Political Islam During the Ottoman Empire

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Abstract: This article analyzes the formation and development processes of the concept of political Islam during the Ottoman Empire. The study highlights the role of Islam in state governance, in particular, the importance of the religious, caliphate institution of the sultan's power and Sharia law in the political system. It also examines the mechanisms of governing society through religious scholars, madrasahs, and the waqf system. The changes in the ratio between religious and secular governance through the reforms of the Tanzimat period are also scientifically revealed. As a result of the study, it is concluded that political Islam served as an important factor in ensuring not only religious but also socio-political stability in the Ottoman Empire.

Introduction: During the Ottoman Empire, the concept of political Islam was a complex historical phenomenon that was formed as an integral part of state governance, the legal system, and social life. Islam was manifested in this empire not only as a system of beliefs, but also as a source of political legitimacy, the basis of social order, and the main factor of legal norms. The power of the Sultan was strengthened by a religious basis, and as a caliph, he had the status of not only the political but also the religious leader of the Muslim community. In this regard, in the political system of the Ottoman state, there was no strict separation between religion and state, but rather they functioned in harmony with each other. During this period, the practical manifestation of political Islam was manifested through Sharia law, the institution of ulema, and the activities of religious institutions. Sheikhs of Islam and judges played an important role in state governance, influencing the adoption of political decisions on a religious basis. At the same time, since the Ottoman Empire was a multi ethnic and religious state, a certain degree of adaptation and pragmatism was also observed within the political Islamic system. This is one of the factors that contributed to the long-term stability of the empire. The emergence of political Islam during the Ottoman period coincided with the decline of the empire's power. Under the influence of the French Revolution of 1789, the Ottoman state attempted to prevent its weakening and disintegration by issuing the Tanzimat edicts in 1839 and the Islahat edicts in 1856.

METHODOLOGY

The phenomenon of political Islam during the Ottoman Empire is analyzed based on a methodologically complex and systematic approach. The research uses historical-comparative, systematic and institutional analysis methods. In particular, the formation and development of political Islam is studied in the context of the interaction between state administration, religious institutions and society. Turkish historian Halil İnalcık has made a thorough analysis of the issue of political Islam in the Ottoman Empire, emphasizing that Islam was the main source of legitimacy in state governance. In his opinion, the sultan's power was strengthened by relying on the harmony of Sharia and traditional Turkish political culture[1]. Another Turkish scholar, Şerif Mardin, explains the relationship between religion and politics during the Ottoman period through the links between the center and society. According to him, Islam served not only as an official ideology but also as a means of social integration[2]. British historian Karen Armstrong, in her analysis of the Ottoman Empire, notes that political Islam was not a rigid theocratic system, but a flexible

form of government. According to her, the Ottomans maintained a balance between religious and secular power[3]. Russian orientalist Vasily Barthold, studying the Ottoman Empire, notes that Islam was the main unifying factor in the state. According to him, political Islam played an important role in uniting the different peoples of the empire into a single system[4]. Another Russian scholar, A. F. Miller, considers the religious elite in the Ottoman state to be an integral part of the political system. He particularly emphasizes the influence of the sheikh ul Islam institution in political decision making[5]. In the Ottoman Empire, political Islam was manifested not as a rigid theocratic system, but as a flexible and pragmatic model of governance. Although religion served as the main factor that gave legitimacy to state power, real political needs and the demands of a multinational society also played an important role in practical politics. This level of integration of religion and politics allowed the Ottoman Empire to function stably for a long time. Because Islam served not only as an ideological basis, but also as a universal mechanism that united society and regulated governance.

RESULTS

Throughout the 19th century, and especially during the Tanzimat period, almost all statesmen, especially under the influence of nationalist movements, sought various solutions to prevent the disintegration of the non-Muslim elements, which constituted approximately 40% of Ottoman society. The idea of Ottomanism stood at the forefront of attempts to find a solution. During this period, political Islamists seeking solutions in intellectual life also encountered Ottomanism as a state project. The Ottoman society, with its diverse ethnic base, was the empire most affected by nationalist ideas. Nationalism, which directly affected non-Muslim communities, emerged when these communities, through separatist movements, confronted the Ottoman intellectuals and politicians with the problem of the empire's disintegration. However, initially, most Turkish intellectuals, like the many nationalities living in Ottoman lands, sought to develop Ottomanism in order to create a common identity, rather than to develop or defend nationalist sentiments. These intellectuals ignored the ideas of Turkism that flourished towards the end of the century[6]. This period actually witnessed a period of transition from traditional Islam to ideological Islam. Turkone describes this situation as follows: Islam permeated all aspects of the life of the Muslim Ottomans.

The idea of Islamism began to be accepted during the reign of Abdul Hamid II. On the other hand, it is a system of thought that also influenced the policies of

the Committee of Union and Development. In response to the Ottoman Empire's search for a "basis of legitimacy", it gradually shifted to a pan-Islamist emphasis. According to Unuvar, within the Committee of Union and Development, Ottomanism, Islamism and Turkishness were not represented by strictly separated segments. In particular, there is a continuous connection between Islamism and Turkishness, and from this connection a meaningful synthesis emerges in which they influence each other intellectually and politically[7]. The characteristics of political Islam during this period were largely shaped around the idea of reform.

With the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Era, a relatively free environment emerged, resulting in a forum for discussion of Islamic ideas, as well as other intellectual movements, in various intellectual journals. Mehmet Akif can be mentioned as the most important representative of Islamic ideas in Turkey due to his works published in such journals. Islamic ideas cannot be separated from other ideologies such as Ottomanism, Turkishism, and Westernism, which were clearly manifested during this period. Each of these ideologies influenced the others or tried to dominate one over the other. Akif's understanding of Islam aimed to correct widespread misconceptions rather than to believe in religious superstitions. In this sense, Islam should be understood and evaluated correctly. Just as Ottoman ideology did not play a saving role over time, the idea of Islam could not prevent the disintegration of the empire. Just as non-Muslim elements seceded one by one, the idea of Islamism weakened due to "the Albanian uprising of 1910 and the ongoing Arab uprisings, Muslim elements began to secede from the empire[8]. Another political ideology that played a decisive role in the structural formation of Turkish society is the Modernization or Westernization movement. Modernization is a movement that emerged in the historical process when peoples encountered modern Western civilization, and they considered it useful to come into contact with this civilization, to reach the level of modern civilization and to establish dialogue with the modern civilization they encountered, in order not to lag behind in terms of modernization and not to adopt ideas, concepts, institutions, culture, etc. from this civilization. It is a multifaceted political movement that considers the adoption of Islamic principles necessary for the development of society. After the Tanzimat period, nationalist movements in the Ottoman Empire were not very successful. The failure of Ottomanism and Islamism led to the rapid disintegration of the country. At this point, the Turkism movement emerged with great effectiveness. All these movements were very

important steps in the development of the concept of political Islam. Moreover, they appear to be the first Islamic nationalist movements developed by the Ottoman state itself. Therefore, it is considered important to describe each of these movements in detail in order to understand the direction of development of political Islam.

The foundation of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis that shaped Turkish politics was laid in the last period of the Ottoman Empire. It can be said that the original intellectual currents that the intellectuals and bureaucrats of that period tried to form in order to save the Ottoman Empire under the influence of modern ideologies emerging in the West influenced the essence of the idea of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis. Formulas such as Ottomanism, Turkism and Islamism, which were developed to preserve the legacy and integrity of the empire but could not change the fate of the Ottoman Empire, contributed to the ideological construction of the Republican regime at various levels. Kemalism created its official ideology under the influence of these currents.

Analysis

The political Islamic system during the Ottoman Empire, as analyzed, was formed not only as a religious belief, but also as a central source of legitimacy for state governance. Sultans, in their capacity as caliphs, consolidated political power as the religious leader of the Muslim community and governed the empire on the basis of Sharia and traditional Turkic political culture[1]. This served to unite representatives of different nationalities and religions within the empire into a single system. In this regard, political Islam was manifested as one of the main elements ensuring the long-term stability of the Ottoman state. Religious institutions, in particular, sheikhs of Islam and judges, actively participated in the process of political decision-making. Their role was not limited to resolving religious issues, but was manifested as a mechanism for regulating state policy[2]. For example, Sharia courts played an important role in resolving social conflicts within the empire, supporting the sultan's authority from a religious perspective. This ensured the harmonious functioning of political and religious institutions and strengthened the internal stability of the empire.

Also, since the Ottoman Empire was a multinational and multi-religious state, political Islam required flexibility and pragmatism in practical governance. Sultans and religious elites made political decisions in accordance with local traditions. This political strategy was an important factor in the long-term functioning of the empire. Karen Armstrong argues that the Ottomans managed the empire by balancing religious and secular power, and as a result, political Islam became a flexible tool of governance.[3] According to Bernard Lewis, although political Islam served as the official ideology of the empire, pragmatism prevailed in practical governance.[4] This situation allowed the empire's political system to function not only as a means of strengthening religious legitimacy, but also as an effective mechanism for governing a multinational society. Thus, political Islam in the Ottoman Empire occupied an important place not only as a religious but also as a practical political tool. In general, the above analysis shows that the political Islamic system in the Ottoman Empire was a complex socio-political mechanism formed on the basis of the combination of religion and state. This mechanism ensured the internal stability of the empire and served to strengthen the legitimacy of the sultan's power in multinational territories. From this point of view, political Islam is considered a central element not only of the religious, but also of the political and social structure of the Ottoman Empire.

In the Ottoman Empire, political Islam was actively used not only as a means of strengthening central authority, but also as a mechanism of social integration and cultural identification. For example, Şerif Mardin argues that religious institutions and local scholars were able to mitigate conflicts and maintain social order between different ethnic and religious groups within the empire.[2] This aspect shows that political Islam served to govern society not only ideologically, but also on a practical political level. In the Ottoman Empire, the religious education system and the ulama institute functioned not only as centers of religious knowledge, but also as a means of raising political awareness and coordinating relations between local authorities and the center. The role of the sheikh al-Islam as a political advisor was also related to aligning political decisions with sharia and increasing the legitimacy of power. The Ottoman Empire implemented political Islam both ideologically and pragmatically. This played a particularly important role in regulating conflicts between regional emirates and the sultanate. At the same time, political Islam provided flexibility in dealing with the different ethnic and religious communities within the empire. Political Islam was also a source of legitimacy in the Ottoman Empire's international diplomacy. Through the status of caliph, the sultans retained political leadership in their relations with other states in the Muslim world, relying on religious foundations.This aspect served to strengthen the empire's political stability and position, not only internally but also externally.

In the Ottoman Empire, political Islam served not only

as a means of ensuring the legitimacy of power, but also as a means of strengthening social integration, cultural identity, and internal and external political stability. In this respect, political Islam once again demonstrates that it was an important, multi-functional mechanism in the complex governance system of the Ottoman state.

CONCLUSION

The fact that the political Islamic system in the Ottoman Empire was formed as a unified mechanism of state governance, social integration and religious legitimacy is proven by many sources. The sultans, in their capacity as the caliphs, practically unified political power as the religious leader of the Muslim community and ensured the internal stability of the empire by harmonizing Sharia with state policy. Sheikhs of Islam, judges and other religious institutions not only resolved religious issues, but also actively participated in the process of making political decisions, which further strengthened the central position of political Islam in the complex governance system of the empire. Also, since the Ottoman Empire was a multinational and multi-religious state, political Islam provided flexibility in practical governance. The religious-pragmatic approach in working with local emirates, Christian and Jewish communities increased the stability of the empire's political system. In this regard, political Islam served not only as a source of religious legitimacy, but also as an important tool in social integration, territorial stability and international diplomacy. The uniqueness of political Islam in the Ottoman Empire is reflected in its system of combining practical pragmatism and religious legitimacy. This system served to ensure the long-term stability of the empire, to govern a multinational society, and to maintain its political position in the Muslim world. In this regard, it is clear that political Islam in the Ottoman Empire is not only a historical phenomenon, but also has important theoretical and practical significance in the study of modern political Islam and state administration.

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