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An Ottoman Example of the Perception of Other Religions in Islamic-Thought

Osmanlı Örneğinde İslam Düşüncesinde Diğer Dinleri Algılama

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Abstract

Today, religious education programs are generally created within the framework of one of the religious conceptions that emerged in the historical process. Generally, the interpretation adopted is the normative, exclusionary, politicized approach formed within its historical conditions. However, moral axis religious interpretations that take the individual to the center within the understanding of religion in history are more dominant. Since we cannot be separated from our historical roots in the formation of the understanding of religion, can it be possible to put forward an interpretation of religion by analyzing the understanding of religion that emerged in the historical process, by using both its own sub-interpretations and those embracing the other?

In this article, madrasa and takka Islam in the Ottoman example were evaluated as an answer to how we can benefit from tradition in the creation of religious education and teaching programs with content analysis method. The reason for the selection of these two institutions is that although the first goes down to the public, it is generally the institutions that train staff for almost every level of the state and represent the official understanding of religion, and the second is that they continue religious education for the public. While the understanding of Islam created by the madrasah is more prescriptive and fiqh based, 11-17. Islamic understanding created by centuries of lodges is human-centered, prioritizing the individual and universal values, aiming to create a culture of coexistence and to produce moral values. Therefore, they differ significantly in perception of other religions.

The article has the quality to present historical materials that will contribute to positive evaluations about how Islamic religious education and teaching should gain a perspective when teaching other religions.

Keywords: Islam, Tradition, Other, Religious Education.

Öz

Bir arada yaşama kültürünü oluşturmama, çevre duyarsızlığı, insan hakları ihlali, insanlarla empati kuramama vb. bugün dünyamızın en başta gelen problemlerindedir. Bu sorunların elbette siyasi, ekonomik, kültürel, tarihi, dini, psikolojik ve sosyal pek çok nedeni vardır. Ancak, küçük bir köy haline gelen günümüz dünyasında bu problemlerin -daha yaşanılabilir bir dünya oluşturabilmek için- aşılmasında çaba harcamak önemlidir ve gerekir. Bireyin öteki algısını oluşturan en güçlü etkenlerden biri olarak din anlayışının adı geçen problemlerin oluşmasındaki rolü de inkâr edilemez. Bu nedenle bireyde olumlu ve yapıcı bir öteki algısının oluşmasında ister yaygın isterse örgün olsun din eğitiminden gelecek katkı görmezlikten gelinemez. Bugün din eğitimi, inanılan dinin mensuplarına karşı nasıl davranılacağını kazandırdığı kadar, ötekine de nasıl bir tutum ve davranışta bulunulması gerektiğinin de üzerinde durmak zorundadır. Bu ise öğretim programlarında “nasıl bir din anlayışı” yanında “nasıl bir öteki anlayışı” sorusunun cevabının da yer almasıyla mümkündür.

Bugün din eğitimi programları genelde tarihsel süreç içerisinde ortaya çıkan din anlayışlarından birisi çerçevesinde oluşturulmaktadır. Genelde de benimsenen yorum, kendi tarihi şartları içerisinde oluşmuş kuralcı, dışlayıcı, siyasileşmiş yaklaşımdır.

Halbuki tarihteki din anlayışları içerisinde bireyi merkeze alan, ahlak eksenli din yorumları daha baskındır. Din anlayışının oluşmasında tarihi köklerimizden ayırlamayacağımıza göre, acaba tarihsel süreç içerisinde ortaya çıkan din anlayışlarının analiziyle, dinin, günümüz problemlerinin aşılmasında hem kendi alt yorumlarını hem de ötekini kucaklayıcı olanlarından yararlanarak bir yorumunu ortaya koymak mümkün olabilir mi?

Bu makalede, içerik analizi yöntemiyle din eğitim ve öğretimi programlarının oluşturulmasında gelenekten nasıl yararlanabileceğimizin bir cevabı olarak Osmanlı örneğinde medrese ve tekke İslam'ı değerlendirilmiştir. Bu iki kurumun seçilmesinin sebebi, birincisi halka inmekle beraber, genelde devletin hemen her kademesine eleman yetiştiren ve resmi din anlayışını temsil eden, ikincisi ise halka yönelik din eğitimini sürdüren kurumlar olmasıdır. Medresenin oluşturduğu İslam anlayışı daha kuralcı ve fıkıh temelli iken, 11-17. asır tekkelerinin oluşturduğu İslam anlayışı insan merkezli, bireyi ve evrensel değerleri önceleyen, bir arada yaşama kültürü oluşturma amacıyla olan ve ahlaki değerler üretmeye yöneliktir. Bu sebeple, diğer dinleri algılama konusunda da önemli bir farklılık gösterirler.

Makale, günümüzde İslam din eğitim ve öğretiminin, diğer dinleri öğretime konu ederken nasıl bir bakış açısı kazandırması gerektiği konusunda olumlu anlamda değerlendirmeler yapmamıza katkı sağlayacak tarihi malzemeler sunacak niteliğe sahiptir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din eğitimi, Gelenek, İslam, Osmanlı Örneği, Diğer topluluklar



Introduction

The developments in science and technology that have occurred over the last two centuries have provided experiences equivalent to a human adventure spanning hundreds of thousands of years. Thanks to science and technology, human beings have discovered unprecedented things and surpassed so-called unsurpassable thresholds. However, human science and technology has also threatened the future of humanity. Modern science and technology warn us what humanity will encounter when it ignores the reality of 'man' and 'the laws of creation' (Guénon, 1979).

Human beings are not wholly independent of nature. From the scientific and technological perspective, nature is an object to be used, consumed, and constantly exploited. The environmental pollution that threatens the future of humanity is the inevitable consequence of this approach. Excessive individualism drags humanity along with a meaninglessness and loneliness that daily increases.

In addition, globalization, as well as bringing positive progress through increased knowledge of other cultures and beliefs, has also brought some negative consequences. Some dispute the negative consequence of excessive secularization. However, violence and terror has now achieved a global dimension that threatens the future of all humanity (Berger - Huntington, 2003; Çapcıoğlu, 2008). To address this, we must start by strengthening people's moral conscience, giving them a greater awareness of the claims and benefits of moral values, and in this way promote the formation of a character shaped by self-control, rather than by egoism. If we fail at this, we shall have no effective criterion for defining what is right and what is wrong, and we shall slip towards annihilation (Bauman, 1999). Undoubtedly, we do not need to *reinvent* these moral values again. These are the values that exist within the three great religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These all bring with them principles that need to be accommodated by secular society as well (Onat, 2007, 6).

Violence and terror have no part in religion. In its essence, no religion encourages them. The common ground of religions is to provide security for life and property, and to encourage goodness and righteousness. The problem does not lie in the religions, but in the perception of some religious people about their religion. Hence our ability to overcome religious terror on a global scale depends primarily on our achieving sound knowledge of the religions. All religions are on the side of humanity. Religion is not itself a goal. Religions are a means of contributing to the humane improvement of humanity.

If we focus on the heart of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, we may summarize their common moral values as righteousness, purity, goodness and charity, reverence for the elderly, and not harming others. Unlawful murder is banned in all religions. All religions are against theft. False testimony is not tolerated by any of them. These core benefits are held in common by all religions and must be brought to prominence through sound knowledge. This will prevent people viewing the followers of other religions negatively in the name of religion. In order to overcome our global spiritual crisis, we must base our lives on a new balance.

It is time to recognize that the spiritual dimension of life is of equal importance to its material dimension. It became obvious in the twentieth century that we had to say once again, 'never again'. If humanity is to take its destiny into its own hands within a harmonious world, it is inevitable that it must put moral rules at the centre (Brzezinski, 1999, 71-72).

As a result of globalization, we live in a multicultural world where individuals from different cultural, religious, economic, political, and ethnic origins live together. These differences can be seen in every sphere of life, starting from the areas of religion, politics, economics, and etiquette. Although we know that some in the past have lived together amicably with members of different religions, the great majority of them lived their lives in the limited world that they inherited from their own past (Çapcıoğlu, 2012, 36). Factors such as developments in technology and communication, which allow us to receive knowledge produced in any other part of the world in a very short time, have not only accelerated contact between different communities but have also made this inevitable. This new situation brought about the problem of 'the other': the problem of knowing, accepting, and living together with the other. We mean by 'the other' here an individual or citizen who differs from us by his or her clothes, behaviour, eating and drinking, language and opinions; but who could be our closest neighbour in a world that has now become a global village (Robertson, 1992).

Humanity is passing through a difficult and stormy period. In this period, humanity does not only need political programmes and activities. It also needs a vision to allow peoples, ethnic and moral groups, and religions to live together on our planet in peace, with common responsibility: a broad vision that requires these hopes, goals, ideals, and values (Küng - Kuschel, 1995, 15).

At this stage in the globalized world, the question arises as to how a believer perceives and relates to members of a different religion. This question necessarily forces all religious people into real conceptual crisis. In addition, religions have sometimes adopted the same, and at other times different approaches to how we should perceive and relate to the other. These different approaches can sometimes be seen among members of the same religion. The problem of how to perceive and relate to the other has become an important topic. It is one about which Muslim thinkers have always been concerned.

In general, attitudes towards the other can be placed in one of three categories: exclusive, inclusive, and pluralistic. According to the exclusivists, the truth can be obtained only by their own religion. There is, therefore, only one truth and one (their own) path to salvation. As there is no salvation outside their religion, all people must be invited to the salvation offered by this religion. According to inclusivists, however, truth may be found in different religions, though it might also be absent. But as the most excellent religion is their own, absolute truth is only to be found in their own religion. The best guide to salvation is therefore the way of their own religion. According to the pluralists, most religions - even all of them - are ways that offer a guide to truth. And none among them is superior (Köylü, 2001, 29-66).



At this point, the question inevitably arises as to which of these three categories represents the attitude of Islam towards the other. It is impossible to respond to this question with only one, permanently valid answer. This is also not possible for the other religions, because attitudes can change according to time, place, and other conditions. Our concern is to find an answer to the question whether or not Islam can ever present a pluralistic worldview. The answer here depends on what may be understood by the concept of pluralism. If we understand it in terms of the presence of social, political, economic, and cultural variety, Islam is pluralistic in the sense that the religion first came into being and later spread in this way. No religious movement ever arose and spread in isolation. Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Judaism are all pluralistic in the sense that all of them were born, developed, and became world religions in societies in which different religions existed (Okuyan, 2001, 163-204; Yaran, 2001, 67-69).

If, however, we understand pluralism as a theory that proposes that every religion is the same and that all of them lead to the same truth, so that Islam is viewed as relative and just like other religions, then Islam would not accept this understanding. Of course, there are many common points within the essence of the religions. But it is important to accept the differences as they are, and to tolerate them (Halliday, 1998).

If pluralism is defined as difference in essence coupled with peaceful co-existence, and as a worldview in which the rights of the other are guaranteed, then many Muslims will agree that, in this sense, Islam is a pluralistic religion on such an understanding. The Muslim community accepts itself as one community among other communities created by Allah. There are many examples in Islamic history which show the acceptance of this understanding. One of the first important examples of this is the Constitution of Madina, executed by the Prophet Muhammad. The Constitution put Muslims and Jews together under a conscious unity that defined the rights of the other in both theory and practice and presented ways of being united (Hamidullah, 2011, 177-182). Another example is the tolerance of Muslims toward Hindus in India. According to Islam, Hindus are not accepted as people of the book (*ahl-i kitap*), but they nevertheless enjoyed the same rights, and were accepted and respected as citizens.

Today we see that tradition has a definite role in how a member of one religion perceives the other. Certainly, there are negative ways of perceiving the other in the traditions of almost all religions. Such traditions are transmitted to later generations through education. If negative perceptions and examples in the tradition are highlighted through education, then education will be one of the factors that plays a negative role in the perception of a member of one religion by another.

New interpretations and improvements about the perception of the other that occurred under new conditions at certain times, places, and circumstances are also important. The responsibilities of education involve not only that of transmitting the tradition to new generations, but also that of raising individuals who can improve this understanding (Altaş, 2003). There is therefore an important role for education in reviewing the tradition that is inherited from the past. But, in order to make a positive change about the perception of the other through education, education needs to be improved in terms of its goals, contents, and methods.

In this article, an analysis is undertaken of two different paradigms as representative of Islamic perception by reference to the madrasas and takkas of the Ottomans, as an example of how we may make use of the tradition to progress a positive approach to 'the other' in the curricula of Islamic religious education.

The conception of Madrasa Islam is generally viewed in the history of Islamic thought as a theory which utilized mostly historical and traditional methodologies. The madrasa by losing its initial dynamism, especially as a result of political and social conflicts experienced after Abbasid Dynasty, gradually became more literal, and paid less significance to the rational sciences as compared to earlier periods (Makdisi, 1981). The sects (*madhhabs*) shaped the existing products, instead of their methodology, and became a ponderous madrasa instead of prolific madrasa. This situation has been transmitted to the Ottoman Empire/Period (Lekesiz, 1991; Kâtip Çelebi, 1972).

The concept of Takka Islam represents the perspective of mystical religion. The main characteristics of this perspective are: contemplation of the metaphysical world; acceptance of one resource for all beings; love and tolerance to all creatures, but primarily to human beings; esoteric interpretation; a concern for art and music; individualism; and an emphasis on moral values (Ocak, 1998, 2/113-114; Kutlu, 2001, 17-18).

1. The concept of madrasa Islam

The Ottoman state is marked by an organized political authority and state tradition, legislative and executive bodies, and institutions and rules. Ottoman society was formed of administrators, scholars, military men, vocational groups, clergy, and other social classes. Business, agriculture, art, and scientific activities have all been of vital importance. In their lands, different religions and ethnic groups lived alongside one another (İnalçık, 1973; Halaçoğlu, 1991). Among the Ottomans, religion played a very significant role in the political and administrative formation of the state. This formation was managed with the help of madrasa scholars. The scriptural and formalistic Madrasa conception of Islam, based on *fiqh*, has dominated the formation of the political and administrative structure of the Ottoman state. Its legal system was created by madrasa scholars who based their jurisprudence on interpretations of religious texts. Behaviour towards members of other religions living in Ottoman lands was prescribed within the juristic interpretation formed by these ulama (Uzunçarşılı, 1984).

These interpretations are as follows. Within Islamic law, there are Muslims and non-Muslims. The non-Muslims, politically, are divided into two categories: *Ahl al-Harb* (those who are at war with Muslims), and *Ahl al-'Ahd* (those who have a treaty with Muslims). The *Ahl al-'Ahd* have been divided into three categories: (1) *Ahl al-Dhimma* (those who accepted the protection of the Islamic state), (2) the *Mu'âhad* (those with whom a peace treaty has been made), and (3) the *Musta'min* (those to whom assurance of security has been granted) (Şener, 1983, 41). The Islamic jurists classified non-Muslims into two categories, in accordance with their religion and beliefs: (1) *Ahl al-Kitab* (those to whom a divine scripture



has been sent), and (2) those who are not *Ahl al-Kitab* (the pagan Mushriks and the Magians are in this category).

In Islamic law, non-Muslims possessed different statutes according to their position. As citizenship has been defined as 'the political and legal bond' between the individual and the state, all who permanently live in an Islamic country are the citizens of that country, regardless of whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim. The non-Muslim *Ahl al-Kitab*, as long as they agree to live under the sovereignty of the Islamic state, are given the 'protection (*dhimma*) of Allah and His Messenger' and are therefore called *dhimmi* (protected). (*Dhimma* means protection and providing safety.) The Islamic state pledges to the *dhimmis*, on behalf of Allah, to protect them against any possible internal or external dangers, and gives assurance as to their life, property, chastity, and their religious life and places of worship. According to this provision, the *dhimmis*, as long as they do not revolt against the state, have the same rights and responsibilities which Muslim citizens enjoy. They have the right of marriage and being overseers to their children; and they have the right to appoint trustees, receive alimony and obtain inheritance, and to obtain property and estates. They may practise their rituals as they wish. They may open places of worship. They are free with respect to their teaching and education (Eryılmaz, 1992; Şener, 1983, 42-48).

In the Ottoman state, the conception of official religion and state religion provided a scriptural interpretation of what it is to live together with the followers of other beliefs living on the same land and implemented this. A social agreement has been constituted as a way of living together. The Ottoman order was an order based on diversities, although 'sameness' or 'similarity' was essential, rather than 'diversity.' This body has been formulated in accordance with differences in belief and protected by laws. Plurality, in the fullest meaning of the term, has been perceived as protecting and sustaining diversity, and has been implemented. On this model, the various religious and cultural factions of the public realm come together; but they never become other than themselves. Each group maintains its own religion, language, thoughts, and form of life. They live together under the Ottoman political system but have never been assimilated (Yılmaz, 1971; Aydın, 1985).

A different conception of Madrasa Islam conforms to its scripturality and formalism. This conception formed the legal foundations of living together with followers of other beliefs in the same land. However, this conception, based on *fiqh*, has partially eroded with the disappearance of the madrasa, due to changes which the social structure has witnessed from the nineteenth century onwards. Some important aspects of Madrasa Islam regarding perception of the other can be beneficial today, guaranteeing the rights of others in terms of law. However, living together today is not possible solely through legal arrangements. But it may be possible by people's mutual willingness to live together, irrespective of the cultural, religious, and ethnic differences between them.

2. The concept of takka Islam

The foundation of Takka Islam lies in *sufi* thought. The institutionalized state of *sufi* thought is designated '*tarîqa* (the *sufi* order)'. The place where *sufi* education is given is the '*takka*'. The *sufi* orders that emerged in the Islamic world may be classified in two groups. The first developed mostly under the impact of Platonism. For example, the concept of *wahdat al-wucûd* rejects sources of knowledge other than intuition and asserts that intuition

is universal and the sole source of knowledge. It cannot be claimed that this conception has been generally accepted. The second group shaped by Turkish people. Treating human existence as central, this sufi conception gives priority to training in morality and of the self, based on repentance, endurance, generosity, gratitude, love and fear of God, glorification, submission, sincerity, and so forth. Favoured by the public, it became widespread. Within this framework, in the foundation of Ottoman Takka Islam, are to be found the sufi orders such as Yasawism, whose formation started at the end of the eleventh century, and later Mawlawism and Baktashism, which developed around Yasawism (Arberry, 2004; Sunar, 1966).

The concept of 'other' in the Takka Islam of the Ottomans, in contrast to that of Madrasa Islam, does not rest only upon formal and legal regulations. In Takka Islam, there is empathy, respect, love, and tolerance towards to 'other'. Takka Islam is individualistic, morality-based, and love-founded. It originated from the Islamic concepts of existence and morality. According to sufi thought, existence is divided into two categories: Allah and others. Hence humanity as a whole is equal, as being human and being created. There is no difference among them in being human. Apparent differences only lie in the mundane, temporary things that will no longer exist when this universe perishes. Therefore, arrogance and fury should not be shown to human beings. It is necessary, rather, to practise and disseminate the culture of tolerance. Not breaking hearts is possible by restoring them. Respect and love shown to humanity is - in a way - also shown to the Creator (Öngören, 2000; Yücer, 2003). This has been put into words in the poetry of Yunus Emre, who expressed the understanding of Ottoman Takka Islam:

Tolerate the created

For the sake of the Creator (Aksakal, 2005, 67).

The heart is the throne of God,

Thus God looks at the heart,

The one is unfortunate of the two worlds,

He who destroys a heart (Aksakal, 2005, 43).

The sufi who practiced these principles comprehended the mysteries of the beings. There is no darkness for him. Wherever he looks, he will see the same reality. He will know that everything has been created by Allah. He will perceive that the being-world has been created for a purpose, and that human beings have been sent to this earth for a reason. There is a masterpiece from Allah in every human being, for Allah had breathed into him His Spirit. For this reason, human beings should not injure other human beings, and should behave towards them in tolerance. Plurality is part of the manifest world and is the reflection of the One. The main thing is love. And the best love is the divine love shown to the real being: that is, to Allah (Köprülü, 1993; Kara, 1985).



In the foundation of Takka Islam there resides good morality, the attributes of which include tolerance, sympathy, absolution, forgiveness, humility, gratefulness to Allah for the blessings He has given (no matter how little or bountiful), constancy, keeping an open table, ignoring the faults of other people, not having rancour or jealousy, being knowledgeable, exchanging greetings, enjoining the good and prohibiting the bad, seeing everybody as equal, patience, contentment, and honesty. Within these moral principles, it is necessary to show virtue towards the followers of other beliefs. For example, in the Ottoman period we find these statements about the approach to 'the others' from sufis who were influential on Takka Islam:

It is sunnah of the Prophet,
Not to hurt the human being,
Even though he/she can be an unbeliever.
Allah is uncomplaisant towards who is callous,
And who hurts a heart (Yasawi, 1992, 57).

Never blame any nation or human being,
Never forget that even your enemy is a human being (Walî, 1971, 82).

Supine is our name/Rancour is our enemy
We are never to be rancorous to anybody
All people are the same to us. (Aksakal, 2005, 84).

This concept of Takka Islam centered moral values in the history of Islamic thought provides us with an attitude for today for admitting and accepting members of different religions as they are, which makes living together possible.

Conclusion

The interpretations of Madrasa and Takka Islam in their approach to 'the other' originated from the Qur'an and the hadiths, the basic sources of Islam. However, they are only interpretations, they do not represent the religion itself. By highlighting human rights and freedoms, however, and showing respect for diversity, it is formalistic and *fiqh* based, due to its influence on the state enforcement ideology. The Madrasa Islam conception goes beyond recognizing 'the other' and establishes what the legal relationship between the other and the state should be. It is also an approach that gives priority to the teaching of moral values by placing the individual and human being in the centre. Therefore, even though the Takka and Zaviyahs were closed down in Turkey, they maintained their influence through various channels. In Turkey today, the sufi interpretations of Yasawism, Mawlavism, and Baktashism are still being adopted in an effective form.

In order to create a culture of compromise, tolerance, and trustworthiness, Turkey today aims at teaching a common basis of Islamic conceptions for those who define themselves as Muslims, through classes in Religious Culture and Ethics that basically adopt a non-sectarian approach. This common ground is formed from the universal values in the Qur'an., It also seeks to develop tolerance towards the beliefs of the followers of all religions in the world, on the basis of knowledge of their religion, through the educational curriculum. It aims at teaching them, not an approach to other religions, but how they should define themselves. In order to realize the aforementioned aims, in the curriculum of the Religious Culture and Ethics classes, special reference has been made to the Turkish-sufi tradition. This development in the curriculum of Islamic religion classes in Turkey is a small, but most significant, step in solving the problems that the world faces, to benefit from the positive contributions of religion.

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