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Dynamics of the Approach to ‘The Other’ in Ottoman State and Its Reflections in the Field of Education

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Dynamics of the Approach to ‘The Other’ in Ottoman State and Its Reflections in the Field of Education

Abstract

The other is a notion that refers to those that are outside the characteristics that a person or group describes themselves. People and societies have different characteristics from each other individually and culturally. Difference is a phenomenon seen in all aspects of life. Faith, language, ethnicity, and cultural differences are phenomena that add meaning and values to human life actually. Nevertheless, these differences can become cause of conflict often. Teaching of preserving, sustaining, respecting of differences and that these are wealth of human life is absolutely necessary for prevent or to keep to the minimum level conflicts. All these can be realized through education and legal regulations. Multiculturalism which means coexistence of cultural differences is one of the main characteristics of human societies. Because of that, problems and solutions related to differences in society also have common sides from yesterday to today. Based on this idea, the aim of the article is to introduce the legal sources of educational rights of subjects belonging to beliefs other than Islam and how this right is used in Ottoman society with a multicultural structure. Firstly, Ottoman legal system is based on Islamic Law. In Islamic Law, duties and responsibilities of muslims and non-muslims are different from each other. But this difference does not mean that non-muslims deprived main rights and freedoms such as faith, worship, education, travel and trade. Islamic law guarantees the fundamental rights of members of different faiths within its structure. In addition, in the Turkish understanding of the state, there is a tradition of respecting differences in the exercise of legal rights. In this respect, the Ottoman State respected the educational rights of its subjects belonging to different ethnicities and religious beliefs on grounds related to religion and state tradition and did not prevent them from using them. It is necessary to divide the Ottoman education system into two periods before and after the Constitutional Reforms (Tanzimat) Era. In both periods muslim and non-muslim’s educational institutions have similiar basic features. Educational institutions of both groups are supported by foundations, and their purpose, program and teachers are religious. After the preparation of the General Education Regulations (Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi) dated 1869 during the Tanzimat period, religious influence on education has been replaced by an understanding based on social needs and equal civil rights. While educational activities were previously carried out only under the Community Foundations, Official Public Schools (mektep) were established in addition to these institutions during the Tanzimat period. As a result of the regulations made in the education system, all citizens were admitted to military and civilian public schools without distinction. Non-muslim members had taken part in commisions which new education system planned, too. Thus, a step was taken towards a secular structure in the field of education as both administration and understanding. In the General Education Regulations, in which the educational organization is organized extensively, non-muslims are also allowed to open private schools for their communities. With the same judicial arrangement, it was permitted to open primitive schools for every religious communities. Since the Abdulhamid II era, religious classes have been included in the programs of secondary schools, but non-muslims have been exempt. The reason why religious classes are included in secondary schools is that non-muslims usually prefer pri-

vate congregations or foreign schools established by them instead of Public Schools. The Ottoman state legally granted rights in the field of education to non-muslims, who held the status of "other" or "minority". Thanks to these rights, no religious and ethnic structure that lived under Ottoman rule for centuries was destroyed, and all differences retained their religious and cultural identity. This understanding and practice should be considered an important experience that should also be considered for today's societies.

Keywords: Religious Education, Ottoman State, Tanzimat, Non-muslim, Multiculturalism

Osmanlı'da 'Öteki' Ne Bakışın Dinamikleri ve Eğitim Alanındaki Yansımaları

Öz

Öteki, kişi ya da bir grubun kendini tanımladığı özelliklerin dışında kalanları ifade eden bir kavramdır. İnsan ve toplumlar bireysel ve kültürel açıdan birbirlerinden farklı özellikler taşırlar. Farklılık, hayatın her alanında görülen bir olgudur. İnanç, dil, etnik köken ve kültürel alanlardaki farklılıklar aslında insan hayatına anlam ve değer katan olgulardır. Bununla birlikte söz konusu farklılıklar çoğu kez birer çatışma nedeni haline gelebilmektedir. Farklılıkların korunması, yaşatılması, saygı duyulması ve insan hayatının zenginliği olduğunun öğretilmesi, çatışmaların önlenmesi ya da asgari düzeye çekilebilmesi açısından mutlaka gereklidir. Bütün bunların gerçekleştirilebilmesi ise eğitim ve hukuki düzenlemeler ile mümkün olabilir. Kültürel farklılıkların bir arada yaşaması anlamını taşıyan çok kültürlülük, insan toplumlarının temel özelliklerinden birisidir. Bu nedenle, toplumda farklılıklarla ilgili yaşanan sorunlar ve çözüm yollarının da dünden bugüne ortak tarafları vardır. Bu düşünceden hareketle makalenin amacı, çok kültürlü yapıya sahip Osmanlı toplumunda, İslam dışındaki inançlara mensup tebaanın eğitim haklarının hukuki kaynakları ve bu hakkın nasıl kullanıldığının tanıtılmasıdır. Öncelikle Osmanlı hukuk sistemi İslam Hukukuna dayanmaktadır. İslam hukukunda Müslüman ve gayrimüslimlerin görev ve sorumlulukları birbirlerinden ayrılmıştır. Ancak bu farklılık gayrimüslimlerin inanç, ibadet, eğitim, seyahat ve ticaret gibi temel hak ve hürriyetlerden mahrum oldukları anlamına gelmez. İslam hukuku, farklı inanç mensuplarının temel haklarını, kendi yapısı içinde güvence altına alır. Bunun ötesinde Türk devlet anlayışında, farklılıkların hukuki hakları kullanmalarına saygılı olmak geleneği vardır. Bu itibarla Osmanlı Devleti din ve devlet geleneğine bağlı gerekçelerle farklı etnik köken ve dînî inançlara mensup tebaasının eğitim haklarına saygılı olmuş ve kullanmalarına engel olmamıştır. Osmanlı Devleti'nde eğitim sistemini Tanzimat öncesi ve sonrası olarak iki döneme ayırmak gerekir. Her iki dönemde de Müslüman ve gayrimüslimlerin eğitim kurumları temel özellikleri açısından birbiriyle benzer özellikler taşır. Her iki grubun eğitim kurumları vakıflar tarafından desteklendiği gibi amaç, program ve öğretmenleri de dini niteliklidir. Tanzimat döneminde 1869 yılında Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesinin hazırlanmasından sonra eğitim üzerindeki dînî etki, yerini toplumsal ihtiyaç ve eşit vatandaşlık haklarına dayanan bir anlayışa terk etmiştir. Eğitim faaliyetleri daha önce sadece cemaat vakıflarına bağlı olarak yerine getirilirken, Tanzimat döneminde bu kurumların yanı sıra resmi devlet okulları (mektep) da kurulmuştur. Eğitim sisteminde yapılan düzenlemeler sonucunda askeri ve sivil devlet okullarına bütün vatandaşlar ayırım yapılmadan kabul edilmiştir. Yeni eğitim sisteminin planlandığı komisyonlarda gayrimüslim üyeler de yer almıştır. Böylece eğitim alanında hem idare hem de anlayış olarak laik bir yapıya doğru adım atılmıştır. Eğitim teşkilatının kapsamlı olarak düzenlendiği Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesinde gayrimüslimlerin kendi cemaatleri için ayrıca özel okullar açmalarına izin verilmiştir.

Yine bu yasal düzenleme ile ilkokulların her cemaat için ayrıca açılması ve programda yer alan din derslerinin de farklılıklara göre okutulması kararlaştırılmıştır. Orta dereceli okulların programlarında II. Abdülhamit döneminden itibaren İslam din derslerine yer verilmiş; ancak gayrimüslimler muaf tutulmuştur. Orta dereceli mekteplerde din derslerine yer verilmesinin nedeni, gayrimüslimlerin devlet okulları yerine genellikle kendilerinin kurduğu özel cemaat ya da yabancı mekteplerini tercih etmeleridir. Osmanlı Devleti hukuki olarak "öteki" yahut "azınlık" statüsünde tuttuğu gayrimüslimlere eğitim alanında haklar tanımıştır. Bu haklar sayesinde asırlar boyunca Osmanlı idaresinde yaşayan hiçbir dini ve etnik yapı yok olmamış, bütün farklılıklar dini ve kültürel kimliklerini korumuştur. Bu anlayış ve uygulama, günümüz toplumları için de dikkate alınması gereken önemli bir tecrübe olarak kabul edilmelidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Eğitimi, Osmanlı Devleti, Tanzimat, Gayrimüslim, Çok Kültürlülük

Introduction

The notion of "the other" is one of the concepts that are widely used, described and interpreted in today's world. Basically, expressing being "different", this notion has an extremely important place for humans and human societies in their realization and identification of themselves and in their recognition of their roles and duties. In this respect, "the self" and "the other" are respectively a fact, first intellectually and then in cultural and social senses.

Positive or negative understanding, interpretation and application of these concepts do not originate from this very fact, but rather, entirely from the approach to these concepts. Therefore, the negativity expressed by term "othering" (or marginalization) as used from time to time today is completely due to assigning such a negative meaning. Otherwise, each "self" is an original entity that is unique to its individual and different from "the other". As the common basic values among the "selves" decrease, the "other" begins to emerge, which is a quite natural process. Thus, the "othering" is the unnatural, morbid form of behavior that emerges in the mind and reflects into the behavior, which manifests in the form of wishing to make "others" like "their own" or treating them as if they are "non-existent" by neglecting this natural process. Prevention of this situation that gives rise to drawbacks for personal and social life is closely related to the education practices carried out both in theoretical situations and in various other settings.

The concepts of people, culture, society, and education are so intertwined that they are inseparable from each other. Culture can be defined as the shared ways of life of human communities. However, it is frequently observed that the shared ways of life are not the same even within the same society and that certain understanding and practice differences *do* emerge. Also referred to as cultural diversity or multiculturalism, this situation is one of the main features of human societies. In short, each society, no matter how homogenized culturally it is, inevitably incorporates certain differences.¹ When addressing the issue of differences or consideration of others, the reality shows us that dissimilarity is a very fact that the nature or the creation has bestowed upon human beings, which cannot be prevented, and which is essentially a source of wealth in the society. This reality can be treated in the forms of dispute or tolerance, but the latter is the

¹ Bhikhu Parekh, *Çokkültürlülüğü Yeniden Düşünmek Kültürel Çeşitlilik ve Siyasi Teori* [Rethinking Multiculturalism, Cultural Diversity and Political Theory] (Ankara: Phoenix Yayınevi, 2002), 253.

correct one. Differences have to be accepted as they are. This approach can only be rendered dominant through formal and informal education. For this reason, a field of study entitled '*Intercultural Education*' has been introduced today, and regarding the religious aspect of the same purpose, a course called *Intercultural Religious and Moral Instruction* is included in the curriculum of Departments of Religion and Ethics Teaching in universities. For this reason, after World War II, a field of study entitled '*Intercultural Education*' has been improved. Regarding the religious aspect of the same purpose, a course called *Intercultural Religious and Moral Instruction* is included in the curriculum of Departments of Religion and Ethics Teaching that established in some divinity faculties.

Our intent with give place concept of "other" is religious differences. Because in Ottoman society, the main criteria for determining the legal status and rights of people is not ethnicity, social class, language or color, but the religion to which they belong. According to this classification, the segment defined as a minority today is a non-Muslim subject, called zimmi, with a different legal status than Muslims. The aim of the study is to introduce the rights that the mentioned minorities have in education and how these rights are used.

We hope that the understanding of how the differences were treated during the course of history will have a positive contribution to the better management of the issue of differences, which maintains its importance in today's world as well. We believe that Ottoman Empire is a good example regarding what this historical approach was and which characteristics it had, because of both its manner of practices and the closeness of its epoch. The results obtained from the Ottoman state's practices in this regard can contribute to the solution of problems today.

1. Legal Status of Non-Muslims in Ottoman Society

Ottoman society had a very colorful, multi-national structure with respect to the diversity of beliefs and ethnicities which it embodied. Ottoman administration placed its citizens in different statuses on the basis of its own legal structure. In this respect, the section of the citizens in the Ottoman society referred to as "the other" in sociological term and as the "minority" in legal term was the section of the citizens who were defined as the non-Muslims. To this, the expression "non-Sunnis" may also be added only as an indication of the difference in the Islamic faith, without any real legal effects.

We have to emphasize that this classification is mainly based on the faith and on the sense of law based on faith. It can be seen that, within the framework of this distinction, Ottoman administration was respectful for the fundamental rights of all sections of its citizens, and that apart from this categorization it did not allow any privileges to the ethnic differences. Non-Muslim citizens would benefit from the basic rights provided by the State, just like other communities in the society but under a different status. The said fundamental rights also included rights of employment, settlement, travel, selection of faith, and worship

and educational rights. Non-Muslims were able to exercise their lawsuits related with their private law in their own courts and also to enjoy the rights of electing their religious leaders and spiritual councils.²

As the maintaining the own cultural structure of each community was accepted as the natural right of that community, the transitions (religious conversions) between communities - without introducing any legal obstructions - were not welcomed.³ The State would not make any special attempts for religious conversions, and quite the contrary, it was requested that the ultimate preferences in this respect should be made completely voluntarily. When we look into the actual conversion movements, we observe that the number of non-Muslims people converting to Islam remained extremely low. The number of non-Muslim who converted to Islam and who were registered so in Bursa from the middle of the 15th century until the beginning of the 20th century was found to be 835.⁴ In order to prevent forced conversion attempts, non-Muslims who converted to Islam were subjected to a strict investigation in order to find out whether or not the conversion was upon consent.⁵ All these demonstrate that non-Muslims were in complete freedom to choose and exercise their religions under Ottoman administration.

However, it is also known that non-Muslims encountered certain limitations. We believe that such limitations are understandable and acceptable as they are related to the tiny details and they do not mean any deprivation of fundamental rights and liberties. Such practices can be considered as a sign of dominance and superiority of the State while it can equally be said that they mean to emphasize the intrinsic characteristics of the people belonging to different faiths and cultures, and even to establish the means of preserving those characteristics.

It is an acceptable and understandable approach even in our time that the culture adopted by the majority of the people in any society should be preserved; efforts should be made to ensure its continuity and to demonstrate it as a better example, provided that the right to life is recognized to the other cultures. On the other hand, the historical periods during which all such understandings and practices were upheld should be judged during the course of their own times and in comparative with the understandings and practices of other contemporary societies. We are aware that during Middle Ages, religion was the ultimate decisive factor in the social and administrative structures of the societies, both in the East and in the West. When the approaches of the two worlds to the religion-based differences are compared, it would not be wrong to point out that such differences were treated much more favorably in the Ottoman Empire⁶.

² Cevdet Küçük, "Osmanlı Devleti'nde 'Millet' Sistemi [The 'Millet' System in Ottoman State]", *Osmanlı 4* (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 1999), 209-210; İbrahim Özcoşar, "Süryani Kiliselerinde Eğitim [Education in Assyrian Churches]", *Süryaniler ve Süryanilik II* [Syrians and the Syrian II] (Ankara: Orient Yayınevi, 2005), 200-202.

³ Özer Ergenç "Osmanlı Klasik Düzeni ve Özellikleri Üzerine Bazı Açıklamalar [Some Explanations on Ottoman Classical Period and Its Features]", *Osmanlı 4* (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 1999), 34.

⁴ Osman Çetin, *Sicillere Göre Bursa'da İhtida Hareketleri ve Sosyal Sonuçları (1472-1909)* [Conversion Movements in Bursa and Social Consequences According to Registers (1472-1909)] (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1994), 14-15.

⁵ Erdoğan Keles, "XIX. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Muğla'da Gayrimüslimlerin Sosyo-Ekonomik ve Hukuki Durumları [Socio-Economic and Legal Status of Non-Muslims in Mugla during the Second Half of the 19th Century]", *Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 5 (19) (2003-2004), 225.

⁶ Berdel Aral, "The Idea of Human Rights as Perceived in the Ottoman Empire", *Human Rights Quarterly*, 26 (2) (2004), 471-475.

It is also important to note that not only non-Muslims but also some Muslim groups were treated within the scope of the differences. It is quite possible to argue that the main reason why the non-Sunni Muslims were considered as the "other" was purely political at that time.

The tolerance for the differences in the Ottoman society takes its roots both from the traditional state approach of Turkish tribes and from the approaches of Islam in this issue. Turkish state tradition is based on the understanding of keeping people from different races and faiths together and on the ability to govern them. This tradition is based on providing justice within the framework of law (customs), respect for people, tolerance to different beliefs, and responsibility of the ruler who represent the State, and has its roots deep in the beliefs and life philosophies of the Turks. As a result of this understanding, great freedoms were granted to the dominated peoples, allowing them to continue their former lives.⁷

When the issue is examined in a religious perspective, we notice that the Turks have maintained similar understandings both before and after Islam. The divine origins of the concept of ruling mentioned in the Orkhon (Orhun) inscriptions demonstrate this very fact clearly.⁸ After the Turks became Muslims, their fair approach to the differences has continued and even strengthened through the principles of Islam on this issue. Islamic thought teaches that differences in terms of race and creed are only natural and that these differences have to be respected (Qur'an, Chapters: Hujurat 49/13, Al-An'am 6/149, and Nahl 16/9). Islam emphasizes that God's will is the decisive one beyond people's will in ethnic differences while primarily the responsibility and will of the individual is the main determinant in faith differences, which have to be respected in any case. All these principles covering the rights of people to select their beliefs, to practice and to learn / teach the same are included in the established legal system and public administration by recognizing these freedoms on a legal basis. Naturally, those parts left outside after establishing the freedoms on a legal basis have to be recognized as the sovereignty right of the political authority.

2. Education Rights of Non-Muslims in Ottoman Society

After talking briefly about the approach of the Ottoman society and its conduct of state towards differences, which was based on tolerance and justice, and about the origins of this approach, we can now proceed with the evaluation of the related practices in the field of education. This topic needs to be addressed on two different perspectives, namely before and after the period of Tanzimat (i.e. Constitutional Reforms) during which radical changes were implemented in the Ottoman Empire in the fields of administration, education, economics and law.

We can identify the main features of the approach and organization of the education before Tanzimat period as follows: First of all, education activities were of religious nature. This was undoubtedly so for the Western world as it was for the Islamic world during the Middle Ages. Educational institutions in both worlds flourished on religion-based principles in terms of their locations, teaching objectives, programs, and of the

⁷ Bahaeddin Ögel, *Türk Kültürünün Gelişme Çağları II* [Development Ages of Turkish Culture] (İstanbul: MEB Yayınları, 1993), 31, 63; İbrahim Kafesoğlu, *Türk Milli Kültürü* [Turkish National Culture] (Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1977), 212-213, 218-219, 228.

⁸ İbrahim Kafesoğlu, *Türk Milli Kültürü*, 304-306; Talat Tekin, *Orhon Yazıtları* [Orkhon Inscriptions] (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 1988).

identities of the teaching staff. Putting aside the new educational institutions (all of which were military and technical education institutions) that were opened on the eve of Reforms (Tanzimat), the formal education in the Ottoman Empire was carried out by Primary (Sibyan, lit. Children's) Schools and by the Madrasas (High Schools, College) during the classical period. Enderun (The Palace School) provided education only to a special and limited section. Religious characteristics were utterly dominant in the functioning of the first two institutions while very intensely dominant in the last one.⁹ Otherwise, formal education would only reach to a certain segment of the society. Primary schools and Madrasas as the formal educational institutions in the Ottoman Empire were so widespread that they would be considered significant for their periods. For example, towards the end of the 16th century there were around 150 Primary schools and 50 Madrasas in Bursa, which was one of the important centers at that time.¹⁰ This figure increases even further for Istanbul.¹¹ However, it is also observed that the number of students attending to the Madrasas, which then corresponded to secondary and higher educations after the Primary School, was very low compared to the general population. We even know that there was not enough interest for Primary schools, and that an Imperial Order (Ferman) was issued to promote them. In these conditions, education is carried out in common and informal educational environments such as mosques, tekkes (mystical teaching places), village rooms and families, except in a Primary Schools and Madrasas.

Finally, education services were carried out through foundations [pious foundations (waqf)]. Although supervision of the foundations was carried out by the State, the initiative of private enterprises including people and communities was the main actor in the establishment and functioning of these foundations.

Thus, we clearly see that the educational activities before Tanzimat period were of religious nature and were mostly carried out by formal and informal institutions managed by foundations that can be considered more properly as private enterprises, or in informal settings. All of these characteristics apply also to non-Muslims. Educational institutions were opened in the vicinity of worshipping places, and the education was of religious nature. These institutions were funded by philanthropists and foundations. Finally, education activities did not consist of these formal institutions only, and - especially to be a family - informal elements made up the remaining part of the education services. In conclusion, planning and implementation of non-Muslim religious education during the pre-Reforms (Tanzimat) period was entirely carried out

⁹ Ülker Akkutay, Enderûn Mektebi [Enderûn School] (Ankara: 1984); Zeki Salih Zengin, *Tanzimat Dönemi Osmanlı Örgün Eğitim Kurumlarında Din Eğitimi ve Öğretimi (1839-1876)* [Religious Education and Training in Ottoman Formal Education Institutions during Tanzimat Period (1839-1876)], İstanbul: MEB Yayınları, 2004), 11-29.

¹⁰ Mefail Hızlı, *Mahkeme Sicillerine Göre Osmanlı Klasik Dönemi Bursa Medreselerinde Eğitim-Öğretim* [Education-Instruction in Bursa Madrasas in Ottoman Classical Period According to Court Records] (Bursa:1997), 15; Mefail Hızlı, *Mahkeme Sicillerine Göre Osmanlı Klasik Döneminde İlköğretim ve Bursa Sibyan Mektepleri* [Primary Education and Bursa Primary Schools in the Classical Period of Ottoman Empire According to Court Records] (Bursa: 1999), 41.

¹¹ Kemal Özergin, "Eski Bir Rûznameye Göre İstanbul ve Rumeli Medreseleri [Istanbul and Rumelia Madrasas According to An Old Diary (Rûzname)]", *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 4-5 (1974), İstanbul: Edebiyat Fak. Matbaası, 275-287; Madeline Zilfi, "The İlmiye Registers and The Ottoman Medrese System Prior to The Tanzimat", *Collection Turcica*, 3: *Contributions à l'histoire économique et sociale de l'Empire Ottoman* (Louvain: 1983), 322.

under the direction of the relevant community, within the framework of the rights and opportunities provided by the State.¹²

The available information about the educational work of non-Muslims in the pre-Tanzimat period indicates that the non-Muslim citizens *did* have educational means and facilities, and that these means were utilized under the above-mentioned conditions. Greek schools teaching Greek, Philosophy, Theology and Ascetic Discipline and operated under the auspices of the Patriarchate in Phanar (Fener) District in Istanbul admitted students from the provinces as well. The graduates of these schools were employed in religious services as well as in certain government services, and the financial expenditures of these schools were provided by the Patriarchate and the Greek community. Also belonging to Greek community, Heybeliada Priest School was opened in 1844 along with another school that was launched in Kuruçesme District in Istanbul.¹³ Although Armenian Schools flourished significantly in number and quality as of the ends of 18th Century, there had been several Armenian schools running before that date. Established around the churches and operated by the clergies, these schools instructed Armenian, Theology, Writing and Accounting. According to the determinations made by the Armenian Patriarchate in 1834, there were 120 schools at that time in various parts of Anatolia. Apart from these, several schools established by foreigners were also actively running.¹⁴

When the post-Reforms period is examined, we observe some major developments in the field of education in line with the changes occurring in the general sense. These developments also reflected in the form of expansion and widening of educational opportunities for non-Muslim subjects in the Ottoman territory. In the meantime, significant increases occurred in the number of foreign schools during the following years as a result of the missionary activities, which had already increased just before the Tanzimat period.¹⁵

The remarkable development in the education system during the Tanzimat period was the transition from the religious education to the instruction of religion as a part of the curriculum. The teaching of religion was included in the curriculum of the newly opened schools, but religion ceased to be the decisive element of the education in the entire education system, as opposed to the regular practices in Madrasas, the traditional educational institutions. In the face of such a development, the main issue to be addressed in education field concerning the view of Ottomans to the “other” was whether or not to include the religion(s) other than Islam in the curriculum of the State schools, or whether or not to allow religious communities to open their own private schools. In this regard, different practices are observed during different periods.

¹² Zeki Salih Zengin, “Tanzimat ve Sonrası Dönemde Osmanlı Toplumunda Gayrimüslimler ve Din Eğitimi [Non-muslims and Religious Education in Ottoman Society in The Age of Tanzimat and Its Aftermath]”. *Değerler Eğitimi Dergisi* 6 (15), 2008, 139-171.

¹³ Osman Nuri Ergin, *Türk Maarif Tarihi [Turkish Education History]* I-II (İstanbul: Eser Matbaası, 1977), 739, 743-744, 745-748.

¹⁴ Ergin, *Türk Maarif Tarihi*, 750-753, 769, etc.

¹⁵ Mustafa Murat Öntüç, “Balıkesir’deki Ermeni Kilisesi ve Mektep Açma Faaliyetleri [Armenian Church in the Province of Balıkesir Turkey and its Activities Related to Establishment of a Mektep]”, *OTAM*, 19 (2005), 343-364; İlay İleri, “Azınlıkların Eğitimi I [Education of Minorities I]”, *OTAM*, 17 (2005), 1-12; İlay İleri, “Azınlıkların Eğitimi II-III [Education of Minorities II-III]”, *OTAM*, 23 (2008), 129-148.

As Primary schools and Secondary (Rüsiye, lit. Maturing) schools were opened according to the communities during the Reform years, just like the previous practices, the religion of the particular community running the school was the subject of education¹⁶. As for the High (İdadi, lit. Preparatory) schools, religion was not included in their curriculum at all. During the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II and afterwards, only Islamic religion was instructed in the public schools, and the students of other faiths were not required to take this course.

This practice essentially demonstrates that Ottoman Empire did not actually hold a much different way than it did before concerning its view to the "other". Because, by this practice, the identity of the State emphasizing Islam was preserved in a sense, but without imposing any obstacles for minorities and even for foreigners to open educational institutions and to perform activities in this field¹⁷.

At this point, we need to mention Imperial Rescript of Reform (Firman of Islahat), i.e. Imperial Order for Reforms) as an important document providing educational rights of non-Muslims during Tanzimat years. In the said Firman, repair or rebuilding of the institutions belonging to non-Muslim population such as hospitals and churches as well as schools would be subject to the approval of the government along with the license issued by the heads of the relevant religious communities. The said Firman also emphasized that each religious community had the right to open both religious schools and general educational as well vocational schools, and that the opening and functioning of the schools with religious purposes was entirely left at the discretion of the spiritual leaders of the relevant community. The curriculum and teaching staff of the schools to be opened for general or vocational education would be determined by the Sultan and would be overseen by a Council consisting of a mixture of Muslim and non-Muslim members. Further, the Firman stated that the children of all the citizens meeting the necessary criteria would be allowed to get enrolled without any discrimination in all the schools opened by the Ottoman Empire, and those non-Muslim students also would be accepted in the military and civilian schools.

The issues mentioned in the Firman such as opening the schools, determining the curriculum and teachers, opening institutions like churches, hospitals and so on were also permitted during the earlier periods, subject to certain rules. In contrast to this, the right of the non-Muslims to open schools for general and vocational education and to enter military and civilian schools opened by the State should be considered as a new practice. However, this situation emerged in the Ottoman Empire after 1846. Before Tanzimat period, Muslim and non-Muslim educational institutions continued with their own traditional methods. During that period and under the existing structure of the education, it was not possible for Muslims or for non-Muslims to admit members of different communities in their educational institutions, and such a request and approval would be out of the question. Mixed education irrespective of religious differences between the students was only made possible for the newly created formal educational institutions, and such practice

¹⁶ See Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi, articles 6, 18 and 23.

¹⁷ The conditions required to open these schools were set forth in article 129 of Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi as follows: 1. Teachers should have Graduate Certificates approved by Ministry of Education or by local education authorities, 2. The curriculum and books should be approved by Ministry of Education or by local education authorities, and 3. Permission to open should be granted by the Ministry in Istanbul, and by the local education authorities and the governor in the Provinces. All of these conditions have the objective of supervision and inspection, not an obstacle to open the schools.

had already started in the very early period of the Reforms, long before the date when the Firman was issued¹⁸. There were not any obstacles in front of this practice, that is, the admission of all sections of Ottoman citizens to the State schools, and the same practice was also implemented later during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II. There are not any records indicating any obstacles for the admission of even foreigner children to the State schools, let alone for the non-Muslim Ottoman citizens; on the contrary, it was officially stated that this practice would not cause any inconvenience¹⁹.

Non-Muslim members were also included in several commissions set up for the organization of education during those years. After the establishment of General Ministry of Education in 1857, a Mixed Commission composed of the members of Muslim community and of different non-Muslim communities was also set up in order to aid with the arrangements related with the Secondary (Rüsdîye) schools and for other schools. The document evidencing this fact²⁰ states that the language of instruction in the courses given by the schools other than Primary schools would be entirely Turkish, from which it is clearly understood that the language of instruction and curriculum of the Primary schools would be shaped according to the own language and religion of each community.²¹

The above-mentioned Mixed Commission was restructured in 1863 and was divided into two commissions, one responsible for the regulation of the Primary schools opened for Muslim children, and the other for the regulation of medium and high-grade schools opened for the children of both Muslims and non-Muslims. Among the members of the second commission, there would be two representatives from each of Greek, Armenian and Catholic communities, and one representative from Jews and Protestants in addition to a non-Muslim clerk member.²² The same practice continued during later years as well. Non-Muslim members were included in the education commissions set up in the capital and in the provinces pursuant to the General Education Regulations dated with 1869.²³

The General Education Regulations dated with 1869 stipulates that Primary schools should be separately established for the Muslim and non-Muslim citizens, and that the costs such as construction, repair and maintenance expenses as well as salaries of teachers should be born by the related communities. In addition, the religious classes included in the curriculum would be instructed to teach their religion according to the principles to be determined by the spiritual leaders of each community. Further to this, it is also

¹⁸ For example, non-Muslims students were admitted to the School of Medicine in 1840. See.Ergin, *Türk Maarif Tarihi*, 726.

¹⁹ The Memorandum by Ministry of Education concerning whether the children of foreign nationalities may be admitted to High Schools (Idadi) was examined in Special Ministers Council and it was concluded that it would not cause any trouble. See. Sultan's Order concerning the Acceptance of Students from Foreign Nationalities into High Schools (Idadi), 15 Rebiülevvel 1305/18 Tesrinisani 1303 (30 September 1887), *Düstur* (5), Tertib-i Evvel, pp. 949-950.

²⁰ For this document dated 13 July 1857 (20 Şevval 1273); see Berker, *Türkiye'de İlk Öğretim*, [Primary Education in Turkey I] (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1945),46-47.

²¹ Ali Akyıldız, *Tanzimat Dönemi Osmanlı Merkez Teşkilatında Reform* [Reform in the Ottoman Central Organization during Tanzimat Period] (İstanbul: Eren Yayınları, 1993), 247.

²² Aziz Berker, *Türkiye'de İlk Öğretim* 45-49; Mahmut Cevad, *Maarif-i Umumiye Nezareti Tarihçe-i Teşkilat ve İcraatı* [History of Organization and Activity of General Ministry of Education] (Ankara: MEB Yayınları, 2002), 69-72.

²³ Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi, articles 132, 133, 136, 138, and 143.

stated those non-Muslim students would even be able to take Concise Ottoman History, Geography and Practical Life Knowledge courses in their own languages.²⁴

What is new in the Regulations was the fact that Primary schools previously opened through foundations were to be launched by the Government. In addition to this, these schools would be opened separately according to each community and the communities would continue their education activities in their own languages and religions during earlier times as well. The situation in religious teaching was maintained by the Education Regulations. Regarding the language of instruction, Writing and Mathematics courses included in the curriculum would be given in Turkish while the others were still allowed to be read in their own languages. Considering the fact that the further stages in the education were entirely in Turkish language, it would not be difficult to guess that the success of these students would be affected negatively due to poor level of Turkish language in their schools. This practice resulted non-attendance of non-Muslim children to the official schools, which result was encouraged indirectly²⁵.

Since the teaching in the High schools (idadi) and in higher education institutions would be mixed irrespective of the religion, the curriculum did not include any religion courses. Besides, vacations in all schools were determined by taking into consideration their sacred days according to their religion.²⁶

The Regulations also provided separate sections for non-Muslims when defining the structure of the teacher training institutions, and a separate section was included in Secondary (Rüsdîye) Schools Branch of Male Teachers College (Darü'l Muallimin) to train teachers for non-Muslims Secondary schools. The own language of each community would be taught as an independent subject, and also, courses such as General History and Book-Keeping Procedures would also be instructed in their own language. Similarly, there would be one each section for non-Muslims respectively in Primary (Sibyan) and Secondary (Rüstiye) Branches of Female Teachers College (Darü'l Muallimat), and the religion classes in the curriculum of these sections would be determined by the spiritual leaders. When the annotation inserted at the side of the courses in the curriculum reading "Instruction shall be carried out in the own language of each community..." (article 6) is considered, it is understood that the teaching in this section would not be in Turkish language. Further, the requirement set forth in the Education Regulations that it is a prerequisite to be an Ottoman citizen in order to become a teacher in Public schools demonstrates that non-Muslim citizens are entitled to be employed in these schools.²⁷

Despite the traditional understanding aiming to preserve the own culture of each community / nation in the Ottoman Empire, the influence of Western intervention increasing as of 19th century was sure in the outbreak of religious conflicts observed during the following years; such conflicts were merely forced to happen or were simply claimed to occur indicating religious differences as the causes²⁸. The demands by Westerners for recognition of religious freedom to non-Muslims were, in fact, nothing but a pretext which

²⁴ Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi, articles 3-4, 6, and 15.

²⁵ Indeed, a report prepared about arrangement of education at 1896 had been said non-muslim families do not choosing public high schools (idadi). *Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive*, Y. EE. Nu: 131/21, 16 Zilkade 1313 (29 April 1896).

²⁶ Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi, articles 8, 25, 32-33, 38, 40, 46 and 48.

²⁷ Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi, articles 53-54, 68-70 and 178.

²⁸ Zeki Salih Zengin, "Tanzimat ve Sonrası Dönemde Osmanlı Toplumunda Gayrimüslimler ve Din Eğitimi [Non-muslims and Religious Education in Ottoman Society in The Age of Tanzimat and Its Aftermath]". *Değerler Eğitimi Dergisi* 6 (15), 2008, 151.

they excused for intervening with the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire. European States which involved in the preparation of Reform Firman of 1856 did not seem satisfied with the said Firman, and as such, British ambassador Canning, who wanted to shape the Firman as he wished, was claiming that freedom of religion was not provided fully by the Firman. "The freedom of religion as understood by this ambassador was a total independence for Protestant missionaries to steal believers from Orthodox and Catholic Christians and from Muslims."²⁹ Movements centered on non-Muslim citizens aiming to seek cultural-religious rights after the Reforms seemed to put forward these claims, but in reality, such demands did not go beyond being a tool and means of exploitation for the main objectives that were based on the political and economic benefits of the Western states. Despite all these, the Ottoman Empire adopted the principles of just approach to all of its citizens and of not depriving them of their basic rights as a whole. These principles were also committed during the activities of modernizing the education, launched during the Reforms period.

During the reign of Abdulhamid II, the inclusion of only Islamic courses in schools should be the result of the tendency of Islamism in educational policy. On the other hand, the fact that non-Muslim Ottoman citizens intensively preferred the schools run by their own communities rather than State Schools despite the absence of any obstacles for the latter³⁰ necessitated to include Islamic courses in the curriculum in the former schools.³¹ The non-inclusion of religious education in the curriculum of High schools (idadi) during the Tanzimat period was the result of the intention of non-discrimination between the students of different faiths in this regard. However, lack of attendance to the State schools by non-Muslims did away with this intention. It does not seem reasonable to explain the non-preference of State schools by non-Muslim citizens only with the lack of the courses on their religion in these schools. It could be argued that this practice had certain effect but we think that the real reason was that these people did not actually want to go to the State schools.³² Indeed, the Reform Firman stipulated that every community should have the right to open its own school, and it is known that this principle was included or demanded in order to ensure the provision of the basic rights of the non-Muslim population.

It is also known that the main party taking the advantage of the article in the General Education Regulations permitting to open private schools was the minorities and in particular foreign nationalities, who even did not care to comply with the provisions of this article most of the time. All these demonstrate that non-Muslims did not show interest for the official schools for some reason or another and that these schools become educational institutions in time where only the children of Muslim citizens attended. As a result and in the face of the existing facts, the policy of the State at that period was directed to unite the citizens

²⁹ Küçük, "Osmanlı Devleti'nde 'Millet' Sistemi [The 'Millet' System in Ottoman State]", 209-214.

³⁰ Bayram Kodaman, *Abdülhamit Devri Eğitim Sistemi* [Education System During the Reign of Sultan Abdulhamid] (İstanbul: Ötüken Yayınları, 1980), 178-179; Erdal Açıkşes, *Amerikalıların Harput'taki Misyonerlik Faaliyetleri* [Missionary Activities of Americans in Harput] (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2003), 105; Mehmet Emin Yolalıcı, "Maarif Salnamelerine Göre Trabzon Vilayeti'nde Eğitim ve Öğretim Kurumları [Education and Training Institutions Trabzon Province According to the Yearbooks of the Ministry of Education]", *OTAM*, 5 (1994), 465.

³¹ Of 891,809 students attending in the Primary, Secondary and High schools run by State in the entire country in 1897, the number of non-Muslim students was determined to be only 607. See Tevfik Güran, *Osmanlı Devleti'nin İlk İstatistik Yılığ 1897* [The First Statistical Yearbook of the Ottoman Empire 1897] (Ankara: Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 1997), 107.

³² Yahya Akyüz, "Cevdet Paşa'nın Özel Öğretim ve Tanzimat Eğitimine İlişkin Bir Lâyihası [An Explanation (Lâyiha) of Cevdet Pasha Concerning the Private Instruction and Tanzimat Education]", *OTAM*, 3 (1992), 108-110.

around Islamic faith, which was naturally reflected in the education system.³³ As a result of such an understanding, Islamic courses were included in the curriculum of all the schools with increased class hours, and the non-Muslim students, who were already in a small number, were exempted from these courses³⁴.

Along with this practice, opinions were put forward in the same period suggesting that instruction of religion should be completely abolished from the curriculums, or that the religions of the non-Muslim citizens should also be included in the curriculum in order to allow opportunity so that everyone could learn their religion in the schools. Shakir Pasha, one of the prominent statesmen of the period, emphasized that the differences in the teaching of language and religion necessitated Primary schools to be opened separately according to religious communities and that this practice were leading adverse outcomes; he holds the view that these institutions should be reorganized as the institutions providing education in the same language and not teaching the religion. Touching also the status of education in the Secondary (İdadi) schools in his report, Shakir Pasha, draws attention to the fact that non-Muslims did not send their children to these schools due to non-inclusion of the religions other than Islam in the religion courses, and that, in addition, non-Muslim citizens demanded the allocation of a share from the taxes collected for education to their private schools; finally, Shakir Pasha concludes that Secondary (İdadi) Schools, in their existing forms, have failed to fulfill their purpose of establishment.³⁵

It is known that a cautious and cold attitude was shown during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II against the foreign schools which were basically set up for the purpose of missionary work, and that their activities were closely monitored in an attempt to oversee them.³⁶ This approach may be due to several reasons; but what is directly related to our subject is the fact that these institutions would lead people of Ottoman citizens - almost all of whom are non-Muslims - to a path outside their own beliefs and cultures, or the concern that such a situation might happen. In fact, another report prepared on the missionaries operating in Eastern Anatolia to provide aid to orphaned children contains the following statements:

*"... The government should build an orphanage (school) in a suitable location in Anatolia, each class of Ottoman citizens should be accepted to this school, and the books necessary for maintaining the national identities of these children and for the upbringing of their conducts should be included in the curriculum; if these steps are fulfilled successfully, then there will be no need for the establishment of education facilities by missionaries and by other foreign nationalities for these purposes..."*³⁷

³³ Benjamin C. Fortna, *Mekteb-i Hümayûn Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Son Döneminde İslam, Devlet ve Eğitim* [Imperial Classroom Islam, the State and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire] (İstanbul: İletişim Yay., 2005), 217-218.

³⁴ There are many documents in the Ottoman State Archives in Istanbul (hereinafter to be referred as BOA) on this issue. See BOA.MF.MKT. No: 182/46; 202/45; 325/26; 1024/23. Admission of even non-Muslim students to Secondary (Rüşdiye) schools, where Muslim students attended, by exempting them from Islam religion courses was not considered as a problem either. See BOA.MF.MKT. No: 39/107; 46/94; 62/25; 188/61; 709/51.

³⁵ For the Education Report dated 1896 prepared by Sakhir Pasha concerning 6 provinces in Eastern Anatolia, see BOA. Y. EE., No: 131/21.

³⁶ Zeki Salih Zengin, "II. Abdülhamit Döneminde Yabancı ve Azınlık Mekteplerinin Faaliyetleri [The Activities of Foreign and Minority Schools in the Abdulhamid II Period]", *Belleten* 71 (261) (2007), 613-652.

³⁷ See BOA. Y.A.RES., No: 101/39.

This statement demonstrates that Ottoman statesmen making the determining educational policy did not have any such aim to direct non-Muslim children to a faith other than their own beliefs, that their goal was to maintain the own faith and culture of everyone, and in addition, to raise them as individuals who are naturally devoted to their society and State. Indeed, as it was during the previous years, it was not intended to prevent the activities of minority schools during these years, and it is known that the State would provide support when requested. For example, the fire-damaged Armenian Primary school located around Kadirga Harbor in Istanbul was rebuilt in 1847 in a much better form than the former one under Sultan's decree at the request of the Patriarch.³⁸ The demand submitted by the Armenian community in Bafra in 1901 for the reconstruction of their devastated schools was investigated Department of State Civil Service. As a result of the review, a license to operate the school was granted and in addition, it was decided that half of the construction cost should be born by the State.³⁹ The demand by the Armenian Patriarch for the reorganization of the education in the schools submitted during the greeting ceremony of anniversary of his accession to the throne was deemed appropriate by Sultan Abdulhamid II, and Prime Ministry (Sadaret) was ordered to initiate necessary studies by setting up a commission composed of Muslim and non-Muslim members.⁴⁰

The practice that religion courses given in the official schools during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II and during Constitutional Monarchy II (Meşrutiyet) periods were based on Islam was not the cause of conflict between the Ottoman citizens. Apart from teaching Islam in schools, Moral course was also included as a separate subject, which contained information necessary for every human being in the name of morality as well as teaching of respect for freedom of religion and belief. In such a program structure, the area where there would be differences was the religion course and as we mentioned earlier, non-Muslim students were already exempt from this course. The same situation applied also during the years of second Constitutional Monarchy (Meşrutiyet). Religion courses were Islam-centered. Apart from this course, the Moral course taken by all the students was made more comprehensive with the addition of rules of good manners and etiquette and was instructed under various course names such as *Civil Knowledge*, *Knowledge of Moral Values*, and *Civil and Moral Knowledge*. When the programs, curriculum and textbooks prepared for these courses are closely examined, we can see the ideas being covered that individuals enjoyed the right to freedom of religious and philosophical thought as well as freedom of thought and belief, that all Ottoman citizens had equal rights, and that Ottoman homeland belonged to its citizens together with all different elements possessing equal rights.

These topics covered in the curriculum, and more importantly, the approach to religious differences demonstrate that such differences were not regarded as a cause of inequality concerning citizenship rights, and that was the subject of teaching, thus emphasizing the belief that it was possible to live together in spite of the faith differences.

It is understood that the issue of whether to include religion courses in the schools was discussed in the context of maintaining social and political unity, and the practices were shaped accordingly, both during the Tanzimat period and during the later years. Despite the different practices in these two periods, neither

³⁸ BOA.A.DVN.MHM. No: 5/1, 1263 (1847).

³⁹ BOA.Y.A.RES. No: 111/70, Gurre-i Zilkade 1318 / 20 February 1901 (Hijri 7 Subat 1316).

⁴⁰ BOA.Y.PRK. BŞK. No: 53/126, 31 August 1897 (2 Rebiülahir 1315).

such concerns could be eradicated nor could the disintegration of the political unity of the State be prevented. Undoubtedly, it not possible to claim that the question of whether to include instruction of religion in schools or conducting such and such course in this or that manner was the single determining factor for the occurrence of such an undesired outcome. It is not to be forgotten that the determined and preconceived separatist movements, fed by external inducements, had a significant share on the failure of obtaining a positive outcome. In the face of such a reality, it would not be wrong to point out that granting this and that right related with education or with another field would not go beyond an excuse.⁴¹ Indeed, granting to the minorities and foreign nationalities the right to open their schools under the name of "private schools" by special legislative amendments did not at all create the satisfaction and commitment to the State to the extent expected, which is a point that should not be disregarded in this respect.

Conclusion

We can see that the minorities who lived in the Ottoman society had a status different from the present-day practices in legal terms, but this difference still took place in its own unique circumstances in the legal system, and that there are significant differences between the present and the past statuses of today's multi-cultural understanding and the relevant practices. First of all, an equal approach to the different beliefs and cultures that exist in the society is understood by today's multi-culture expression. Also, in a secular state concept, religion is not considered as a cause of differentiation / inequality in the relationship of the State with its citizens. In an atmosphere covered by such an approach and understanding, an equal approach should naturally be displayed to religion-based differences in both planning and implementation phases of the courses when it comes to teach religion as a subject of education / instruction in formal education institutions addressing to the entire society. It does not seem possible to claim that this understanding and practice, as mentioned above, was indeed so in the past, neither for the Ottoman society nor for the other communities. In our opinion, the decisive issue in this regard is the secular approach. Therefore, the issue of respect for differences and for the right to life in societies composed of different cultures should be examined in conjunction with whether or not this mentality plays a part in the conduct of the state. During the periods before the secular understanding, it was out of the question that the political authority would keep an equal distance against all religions, or it would disregard the religion in the administrative - legal construction of the State; however, within such a state mentality, it is not always correct to reach a conclusion that other religions would be deprived of the right to life or they would be entirely ignored by the State. When the relations between religion and the State in those periods are examined, the rights granted by the political authority to the religion(s) other than the religion used by it to express its own identity, and the reflection of such rights to the areas like education and law should be given the main priority.

⁴¹ Parekh argues that formation of a common sense of belonging among different communities in multi-cultural societies is possible when the necessary conditions are ensured, but it would be very difficult to keep politicized societies together; if the multi-cultural society becomes unable even it has done everything expected, it should refrain from oppression and violence, therefore it should accept its misfortune to be the result of fragility existing in all human institutions. See Parekh, *Çokkültürlülüğü Yeniden Düşünmek*, 303.

We should also point out that it is not in our age solely that the differences in societies with different beliefs and cultures have arisen as an issue of this or that size. However, there are certain differences between the present-day and earlier periods regarding the size of the problem and the disputed areas. Indeed, for the Ottoman Empire, it was completely out of the question to instruct different religions at the same time as a course or as a subject in the general curriculum in the formal education institutions before the Tanzimat period, because the educational institutions of that period were already operated separately according to religious and even sectarian differences. Inclusion of different religions into the area of formal education was made possible only during the period after Reforms.

In the light of the above findings, we can say that there was not a totally equal approach to all religions in Ottoman Empire, which was not a fully secular state even in its later periods, because it was aimed to preserve religious / Islamic identity of the State. Despite this reality, a situation where the religions other than Islam was regarded non-existent, or where such religions were deprived of certain set of rights was completely out of the question in the Ottoman Empire, both before and after the Tanzimat period. Although this approach does not fully accord with today's multiculturalism understanding, there should not be any serious problems in this regard when we accept that the right of life and the right to perform religion freely ought to be ensured effectively for other religions.

It can be seen that non-Muslim citizens were not subject to a discriminating treatment for access to the right to education or were not deprived of education rights under the arrangements carried out within the scope of the education modernization efforts launched with Tanzimat period in the Ottoman Empire.

It is understood that the issue of whether or not religion courses should be included in the schools opened after the Reforms was considered together with the issue of maintaining the national unity of Ottoman Empire, which had a structure consisting of individuals belonging to different religions and cultures, and that the planning for education was made accordingly.

Despite all the rights recognized and the respect shown for the differences, the expected result could not be obtained with respect to maintaining the national unity. When the course of events during the period of time making up the last period of the Ottoman Empire, the turning points, and the ultimate outcome of these events are seriously examined, it is understood that the main problem regarding the differences was not "deprivation of religious / cultural rights".⁴²

In such a case, it can be discussed - merely with a view to finding solutions from the historical experience for the future problems, or to contributing to the efforts of taking lessons from a topic already made history - whether or not shaping the contents of religious instructions based on the own faiths and worship teachings of each religion along with the main idea that having different faiths is actually a wealth for humanity and a reality deserving the respect could indeed be a solution.

When we look at the issue of which one of the said different practices is more accurate and realistic, the answer will, no doubt, have a value at least from the point of satisfying the scientific interest on such an

⁴² On this subject, see "II. Abdülhamit Döneminde Yabancı ve Azınlık Mekteplerinin Faaliyetleri [The Activities of Foreign and Minority Schools in the Abdulhamid II Period]", *Belleten* 71/261 (2007), 613-652; Berker, *Türkiye'de İlk Öğretim*, 67-69; Fortna, *Mekteb-i Hümayûn*, 135, 291-296.

issue that is made history. To reach a sound conclusion, having knowledge on both pre- and particularly post-events of the approaches and practices that were involved during the course of that part of history will be an important contribution. Considering what happened during the disintegration period of the Ottoman Empire, it will be easier to put forward an idea about which one of the educational policies implemented until then was more accurate and realistic. All these also have certain components that are reflected to the present or to the future: Religion should be the subject of instruction with a curriculum that includes tolerance and respect for all kinds of differences. Cultural and religious differences alone are not the causes of conflict and separation; but rather, approaches aiming to obtain interests and to exploit may turn these differences into an instrument of conflict and separation. This adverse outcome could be avoided by upholding the rights of life and the rights to learn and teach religion around the principles of tolerance and respect for differences, along with the prerequisite that those who bear differences should have good intentions and should possess an understanding to refrain from abusing the rights granted to them.

Education and religious education and approach and practices about non-Muslim citizens of the Ottoman Empire has significant aspects today also. The Ottoman state does not have a secular legal system. For this reason, he classified his citizens as Muslims and non-Muslims. Despite this, it protected the religious and cultural rights of people of different faiths and secured them legally. However, many states today have adopted a secular understanding of law. Secular understanding refuses to group people according to their beliefs in the face of the law. It also accepts all rights related to religion, such as choosing faith, living, teaching-learning, as basic human rights. At this point, there is no difference between Ottoman law and secularism. It is understood that the Ottoman State had a wide religious tolerance compared to other societies in the periods in which it lived. However, this tolerance, which was shown mainly for Christians and Jews during the Ottoman period, should be taken into account for all sections of faith today. The state's relationship with its citizens should be within the scope of equal citizenship rights, not religious preferences. Any activity with religious preferences and experiencing these preferences should be free, so as not to violate other rights and rules.

Finally, we think that a comparative study of the historical practices of the education of religion in various societies incorporating different cultures and beliefs would be very productive in this regard. Such a comparative study - even in a tentative form - is too exhaustive to be beyond the purpose and the limits of this present study and requires an intense work as well.

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