How are the concepts of religion, religiosity, and God image reflected on screen in the PK film?" The aim of this study is to determine how the concepts of religion, religiosity, and the God's image are portrayed in the PK film. Given the cinema's capability to convey messages to broad audiences quickly and easily, it is essential for studies in religious psychology to investigate how the subjects it deals with are portrayed. Additionally, it is hoped that this study will contribute positively to the literature on the relationship between cinema and religious psychology and serve as a reference for similar studies in the future. Due to the researcher's lack of knowledge of the Hindi language, the content analysis of the film was conducted based on its Turkish translation, assuming the accuracy of the translation.

Method

In this study, a qualitative research design was preferred to ensure detailed descriptions of the context and phenomena, and to seek answers to how and why certain behaviors occur. Documentary analysis, one of the qualitative data collection methods, was used in this research. The PK film was subjected to content analysis from the perspective of religious psychology. Through the analysis, codes related to the literature of religious psychology were determined. The codes identified in the study are: Obsessive behaviors, religiosity, God image, religious conversion, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, religious disposition, worship, terrorism, religion and its function, religious sentiments, development, religious development, trust, clothing preferences, and places of worship. Based on the evaluation of the codes, religion, religiosity, and God image were chosen as themes in the study. The findings and interpretations of the study were also

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* Res. Assist., Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, e-mail: cihat.sahin@erdogan.edu.tr, orcid.org/0000-0002-2681-0584, Rize, Türkiye

separately addressed for each of these themes and prepared according to the chronological order in the film.

Religion and Religiosity

There are different views regarding the etymology of the word religion. In the Turkish language, religion is defined as "A social institution that systematizes belief in supernatural powers, various sacred beings, and worshiping God" (TDK, 1988, 378). In this study, Fromm's definition of religion, as "A system of thoughts and actions shared by a group that provides a ground and an object of worship for individuals to find their direction" will be used operationally.

The difficulties encountered in defining religion are also evident in defining religiosity. In the Turkish dictionary, religious is defined as *someone with strong religious beliefs, adherent to religious rules*, and religiosity is defined as *the state of being religious* (TDK, 1988, 379). The variable nature of religiosity, like religion, constitutes the main reason why a common definition of religiosity cannot be made, stemming from the criteria researchers choose when defining culture and religiosity. Just as there are various proposals regarding the dimensionalization of religiosity, only Glock's five-fold approach and Allport's two-dimensional approach to religiosity were used in the study due to being more suitable for the subject of the research.

God Image

It can be said that the expressions used in studies related to God primarily revolve around the concept of God and God image. In theological approaches, the term concept of God is more commonly used, while in psychological approaches, the term God image is preferred. The term concept of God mainly refers to the intellectual and mental definition of the word God i.e., *the God of theologians, whose existence or non-existence is debated with metaphysical deductions and does not directly affect us* (Hayta, 2019, 52-54).

The concept of God differs from the God image due to the fact that the concept of God does not contain emotions, is at the level of pure knowledge, and includes knowledge of beliefs about God, rational and general information about God (Karaca & Hacıkeleşoğlu, 2020).

Findings

Religion in the PK Film

As a result of the analysis, it was observed that each of the religions mentioned in the film was introduced and criticized, but no religion was evangelized or preached by highlighting its positive aspects.

In the introductions of religions, emphasis is generally placed on visual and auditory motives rather than ideologies. Prominent elements in the introduction of Hinduism include deity statues, deity pictures, sacred places like the Ganges River and Vimanas, and rituals. When emphasizing Christianity, bell sounds, cross necklaces, churches, and ceremonies are used. In the introduction of Islam, main elements include mosques, the call to prayer, prayer rituals, clothing, and the crescent and the star symbols.

Critiques on various aspects of religion can be categorized in the film. These include criticisms of contemporary religious leaders and clergy, belief principles, the biological origins of religious

inclination, the behavioral aspect of folk beliefs practiced with an intention of worship, exploitation of belief, missionary activities, the relationship between religion and terrorism, and externally motivated religiosity. In addition to these, criticisms of the authoritarian religion and secular authoritarian religion encountered in Fromm's thoughts are also addressed in the film.

Religiosity in the PK Film

The first point emphasized in the film regarding the theme of religiosity is Allport's proposed internalized-externalized religious orientation for determining religious orientation. Briefly, the externalized religious orientation, meaning the individual using religion as a means of benefit for his/her own interest (Allport, 2014, 13), is emphasized in many scenes of the film.

It is observed that PK, due to the sensitivity of the subject it deals with, has been very careful and selective in its descriptions. In scenes where religiosity is addressed, not only traditional perspectives of worship are reflected, but also many dimensions of religiosity are emphasized.

In the film, certain behaviors observed in the name of religion are directly criticized (PK, 2014, 1:26:56-1:27:40). Examples of criticized religious behaviors include washing idols with milk, rolling to temples or walking on knees, attributing sanctity to shrines, and tying threads to trees (PK, 2014, 1:07:55, 1:05:34, 1:07:32). Also included in the film, the practices of Shiites within the context of the Kerbela Mourning, who harm themselves by using fists, chains, and knives, is portrayed due to the misunderstandings it may lead to about Islam (PK, 2014, 1:06:45).

God Image in the PK Film

It can be said that in the film, efforts have been made to present the God image of followers of different religions to the audience as impartially as possible. Objectively, it can be stated that one of the messages conveyed in the film is "We are not trying to make any religions or Gods superior to each other." It is observed from many scenes that each religion is dealt with around its unique beliefs, worship, and God image.

In the film, a process similar to human development and religious developmental stages can be observed through the adventure of the PK character after he descends upon Earth. Similarly, PK's God image has gradually shifted from a concrete structure to abstract over time; instead of accepting his thoughts about God as they are, he starts questioning them.

Conclusion

In this study, the PK film, a production of the Bollywood cinema, was analyzed in terms of religion, religiosity, and God image themes from the perspective of psychology of religion. Among the qualitative methods, documentary analysis and content analysis techniques were used in the research. It was observed that satire predominated in the portrayal of the PK film. Criticisms in the film include contemporary religious leaders and clergy, belief principles, some religiously inclined folk beliefs, exploitation of belief, the relationship between religion and terrorism, missionary activities, and externally motivated religiosity. Additionally, no missionary or proselytizing activity was observed towards any religion during the film. It was also observed that a process similar to the human development and religious developmental stages was followed through the PK character's thoughts and God image.

Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors
Araştırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütülmüştür.
The research was conducted by a single author.
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Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest
Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.
There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.
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