



## Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism: Marginalisation of the Opponents with Special Reference to the Hizmet Movement

Ismail Albayrak<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This article analyses the contents of the sermons prepared by the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) during 2015 – 2018. First, the importance of the Friday prayer and its *pars quidem*, the *khuṭbas* (the sermons), together with their historical developments in the socio-religious life of Muslims will be discussed briefly. Then, the article will focus on how these sermons are being increasingly utilized by Diyanet (which in turn is used by the Turkish government) as an effective tool to wage war on the political opponents of the current Turkish government. The instrumentalization of the sermons is best manifested in the marginalisation of one of the most peaceful groups in Turkey, namely the Gülen (Hizmet) movement. The main aim of this article is to evaluate the topics and discursive nature of these sermons, which have been addressed to nearly 25 million Muslims weekly in and outside Turkey (including Europe, United States, Australia, and Central Asia), in order to show that Diyanet is involved in demonising and silencing the dissenters of the regime. In short, the article deals with the transformation of Diyanet from a traditional status to a major role player in the legitimisation of the Justice and Progress Party (AKP, Erdoğan's party) on the one hand, and as an instrument in the painful relationship between the state and church in the Turkish context on the other. In other words, an extreme politicisation of Diyanet in the hands of the AKP government forces this formerly respected institution to adjust itself to the constantly varying and unstable daily policies of the AKP. To do so, Diyanet comes and swings between the nationalistic and Islamist (*millî* and *ummah*) spectrum to endorse the AKP. The best example of this spectrum is exemplified by the role of Diyanet in converting a political and security issue, namely the staged military coup on 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2016, into a process of religious and spiritual commemoration by the power of the sermons.

**Key words:** Sermon, Diyanet, Hizmet movement, Discrimination, AKP, Nationalism, Ummah.

---

<sup>1</sup> Australian Catholic University, Ismail.Albayrak@acu.edu.au

## **Introduction**

Recent Turkish Republican history is marked by the painful and uneven relationships between the church and state. An interesting aspect of this tension between the church and state is manifested in the new role of Atatürk's Diyanet, redefined by the conservative AKP. There has been a rapid increase in academic works and research into Diyanet during the last five years. Besides many types of research that concentrate on the socio-political instrumentalisation of Diyanet, this article can be considered as a modest socio-theological contribution to this international research interest. Briefly, this article deals with the question of how an institute, which is supposed to be an impartial governmental body, assumes through primary sermons and many other tools an Ecumenical status and becomes an effective religio-political apparatus of the state. Instead of focusing on the empowerment of the society spiritually and paving the way for people's religious freedom in multi-cultural Turkish communities, Diyanet has assumed a mission of legitimising current government's (AKP) totalitarian policies. This new role of Diyanet has two dimensions: on the one hand Diyanet supports government policies via Friday sermons and embellishes the critics' remarks against the government by religious colours to reduce general dissatisfaction of the people, and on the other hand, by its unquestionable attachment to the government, Diyanet reinforces its own place by getting strong support from the government. In conclusion, both Diyanet and the government are materially in a win-win situation. In addition, this article discusses how Diyanet, backed by the AKP, criminalises active international socio-religious movements by means of the sermons. Furthermore, light is also shed on how Diyanet, with these sermons, transforms the Hizmet movement into a cult or heretic group in the eyes of the Muslim masses in the mosques.<sup>2</sup> This article also evaluates the content of these sermons in the light of a complete marriage between Diyanet and AKP, and its reflection in the sermons. It argues that Diyanet is obsessed with some short-term privileges and gains which make this important institution extremely blind to the political polarisation of the government and a toy in this divisive nature of the current political climate. Thus, on the basis of the content analysis of the sermons, this article gives detailed information about Diyanet's outward growth (in personnel numbers and budgets) in

---

<sup>2</sup> Having taken the historical and theological framework into considerations, Diyanet's defamatory and derogatory sermons about the global Hizmet movement resemble the Umayyad Dynasty's abusive attacks on the members of the family of the Prophet (ʿAhl al-Bayt), especially ʿAlī, the cousins of the Prophet and his children.

## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

contrast to its shrinking status and values in the eyes of ordinary people who consider Diyanet solely as an AKP institution rather than a public state department.<sup>3</sup>

Sermons are subjected to the qualitative and quantitative content and discourse analysis. Since Diyanet published all the full text of the subject matter of sermons regularly on its official webpage, we find it easy to base our analysis primarily on the use of keywords and concepts. Although we did not take every socio-religious or political concept and term into account, we did our best to cover some keywords, significant anecdotes, main topics, and themes in our analysis. Thus, we do believe that these evaluations fulfil the requirements of the full qualitative content analysis of the data. To carry out this analysis, we will first consider the sermon topics from three perspectives. As the content of a sermon has an effect on the religious inclination and formation of the people, it is essential to see how the selected topics address the belief/faith (thought), actions (behaviour and worship), and emotions (spirituality) of Muslims.<sup>4</sup>

We will also discuss the importance and historical developments of the Friday sermons in Islamic traditions and cultures. Then we will provide some background information about Diyanet in the Turkish state context, its establishment, legal status, and functional and operational nature. Having summarised these two topics briefly in this article, we will consider the inventory of the sermons delivered during four years (from 01.01.2015 to 10.11.2018) to make some preliminary remarks. We will discuss what kind of aims and outcomes Diyanet had planned while delivering these sermons. After this general discussion, we will focus on the negation of the Hizmet movement by Diyanet through direct and indirect messages in the sermons. It will be argued that the tone adopted by sermons about the Hizmet movement never changes despite Diyanet's flip-flopping in accordance with AKP's erratic policies. Thus, the systematic concerted efforts by AKP and Diyanet to create *Hizmetphobia* among congregations in the mosques by using hatred speech and divisive language is the main topic of this article.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> The new state system introduces AKP to Turkish public as not only a political party but also the owner of the state. Consequently, Diyanet, like every other state department, associates itself directly with AKP rather than the state itself or the people. Mutual empowerment will continue as long as AKP holds the power in Turkey.

<sup>4</sup> In this analysis, we follow the format developed and applied by Dr. Ahmet Onay in his examination of Turkish sermons. Onay prepared his work under the auspices of the Supreme Board of Religious Affairs for the Presidency of the Turkish Republic. See Ahmet Onay, 'Diyanet Hutbelerinin İçerik Analizi', *İslami Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 17 (2004), 1-13; for further details see Ismail Albayrak, 'Friday Sermons and the Question of home-trained Imams in Australia', *Australian eJournal of Theology* 19/1 (2012).

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, malicious and groundless injury done to the reputation of the Hizmet was initiated by Mehmet Görmez. He constantly kept the *Hizmetphobic* approaches alive in the sermons to remind the congregation that Hizmet people are dangerous and that they need to support the government against them. This is not only a national but also a religious duty of the congregation. Of course, a new enemy created in the sermons by Diyanet forced the congregation to look after their government.

From time to time, we will also point out the new type of unaccustomed and quite unorthodox approaches invented by Mehmet Görmez and advanced by Ali Erbaş to use the sermons to mitigate the tension between problematic national and international politics of the AKP government and public concerns as a lifesaver.

### **Friday Sermons**

Friday as a day and Friday prayer has a significant place in the Muslim religious life. Mid-day prayer on Friday was replaced by Friday prayer, and the sermons are an inseparable aspect of this weekly prayer. Thus, a proper Friday prayer necessitates delivering the sermon. Although we do not come across the term *khuṭbah* (sermon)<sup>6</sup> in the Qur'an, the expression '...then proceed to the remembrance of Allah...' mentioned in verse 62:9<sup>7</sup> has been explained as referring to Friday sermons from the early formative period of Islam.<sup>8</sup> During his stay in Madina, it is estimated that the Prophet Muḥammad gave around 500 sermons. Despite the fact that many of his statements, words, actions, and even his approvals are recorded and transmitted to us, it is interesting to see that a very limited number of his sermons actually reach us. Although this article's topic is not this issue, it is worth investigating it. Most probably, the Prophet's sermons are very short and generally consist of Qur'anic verses. Thus, the companions do not feel any need to transmit them totally.<sup>9</sup>

During the rightly guided caliphs' period, it has been observed that they also followed a similar pattern. Nevertheless, in the Umayyad period, we witnessed that the content and quality of the sermons were deteriorating through frequent references to their policies and divisive language.<sup>10</sup> Besides the sermons' contribution to the people's religious and moral life, many political leaders had a fundamental understanding of the socio-political dimension of the sermons. This aspect of sermons encouraged them to unite the people around their policies with the help of powerful sermons. For this reason, it has been common for caliphs throughout history to ask officials to read sermons on their behalf and pray for their health, leadership, and power at the end of each sermon in the Muslim majority regions. In addition to their focus on the ethical and religious formation of the community, they also play a significant role in uniting

---

<sup>6</sup> However, it is safe to say that we frequently see the expression in the prophetic traditions. It is also important to note that the oral communication of traditions was a part and parcel of the Arabian society long before Islam (Albayrak, 'Friday Sermons', 30).

<sup>7</sup> 62:9 'O you who have believed, when [the adhān] is called for the prayer on the day of Jum'ah [Friday], then proceed to the remembrance of Allah and leave trade. That is better for you, if you only knew'.

<sup>8</sup> Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Sarakhsī, *al-Mabsūṭ*, Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa 1989, II.120.

<sup>9</sup> Recai Doğan, 'Cumhuriyet Öncesi Dönemde Yaygın Din Eğitimi Açısından Hutbeler', *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 39/1 (1999), 495. Also see Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *al-Khiṭāba*, Cairo 1980, 270-75.

<sup>10</sup> Doğan, *ibid.*, 498.

## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

the community both socially and politically.<sup>11</sup> Today, Friday sermons continue to have a special religious status among Muslims, and attendees are forbidden to speak among themselves during the delivery of sermons; anyone else who speaks, or even asks another person not to speak, will be acting against the Islamic law.<sup>12</sup>

During the Ottoman period, sermons<sup>13</sup> were delivered in Arabic, and therefore, in Turkish speaking regions the majority of the congregation did not understand its contents. People generally paid attention to the liturgical and spiritual nature of this deliverance rather than the sermon's main message or content. Because of this language barrier, authorities also did not try to convey their message by means of these sermons. Nevertheless, we observe that in some grand mosques (*Salāṭīn*), there were a certain group of preachers (*shaykh al-kursī*/the master of the pulpit) who translated Arabic sermons into Turkish after the prayer. Be that as it may, it is important to note that their numbers were limited and it was only available in big mosques.<sup>14</sup> The first discussion about the reform of sermons began during the Tanzimat period (reforms and re-organisations during the years 1839 – 1876 in the Ottoman history) when the authorities were eager to transmit their views on the revival of society to the general public. Serious discussions, however, were carried out during the second Constitutionalist (Meşrutiyet) period (beginning 1908 to the end of Ottoman state in 1922). Many participated in the discussion for renewing and reforming the content of the sermons by focusing mainly on the simplification of the language, reading the sermons without melody, using authentic reports, dealing with contemporary issues, and so on. When they had achieved the abovementioned goals, they also had a chance to disseminate their new political views and activities with the help of Friday sermons.<sup>15</sup> Sermons, during this period, were a battleground for those who were trying to

---

<sup>11</sup> Mustafa Baktır, 'Hutbe', *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: Diyanet Vakfı 1998, XVIII.426.

<sup>12</sup> See Albayrak, 'Friday Sermons', 31.

<sup>13</sup> If one looks at the main titles of the Friday sermons during the Ottoman periods in the list of Kamil Yaşaroğlu, it can be seen that these sermons were far from politics and mainly focused on moral and ethical issues. The importance of the Hijrī (lunar) calendar and virtues of lunar months, good morals, the virtues of *Sūrah Fātiha*, *Ikhlāş* and *Basmala*, harms of alcohol, virtues of the companions such as Abū Bakr and 'Umar are good illustrations of these sermons (See M. Kamil Yaşaroğlu, 'Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'nın Hutbe Hizmetlerine Genel Bir Bakış', *Yakın Doğu Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2/1 (2016), 95).

<sup>14</sup> Nesimi Yazıcı, 'Osmanlı Döneminden Cumhuriyete Hutbelerimiz Üzerine Bazı Düşünceler', *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 39/2 (1999), 213.

<sup>15</sup> Concerning this issue, Ali Suavi and Muallim Naci's views are worth mentioning. Even Atatürk himself in his speech on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1922 made it very clear: 'if the language of the sermons were simple to be understood by the public, and addressed to the spirit and mind of the people, Muslims' bodies become alive and their minds are stimulated and purified, their faith becomes very powerful and their heart becomes encouraged'. Nonetheless, there were quite a good number of classical scholars who objected against the simplification and translation of the sermons, even a small group of scholars issued a religious judgment (*fatwā*) about impossibility of reading the sermon in the Turkish language in 1914 (See Yazıcı, *ibid.*, 211-213). Similarly, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi expressed his dissatisfaction and worry with this kind of issue. For him, sermon is the place and space of time where and when people should be warned and not the place of giving details of religious rulings. According to his

convey their political messages and for those who worked very hard to realize some kind of religious revival among the Muslim society. The pragmatic usage of the sermons by the leaders of the second Constitutionalist period is very similar to the modern Constitutionalist (AKP) who have exactly the same mindset as their predecessors.

In 1925, for the first time in Turkish history, the sermons were translated into Turkish. Apart from the sermons' textbook of Ahmet Hamdi Akseki (who later became a director of Diyanet), there were no systematic texts for sermons in the newly established Turkish Republic. Even Akseki's Turkish sermons work was not organized by Diyanet up until the end of 1960. A journal entitled *Diyanet Gazetesi* and published three times a year, contained sermon text in each issue. In the 1970s, these sermons reached out to the local imams in various parts of Turkey through the medium of another journal named *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*. Between 1970 – 90, with the active participation of the Diyanet's personnel (such as müftis, preachers, imams) in the process of preparation of sermons, the length of sermons' texts increased. Diyanet chose among them and sent the selected sermons to imams in the provinces. During 1991 and 1992, the preparation of sermons' text was localised and many müftis in cities and small districts themselves wrote the text of their local sermons. In 2006, Diyanet established a Commission for the preparation of sermons and issued certain guidelines for the preparation of sermons. In 2013, committees of guidance (irşat in Turkish), located in each of the müftis' offices, began sending sermon text prepared by their people to the general directorate of religious services in Diyanet, and after investigation and the selection process, this directorate published the text of the chosen sermon every week on the Diyanet webpage.<sup>16</sup>

Here we would like to draw the readers' attention to a very interesting coincidence regarding the encyclical for the preparation of Friday sermons and the circular note prepared by National Security Council in 2007. As we will discuss in detail about Diyanet's defamation of the Hizmet movement in sermons, we only say at this juncture that both the content of the circulars prepared by Diyanet and Security Council overlapped. In the same year, two important organisations in Turkey seemed to work together to destroy this philanthropic Hizmet

---

own words: 'Friday sermons are the remembrance of the necessary and essentials, not the place where theories are being taught. In terms of warning, Arabic expressions are more powerful than others. If we compare the hadith with the verses of the Qur'an, it will be seen that the most eloquent speaker of the human being cannot reach the imitability of the Qur'anic eloquence/Cumada hutbe, zaruriyat ve müsellemlâtu tezkirdir; nazariyâtı talim değildir. İbare-i Arabiye daha ulvî ihtar eder. Hadis ile âyet muvazene edilse görünür ki, beşerin en belîği dahi, âyetin belâgatine yetişemez, ona benzemez.' (Nursi, *Mektubat*, -Risaleinur nesil yayinlari online- 513).

<sup>16</sup> Onay, *ibid.*, 2; Yaşaroğlu, *ibid.*, 96-100. It is also important to note that there was a workshop in 2014 organised by Diyanet. Especially after 2007, we see that there are some women who participate in preparing the sermon's text although their number is very limited (Yaşaroğlu, *ibid.*, 105-6).

## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

movement. According to Diyanet's encyclical, religious unity, national unity, and togetherness should be given extra emphasis and anything that harms this unity, especially currents or movements that have a divisive and destructive impact on the society or cause a disorder, should be dealt with in sermons.<sup>17</sup> Clearly, it is very easy to criminalise any group in Turkey by stigmatising them with a disorder or as harming the unity of society. What we understand today clearly is that Diyanet was the unseen partner of the AKP-National Security Council meeting in which the decision to destroy the Hizmet movement in 2007 was made. It is also interesting to observe that since mid-2007, Diyanet is growing in power and is backed by AKP to become the sole representative of religious life in the country.<sup>18</sup> Finally, it is important to remind the reader that these sermons by Diyanet address nearly 25 million people inside and outside Turkey. Thus, there is no need to discuss the impacts of the sermons in the mosques but there are other religious publications of Diyanet that take this influence beyond the walls of mosques. In conclusion, religious, socio-cultural, and political effects of the sermons are transcontinental and beyond simple demographics.

As it has been argued above, since the early period of Islam, sermons have been controlled and used by the dominant powers and political elites as instruments to carry out their reform projects and impose their socio-economic and cultural changes on the people. In Borthwick's semi-truthful evaluation, sermons became the tool to legitimise the current government and an apparatus for preparing a conceptual framework for socio-cultural changes in society.<sup>19</sup> Besides their religious and confessional contents, the sermons have played a significant role in the implementation of socio-political programs of the state by enhancing the national identity of the congregation. It is also safe to say that even the opposition groups have used sermons to attack the dominant powers of their time. Messages were sometimes given between the lines or in a more hidden manner while other times it was put across in an extremely articulate way. Nevertheless, without good intentions, sermons become a rhetorical lens to smear others in the hands of governments. When considering the sheer numbers of the audience that listened to the sermons during the AKP period, one can confidently say that these sermons, for the first time in modern Turkish history, witnessed its golden age. Since Diyanet has assumed the role

---

<sup>17</sup> Yaşaroğlu, *ibid.*, 100-101.

<sup>18</sup> The texts of the sermons were subjected to the scrutiny of the Security Council after the soft cope on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1997. If one wants to look at the texts of the sermons prepared at that period, s/he will understand easily that these texts are prepared by some military-minded personalities. The contents of the sermons are very superficial, artificial, dull, boring, and lack any literary taste.

<sup>19</sup> Bruce M. Borthwick, 'The Islamic Sermon as a Channel of Political Communication', *Middle East Journal*, 21/3 (1967), 299-301.

of spokesman for AKP government in mosques and other spaces, the sermons' religio-political dimension is not a hidden agenda anymore. If one looks plainly at the texts of the sermons of the last four or five years, one can see clearly that these sermons contain both political and social-behavioural instructions. Nevertheless, these instructions do not reflect the public's attitude towards religion and social events around them, but they generally reflect AKP's social engineers' expectations from society. In brief, the sermons, which have multifunctional religious apparatus in the hand of Diyanet, are being used to decide what the public should know, how much they should know, and the perspective they should know it from. In other words, sermons are the best example of how the expectations of the AKP elites and the religious life of ordinary Turkish Muslims are brought into compliance. Diyanet's activities, as a mediator in this process, should be definitely investigated from this perspective in great detail. Here we are not only focusing on the question of how religious faith is politicized but we are also dealing with the question of how politics with the help of AKP in the secular Turkish Republic is wrapped up in a religious garment.<sup>20</sup> Now, it is time to give brief information about the status of Diyanet as a higher religious institutional body in the Turkish Republican context.

### **History of Diyanet as a Religious Institute and Establishment in Modern Turkey**

Established in the ruins of the Ottoman state, the new Turkish Republic closed down the traditional religious institutions such as the offices of *Shaykh al-Islām*, *qāḍīs* (judges), *madrāsas*, and sufi lodges. However, to meet the needs of the religious affairs of the public in the secular society, the new state formulated a fresh model and introduced Diyanet. Under article 429, confirmed by the Parliament in 1924, the Turkish Republic established Diyanet to deal with the public's religious life (organising the places where they pray) and some belief matters (publishing some authentic works to be beneficial for people). From outside, it is observed that Diyanet was established to function in a very limited scope. However, there was also a hidden agenda behind the establishment of Diyanet by new ideologies of the Turkish Republic; namely, to monopolise religious services in Turkey and prevent backlash from the religious demographic following the establishment of new secular systems. Thus, apart from

---

<sup>20</sup> The meaning of religious garment in this context is not to say that one needs to be Islamicised and becomes more religious, but it overlaps this type of religiosity with the religiousness of AKP's ideologies. If we are to make no bones of it, we can say that in order to win the election or gain the political power, this religious understanding acts very pragmatically, considers every path legitimate, and has many worldly expectations and profits.



## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

Diyanet, almost every single mechanism that provided religious instructions was closed down and declared illegal.<sup>21</sup>

Since its establishment, although Diyanet has been enjoying these privileges, political and military authorities in Turkey frequently interfered with Diyanet's operation; sometimes, they gave it extensive freedom whereas, at other times, its activities were restricted. For instance, in 1931, Diyanet became a dysfunctional institute whose realm was too restricted to be recognised by outsiders. It finally regained its official status in 1935, and today's semi-independent structure was only achieved in 1965 under article 633 issued by the Parliament.<sup>22</sup> Diyanet came into prominence during the 1970s when many Turkish citizens went to Europe as unqualified workers. Diyanet was the most appropriate institute to support them religiously, protect them from the influence of other religious groups and ensure their loyalty to Turkey. Religious and socio-political missions allowed Diyanet to gain legitimacy steadily among the public and in the state. It is a generally accepted view that the first person who gave Diyanet its real identity (institutional) is Dr. Tayyar Altıkulaç. He never lost interest in Diyanet and even after retirement, he has continued to be attached to this institute by means of the Diyanet Foundation. Nonetheless, it is important to note that although Altıkulaç was the director of Diyanet during the military coup in 1980, he skillfully kept Diyanet away from politics. In 1982, article 136 of the constitution made it clear that Diyanet should keep away from politics to preserve national unity as required by the secular nature of the state.<sup>23</sup> Diyanet achieved this new role by emphasising the synthesis of Turkish-Islam. As Ahmet E. Öztürk has stated, from 1983 up until the AKP government, this synthesis has been the dominant approach of Diyanet.<sup>24</sup> With AKP, Diyanet entered a new stage under the leadership of Görmez and Erbaş. In this new stage, AKP's politically blended and pragmatically changeable understanding of Islam needed a constant legitimiser and rectifier in the eyes of the public. This idiosyncratic understanding of

---

<sup>21</sup> 'All transactions, the legislation and execution of them belong to the Parliament of Turkish Republic. Apart from legislation and execution, in order to manage the religious matters such as faith (dogma) and worshipping (itikadat ve ibadat), Diyanet is established' (İsmail Kara, 'Din İle Devlet Arasında Sıkışmış Bir Kurum: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 18 (2000), 39; Ihsan Yılmaz-James Barry, 'Instrumentalizing Islam in a 'Secular' State: Turkey's Diyanet and Interfaith Dialogue, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, (2018), 3; Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, 'Transformation of the Turkish Diyanet Both at Home and Abroad: Three Stages', *European Journal of Turkish Studies Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, 27 (2018), 1).

<sup>22</sup> Kara, *ibid.*, 39-40; Nil Mutluer, 'Diyanet's Role in Building the 'Yeni (New) Milli' in the AKP Era', *European Journal of Turkish Studies Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, 27 (2018), 4.

<sup>23</sup> A. Erdi Öztürk-Semiha Öztürk, 'Diyanet as a Turkish Foreign Policy Tool: Evidence from the Netherlands and Bulgaria, *Politics and Religions*, 11 (2018), 629.

<sup>24</sup> Ahmet E. Öztürk, 'Turkey's Diyanet under AKP Rule: from Protector to Imposer of State Ideology', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16/4 (2016), 621.

Islam was promoted by an old institute that was newly transformed into an unstable company, namely Diyanet.

Besides Diyanet, many civil bodies and organisations continued their socio-religious activities until mid-2000. Leaving aside the activities of the Diyanet during the soft military coup period (28 February 1997 and a few following years), it has been observed that Diyanet operated under the leadership of Ali Bardakoğlu within the limits of the constitution. Although Bardakoğlu carried out some modernisations and institutional changes, despite pressure from the AKP authorities, he insulated the Diyanet from politics in Turkey.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Bardakoğlu, while being progressive and having a modernist interpretation of religious thought and opinions in his academic career, did not attempt to modify the traditional Sunnī-Ḥanafī stance of the Diyanet.

Rapid change and enormous transformation in traditional Diyanet coincided with the directorship of Mehmet Görmez.<sup>26</sup> This period witnessed how AKP in micro plan became Diyanet, whereas in macro plan it was also observed that Diyanet completely transformed into AKP. In contrast to the earlier rhetoric of the AKP (pro-European Union, a lot of emphasis on human rights, pluralistic societal understanding, democratic opening out, equity and freedom), the new AKP developed more fascist tendencies with great emphasis on local/native and national stance (yerli ve milli duruş). The legitimation of AKP's new authoritarian turn through religion was first carried out professionally by Görmez and then his successor Erbaş in a less professional manner. Another major change during Görmez's leadership of Diyanet was the carte blanche given by the government, which saw astronomic budgets and tremendous increases in the number of personnel.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the elevation of the President of Diyanet

---

<sup>25</sup> Mutluer, *ibid.*, 5; Erdi Öztürk-Semiha Öztürk, *ibid.*, 627.

<sup>26</sup> Here we limit ourselves to focus on Diyanet, and therefore, we are not going to deal with other institutions or Diyanet-related institutions such as the Diyanet Foundation and İSAM (Islamic Studies Research Centre). Diyanet Foundations is one of the richest charitable endowments and both Foundation and İSAM have undergone serious changes during last 5 years, but this issue is not the topic of this article.

<sup>27</sup> In his article where he compares the budgets of Diyanet and directorate of religious affairs of Indonesia, Martin van Bruinessen points out how the AKP government did a great favour to Diyanet. In 2018, the Indonesian Religious Directorate had a 3.85 billion budget whereas Diyanet's budget was 2.90 billion. We need to bear in mind the fact that Indonesia's population is three times bigger than Turkey and in Indonesia, many official religious schools and universities are financially supported by the Directorate of Religious Affairs whereas in Turkey all İmam Hatip schools and Divinity faculties are financially supported by the Ministry of Education and YÖK (High Presidency of Tertiary Education) (Martin van Bruinessen, 'The Governance of Islam in Two Secular Polities: Turkey's Diyanet and Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, *European Journal of Turkish Studies Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, 27 (2018), 4). As we mentioned above, the growing budget and personnel's number of Diyanet during the Görmez-Erbaş periods was not accidental. The financially sentimental relationship between Diyanet and AKP makes Diyanet very vulnerable towards AKP's growing expectation from it and also exposes Diyanet to explicit influence from AKP. Economically speaking, Diyanet is bought by AKP and this transaction is realised by no other than Görmez himself.

## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

(başkan) from directorate to permanent secretary (müsteşar), and the state protocol of Diyanet's director's hierarchy being elevated from 51 to 10 by AKP<sup>28</sup> can be considered symbolically as one of the greatest prerogatives given to the society's conservative segments. It is also worth noting that in contrast to his predecessors, Görmez was vocal and mediatic in giving his own opinion about almost every issue in Turkey, from social, political, economic issues to education and moral matters. Although Turkish society was not accustomed to a garrulous religious figure, Görmez's interest in politics brought Diyanet closer to AKP than any other period. If one analyses Görmez's statements during his directorship, one can easily see the stages in which Diyanet was drawn into politics step-by-step by the collaboration of its President and AKP masterminds.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, Diyanet, under the control of the so-called conservative government, failed to embrace majority of citizens in Turkey. Instead, as a result of the effort of its recent presidents, Diyanet is deliberately and systematically subjected to AKP's service. In the hands of Görmez and Erbaş, this great institute, in tune with AKP's policies, was radicalised and became exclusivist and divisive. This undermines not only Diyanet's prestigious reputation but also Islam as a religion. As we will see in the discussion of the sermons' content between 2015 – 2018 in the following sections, Görmez launched an unofficial partnership between the Diyanet and AKP (in a modern sense Diyanet has become a satellite of AKP) and its director assumed the role of the spokesman of AKP rather than the director of the High Presidency of Turkey Religious Affairs.<sup>30</sup>

Ali Erbaş, who took the baton of directorship from Mehmet Görmez in September 2017, was determined to carry an AKP-oriented Diyanet as far as he could from the outset. The new director's commencement address is a fair proof of what he plans on achieving during his tenure.<sup>31</sup> Like Görmez, Erbaş successfully conveys the message and mission of AKP to the world through Diyanet's resources. Besides mosques, where there is always an audience to listen to AKP's trumpet, Diyanet and AKP mayors' joint activities, under the guise of religious

---

<sup>28</sup> Mutluer, *ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>29</sup> In fact, many former directors of Diyanet became MPs in different parties and engaged heavily with politics in Turkey. Nevertheless, their political discourses were not very clear during their stay in the office of Diyanet. Although Görmez has not yet been participating in active politics in Turkey, because it is a general practice and custom among the directors, no one guarantees Görmez's long-term abstinence from the politics.

<sup>30</sup> If one reads the abovementioned discussions in the light of the key role played by Görmez during the staged military coup, his instrumentalisation of Diyanet for the sake of AKP policies becomes very clear. Görmez was with the head of Turkish Intelligence agency on the day when the staged coup started. Right after the outset of this coup, Görmez organised, without wasting any time, the recitation of *adhān* by imams and *muadhdhins* in every mosque in Turkey. This was the first step taken to dress a religious garment to this resistance against coup. In the following days and months, it became apparent that Diyanet was commissioned to idealise religiously and spiritually the resistance against this failed coup attempt. In conclusion, Görmez will always be remembered as the first director who solely presented this respected institution to the service of AKP.

<sup>31</sup> See Mutluer, *ibid.*, 7.

gathering, results in prating virtues of AKP in every occasion. Imams encourage their congregation to vote for AKP; AKP candidates freely come to mosques and promote their campaigns, and even pro-AKP ladies use this opportunity and address men in the mosques. Many Diyanet Qur'an courses turn into convenient AKP polls offices. This explicit partisanship by Diyanet that was aggravated by the hate and discriminatory speech of imams in the mosques detaches many people from places of worship. In brief, with the joint venture of Görmez and Erbaş in politicising Diyanet, a century-old respected institution (Diyanet) not only lost its spirit but also its consciousness. Diyanet is now a leading institution that has a secularising effect on Turkish masses and is the reason for reducing religiosity and distancing people, especially young people, from religion.

The main question we have to ask at this stage is what incentives lie behind the extreme instrumentalizations of Diyanet by politics in the hands of Görmez and Erbaş. According to our research, like AKP, after a certain period, Diyanet too became the servant and captive of political Islam. Similar to AKP, Diyanet's leader cadres created an Islamist ideology that is far from Turkey's realities. Being an apparatus of politics brings Diyanet to the edge of an abyss. To serve political Islamist ideology, Diyanet's personnel begin legitimising everything to achieve their political gain. Diyanet became a mirror-image of AKP and mimicked its every move, whether it was working with their own supporters or marginalising its opposition. This institutional behaviour that is typical of developing nations makes many of the Diyanet's members indifferent to what is happening around them. Like their political counterpart, Diyanet personnel prefer to enjoy their life in their glasshouse by dealing with and serving for like-minded people. The most important negative outcome of this attitude is the discrepancy between discourse and action. Just as AKP leaders, Diyanet's action never speaks louder than their words. In the end, Islamism in Diyanet's discourse becomes an empty and meaningless word (*lafz-ı bî-manâ*).

Diyanet's activities were not limited to the mosques. Bearing in mind the extensive national and international network and media coverage (journals, radio, TV, digital networks), Diyanet expanded its hinterland continuously. To put it in modern terminology, Diyanet has now become a global institution.<sup>32</sup> It is safe to assume that through Diyanet and its weekly sermons,

---

<sup>32</sup> Many Diyanet mosques abroad are unfortunately converted to AKP's branches or organisations. Diyanet is the strongest institute and effective instrument in the hand of AKP overseas. Thus, the religious life and perceptions of the Turks in Europe are generally shaped by this institution. The changing nature of the AKP policies are constantly revitalised among the Turkish Muslims in Europe by means of Diyanet's activities in mosques (A. Erdi Öztürk-Semiha Öztürk, *ibid.*, 624). But one serious problem, posed by Diyanet's acting as a satellite of AKP is the growing polarisation among Muslims in the West, which harms the unity and social cohesion of the society.

## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

Turkey's and AKP's daily politics spread from localities to the global audience. Diyanet's exportation of AKP's politics kills two birds with one stone: on the one hand Diyanet transfers these problems from AKP's perspectives to the Turkish diaspora, and on the other hand, it gives the impression of AKP's Islamist sensitivity to both the Turkish and non-Turkish Muslims outside Turkey.<sup>33</sup> Diyanet is gradually becoming a transnational AKP. Operating in 36 countries with 61 branches and publications in 28 languages, Diyanet's influence is greater than the offices of the Turkish embassies. AKP leadership uses this massive network to convey their pragmatic and spineless Islamist vision by means of Diyanet on a global scale.<sup>34</sup> The unwavering support of AKP abroad and some of Diyanet's personnel's self-confidence in seeing themselves as the sole representatives of the state led them to act as the secret agents of the state among Turkish populace in Europe and other places. Some imams and social attaches in embassies and consulates target the people of the Hizmet movement and record their moves to report to the government. The intelligence they sent to Turkey affected the lives of the relatives of people who are linked to the Hizmet movement.<sup>35</sup> At this stage, the most important question to be addressed is what motivation do these people have to discriminate against their own people in a foreign land where the laws do not permit this kind of illegal collection and transformation of information. The answer is simple; the Diyanet steps in where the government's reach falls short, as a hidden political force that is more loyal than the king himself.

Finally, we would like to draw the reader's attention to the interesting aspect of Diyanet's officials. Similar to AKP's cadres, Diyanet's personnel share the same background and world view. For them, the state is considered to be the Satan when they are in opposition, but while they are in power, the state becomes sacred and needs to be protected. Normally, many of Diyanet's staff members are from low income and rural backgrounds. One distinguishing feature of these people is that they are timid, reserved, and withdrawn rather than open and articulate. For a long time, religious people were marginalised and depicted negatively in society. AKPs coming to power encouraged the people who, for a long time, had lived subconsciously as an alienated people. Especially after 2010, AKP has given privileges to Diyanet to create a new self-image and allow them to enjoy more power than some ministers' offices. This delusion is empowering but at the same time intoxicating. Especially after the

---

<sup>33</sup> Erdi Öztürk-Semiha Öztürk, *ibid.*, 627.

<sup>34</sup> For details see Erdi Öztürk-Semiha Öztürk, *ibid.*, 632-6.

<sup>35</sup> See Yilmaz-Barry, *ibid.*, 8; The activities of Yusuf Acar, social (Diyanet) attache of Holland, is a very good illustration of this. See Erdi Öztürk-Semiha Öztürk, *ibid.*, 639.

staged coup attempt, two groups (Diyanet and Police force/Intelligence) have become extremely outspoken defendants of the government. Seeing themselves as an indispensable component of the country, they undervalue others or any opposition. The widespread fear created by the current political climate in Turkey has produced a new layer of society who uses religion as a shield. Diyanet, in this context, is the leading actor, and members of the Theology and Divinity faculties and Imam Hatip schools follow Diyanet as proxy members.<sup>36</sup>

### **General Evaluation of the Sermons**

In the light of four years of sermon texts, we can confidently say that there is no systematic arrangement regarding the themes. The sermons' topics are selected in accordance with the current situations or with the celebrations of certain dates. There is no short- or long-term plan of organisation dealing with faith, spiritual, social, and religious issues. Another deficiency in the preparation of the sermons is emulating and following closely the political agenda of Turkey or unexplained randomness. Although the majority of the sermons' contents are dry and stereotyped, the titles of the sermons are attractive and striking<sup>37</sup> and we have not been familiar with these type of headings on a rhetorical level before. The particular selections of the Qur'anic verses and the prophetic reports for the caption of the sermons, similar to headings, are also very effective and impressive in contrast to the shallowness of the contents, which reminds us that sometimes they are repetitions or copies of the previous years' sermons with very little update.

In regard to faith, dogma, the most frequently mentioned topic is *tawḥīd* (oneness and unity of God) and social manifestation of it, namely *waḥdat*. The Notion of *ʿubūdiyyah* (servanthood) is also one of the most common topics of these four years' sermons.<sup>38</sup> Prophethood, celebration

---

<sup>36</sup> There is an important issue to be underlined here. People who belong to abovementioned backgrounds—with very few exceptions—were very scared of the state and military coup in September 1980 and soft coup in February 1997. Today these people assault the Hizmet movement in undeterred manner, criticise them severely, and do not recognise any moral boundary in their attack. Not only do they attack the Hizmet movement, but they are ready to launch an onslaught against any opposition to the AKP without any concern. I think the reason behind their bravery is the fear of state that is immanent in their subconscious. For them, there is no doubt that AKP is associated with the state, therefore, many Islamists' cheap heroisms are mainly backed by the state rather than meritorious acts in supporting human rights. Diyanet's share in the production of this new type of Islamist is undeniable. The economic aspect of these new religious elites who have become nouveau riche and do not want to lose these privileges, even under the shadow of dreadful practices of AKP should also not be forgotten. Sadly, many of them are not aware of the real danger that destroys the religious lives of masses day-by-day.

<sup>37</sup> For instance, the title of the sermons dated 28.8.2015 was 'From Travelling to Pilgrimage to Travelling to Righteousness (in original there is a pun with the words *ḥājj* and *ḥaqq*). The title of the sermon on the sacrifice day dated 02.09.2016 was 'the Declaration of the Servanthood and Sincerity: Sacrifice Day'. The sermon delivered on 01.12.2017 was inspired from the prophetic tradition 'the Most Auspicious Day on which Sun Rises: Friday'.

<sup>38</sup> *Tawḥīd* and *waḥdat* are mentioned more than 30 times. The notion of servanthood and its derivatives occurs more than 100 times.

## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

of the birth of the Prophet, Ramadan, Night of Power, the importance of the learning, the recitation of the Qur'an during school holidays, and meeting with the Qur'an are also frequently mentioned topics. Besides the Qur'an, the concept of belief in the holy scriptures is also brought forward in the sermons. Nevertheless, it is observed that two important articles of the principle of faith are missing in the sermons: belief in the Angels and destiny. It is puzzling that during four years these two themes were not given the attention they deserved. Regarding the basic principles of Islam, pride of place belongs to *ṣalāt* (ritual praying), and then fasting and pilgrimage are dealt with in their respected season.<sup>39</sup>

Another important topic which attracts considerable attention in contrast to the earlier years is family and women issues. The Turkish public has been experiencing an increasing number of divorce rates and a diminishing ratio of marriages for a long time. In addition, mistreatment of women and domestic violence at a fearful rate make these topics timely, although their effect seems very limited. During the defined period there were five sermons that directly focused on the family. If we add the topics of women, family privacy (*mahremiyet*), and visiting and connecting with the relatives (*sıla-i rahim*) to it, we have around ten sermons related to family and women.<sup>40</sup> These sermons were intensely given between 2016 – 2018 and dealt with subtopics such as physical and emotional violence against women, honour killings, empowerment of the family, need for compassion in the family, chastity and modesty, importance of marriage, the relationship between relatives, the meaning of being a father and mother and their responsibilities.

### **Diyanet's Attempt to Defame Hizmet Movement via Friday Sermons**

Otherising the sympathisers of the Hizmet movement by the AKP leadership began right after the 17<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> December 2013 corruption scandal and investigation. AKP directly targeted the Hizmet movement and insulted, marginalised, and even heathenised the movement. Diyanet, as a hidden partner of the AKP government, joined secretly in this otherising process up until the staged military coup in July 2016. Before the coup, Diyanet gave its logistic support to the AKP government and generally sent its reinforcement indirectly, and to some extent, subliminally. Although congregations in the mosques understood well which group was on the agenda of the sermons, there were still some on Diyanet's side who were hesitant to be involved

---

<sup>39</sup> The term *ṣalāt* and its derivatives are mentioned very frequently, most probably more than 200 times.

<sup>40</sup> The concept of family and its derivatives are mentioned more frequently than woman and its derivatives in the sermons. See the sermons dated as follows: 20.02.2015, 08.05.2015, 13.05.2016, 20.05.2016, 08.07.2016, 30.06.2017, 05.01.2018, 09.03.2018, 11.05.2018, 26.10.2018.

in the defamation of the Hizmet movement openly. As we mentioned above, Diyanet's sermons have no patterns or preplanned strategies in general but when the subject matter was the Hizmet movement and its leader, Mr. Fethullah Gülen, we witness serious consistency, determination, and stability in their denigration. Although we will discuss in detail below, the sermons frequently and heavily deal with hostility towards the Hizmet movement after July 2016 and try very hard not to allow the congregations in mosques to forget this stigmatised enemy. Thus, Diyanet, at regular intervals, brings the hatred of the Hizmet movement to the fore in Friday sermons. Diyanet adopted the political Islamist stance of AKP and declared a war against the socio-religious civil Islamic movements by transferring this political struggle to the theological field. This is a dramatic shift and Diyanet, backed by every kind of state apparatus, succeeded in demonising the sympathisers of the Hizmet movement.<sup>41</sup> Diyanet's explicit taking of side forces readers to think that official Islam (Diyanet) has an (unofficial) agreement with the state (political Islam of AKP) in bringing civil Islam down. The question of how they bring civil Islam down lies in the power of their words, namely sermons on Friday. The irony is that while the Hizmet movement is frequently marginalised and referred to as the greatest devil in the sermons, the most frequently mentioned topics are local and global fraternity and brotherhood.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, the driving force behind Diyanet's lynching attempt is political not religious.

There are many other specific topics that attract our attention in the analysis of the sermons. For instance, the title of the sermon on 10.04.2015 (before the military coup) during the celebration of the Prophet's birthday was 'the Prophet and the Ethics of Living Together'. This sermon talks about creating universal peace, keeping away from violence (establishing a non-

---

<sup>41</sup> There is an interesting anecdote which is worth mentioning. A sheikh of relatively marginal sufi order in Indonesia, who has a close contact with another sufi order in Istanbul, issued a fatwa that denounced the Hizmet. Diyanet was so happy to have this *fatwā* and embraced it wholeheartedly and congratulated the Indonesian sheikh and sent a letter of thanks to him. Hamdullah Öztürk, who investigated backstage on this issue, concluded that most probably this letter was prepared by the Turkish sheikh and asked the Indonesian sheikh to confirm this as a favour. The saddest part was Diyanet 'taking the bait' (putty) in the hands of this fabrication. For details see Dr. Hamdullah Öztürk's dialogue (<http://www.shaber3.com/hamdullah-ozturkten-dib-ali-erbasa-onemli-sorular-bu-kisiyi-tasvip-ediyor-musunuz-haberi/1313823/>).

<sup>42</sup> Terms indicate togetherness, unity, brotherhood occurred in the sermons numerically as follows: together/birlikte, 220; unity/birlik, 87; birbirimize/one another, 80; each other/birbirine, 41; one another/birbirlerine, 21; one another/birbirimizin, 17; each other/birbirinize, 15; somebody/birimiz, 13; mutual/birbirini, 12; together/beraber, 35; solidarity/beraberlik, 22; our solidarity/beraberliğimizi, 15; together/beraberce, 9; together with/beraberliğine, 7; our brothers/kardeşlerimize, 67; brotherhood/kardeşlik, 66; our brothers/kardeşlerimiz, 34; brother/kardeş, 33; our brotherhood/kardeşliğimizi, 31; our brothers/kardeşlerimiz, 23; our brothers/kardeşlerimizi, 19; our brother/kardeşimiz, 17; brothers/kardeşler, 17; his brother/kardeşi, 13; our brother/kardeşimizin, 13; brotherhood/kardeşliktir, 13; brotherhood/kardeşliğe, 11; his brother/kardeşine, 9; his brotherhood/kardeşliğine, 9; his brother/kardeşini, 8; together with our brothers/kardeşlerimizle, 7; our brother/kardeşimizi, 7; (above all, 1019 times imams address the congregations as 'my brothers/kardeşlerim'. Late 2018 the address type changed into 'respected believers').



## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

violent world), embracing people, and not otherising anyone. The topic of the following week's (17.04.2105) sermon was 'The World is Entrusted to Us and We are Entrusted to Each Other'. This sermon focuses on the sacrosanct nature of human life, honour, and property, and then, gives information about the importance of a human's distinguished language, colour, and gender. The sermon also discusses how to learn to endure and tolerate other ethnicities, classes, and schools of thought. One might get confused with Diyanet's sensitive and embracing sermons on the one hand, and sermons that promote hatred against Hizmet on the other. But one should not forget the fact that the growing number of Syrian refugees in Turkey is, unfortunately, disturbing to some local people, which, in turn, affects their attitude towards the AKP government negatively. So Diyanet, as an indispensable ally of AKP, attempts to mitigate opposition against the incumbent government by implying that the lenient and somewhat ad hoc policies on Syrian refugees are stipulated by religion. Otherwise, the sermons in the following years are far from embracing and extremely critical of the Hizmet movement. These sermons project Hizmet people as people who see themselves and their relation to Hizmet as a source of superiority over other religious groups in Turkey.<sup>43</sup> The first sermon in June 2015 reminds the people of Adam's position, who was created from earth, and Satan who claimed superiority over Adam by its own creation from fire. The conclusion derived from that week is simply that 'whoever allegedly claims his or her ideological or sectarian superior, s/he is the real Satan'. Diyanet's sermons frequently brought this topic of 'prioritising one's own group over the notion of belonging to the global Muslim ummah' to attack the Hizmet movement during the four-year period. It is also worth noting that Diyanet's vilification of the Hizmet movement shows that it considers these peaceful and religious people to be outside of the global Muslim ummah.<sup>44</sup>

The earliest criticism against the Hizmet movement in the sermons is related to their fanaticism. However, with the passage of time, the tone adopted in Hizmet criticism was deteriorating and was cutting across all boundaries. The turning point in harsh criticism began with the military coup, although up until coup, Diyanet had some kind of auto-control in their criticism against Hizmet. After the coup, Hizmet, which used to be introduced as an included external (*dahildeki hariç*), had become an external insider (*hariçteki dahil*) in the sermons. Diyanet's exclusivist approach to Hizmet had a big impact on other mainstream and marginal groups who started

---

<sup>43</sup> In the sermon entitled 'Islam Refuses Every Kind of Racisms' (05.06.2015), it is said that 'sometimes people consider their own school of thought, identity, movement superior than others...this is equal to preferring division and discrimination over unity and togetherness'.

<sup>44</sup> See especially the sermons on the following dates: 01.01.2016, 15.01.2016, 22.04.2016, 26.07.2016, 03.11.2017, 23.11.2018.

seeing Hizmet even outside the Islamic circle. Another interesting accusation brought against Hizmet by Diyanet in the pre-staged coup period was that it caused sedition (*fitne*), was an instrument of the evil (*şer*), and gave false teachings of Islam. This last point was quite crucial for this article. There was a growing tendency in AKP circles for making Diyanet the sole representative of formal and non-formal religious education in Turkey. Thus, Diyanet put great emphasis on authentic religious learnings from reliable sources. According to Diyanet, there are no other reliable sources and authentic teaching than Diyanet itself. *Argumentum a contrario* of this view was that whatever Hizmet teaches is inauthentic and Hizmet itself is not a reliable source.<sup>45</sup>

In this context, the notions of *fitne* and *fesat* (sedition and corruption/disorder) were frequently mentioned terms in the sermons.<sup>46</sup> Be that as it may, the real target of these statements seemed to be the Hizmet. The topics of *fitne* and *fesat* were covered five times in 2015 sermons, whereas in 2016 sermons they were mentioned eleven times, and in 2017 sermons nine times. The rapid increase in 2016 is a clear indicator of Diyanet's intention for bringing up the same (topic) time after time. The sensational headings of the sermons on 15.01.2016 'the Name of the Trial is a *Fitne* (sedition)' and on 29.07.2016 'the Greatest Corruption is to Exploit the Esteemed Values of Religion' are very good illustrations of Diyanet's direct and indirect maneuver to accuse Hizmet. Besides being a source of corruption and mischief, with the sermon delivered on 05.08.2016 entitled 'the Servanthood is Only Peculiar to God', the Hizmet movement was given a new spiritual rank, which previous sermons shied away from mentioning explicitly: hypocrisy and being a hypocrite/*nifak* and *münafıklık*. Curiously, this week's sermon ended with a special prayer 'O our Lord! Do not give any opportunity for those who deceived us with religion, faith, the Qur'an, the Prophet/Rabbimiz! Bizi dinle, imanla, Kur'an'la, Peygamber'le aldatanlara fırsat verme'.<sup>47</sup> This prayer looks like a *berceste* (salient point of the poem) of the sermon. Evidently, Diyanet was determined to inflict these Qur'anic terms randomly on Hizmet sympathisers. What Diyanet implies in these sermons is that the

---

<sup>45</sup> See the sermons: 31.7.2015, 01.01.2016, 15.01.2016.

<sup>46</sup> The Qur'anic terms sedition/*fitne* occurs 81 times, corruption and disorder/*fesat* 30 times, and the word division/*tefrika* 8 times. Clearly Diyanet places great emphasis not only on brotherhood and unity but also on the danger of disunity, sedition, and corruption on the rhetorical level.

<sup>47</sup> In the sermon titled 'Being an Exemplary Ummah/Örnek Ümmet Olmak' and dated 16.11.2016, first there is an emphasis placed on *tawhīd* and *wahdat*, and then it is stated that the creation of the corruption, disorder, and discord among the ummah is in reality the custom of the time of ignorance. Then, the sermon concludes with the following prayer 'O God! We take refuge in you from corruption, hostility, and bad morality.' The target group in this sermon is evident: the Hizmet movement. For a similar prayer, see the sermon dated 10.02.2017.

## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

followers of this movement are more dangerous than idolaters or infidels, and their opposition should be dealt with on the basis of religious deviation rather than a simple civil disobedience.

Before moving on to the issue of how Diyanet shaped the subconsciousness of the masses about the staged coup, we would like to give an interesting example of state propaganda, namely the sermon titled ‘Ethics of the Words’ delivered on 22.01.2016. It emphasised that words are a mirror or reflection of the essence/character’ and that the most important feature that is supposedly sought is morality and purity in ethics. Then, interestingly, a flashback was made, where the congregation in the mosque was reminded that: ‘...the Prophet (pbuh) said that God does not love those who say false words to impress others or speak with bending their mouth to show off. This emphasises that a believer cannot curse people, cannot insult others with bad words, cannot be a rude and ugly person’. As can be seen, the addressee of these words was directly Fethullah Gülen Hocaefendi. His religiously motivated invitation to reprobate wrongdoers (*mulā’ana/mubāhala*)<sup>48</sup> right after the 17<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> December corruption scandals was alluded to in the sermon as cursing and foul speech. Gülen’s call for reprobation in the sermon was reduced to hypocrisy, with the aforementioned prophetic tradition serving as evidence. Similarly, in the sermon titled ‘Sunnah: the Prophetic Guidance’ dated 03.11.2017, it was proclaimed that ‘no individual or group has the right to regard itself as the sole patron of prophetic traditions’. Here again, Diyanet’s interlocutor was the Hizmet movement. While Diyanet was accusing Hizmet of religious exclusivism, it contradicted its own institutional structure that nominates itself as the only right authority on religious matters in the country, although its institutional piety/religiosity is very problematic.

At this juncture, it is important to note, that there is an immense need for research about Diyanet’s institutional religiosity and spirituality in the Turkish context. We do not know if there are any academics in Turkey who have the courage to work on this topic these days, especially the religiosity of this institute under the AKP period. The Diyanet bureaucrats, who were stuck between the AKP policies and imams, who keep silent due to the fear of being defrocked by the authorities, caused serious spiritual dryness, infertility, and emptiness in their personal lives and the lives of others. Diyanet and its members, who were considered the most

---

<sup>48</sup> For *mulā’ana/mubāhala* verses see 3:61 ‘And if anyone disputes with you about him, after the knowledge that has come to you, say, “Come, let us call our children and your children, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves, and let us invoke God’s curse on the liars’ and 24:6-9 ‘As for those who accuse their own spouses, but have no witnesses except themselves, the testimony of one of them is equivalent to four testimonies, if he swears by God that he is truthful. And the fifth time, that God’s curse be upon him, if he is a liar. But punishment shall be averted from her, if she swears four times by God, that he is a liar. And the fifth time, that God’s wrath be upon her, if he is truthful.

reliable institute and people twenty years ago, are considered today by many as not only being untrustworthy but also immoral and unethical. Turkish people have given up their high moral expectations from the Diyanet. The fact that many types of corruption, unethical behaviour, and activities that take place throughout the country are also seen among some of the staff of Diyanet, who are supposedly the representatives of religion in Turkey, is one of the important factors in the loss of hope in the name of creating an ethical society. If we take the ethico-religious context of Diyanet's institutional religiosity into consideration, which is directly related to the collective religiosity of all its members, we will clearly see how the ethico-religious values are emptied and undermined by Diyanet itself from the perspectives of the parameters of modern psycho-sociological studies. Of course, this kind of research will disturb the AKP politicians and Diyanet's leadership, which has become reckless with the unlimited support coming from AKP. Obviously, if one applies a similar religiosity test to the religiosity of the Divinity faculties and religious high schools (İmam Hatips), the outcome will be no different than the Diyanet's own religiosity. In sum, institutions in Turkey who think they represent religion and religious life at the highest level are neither religious nor spiritual. Their heightened religiousness and extrinsic religiosity do not bring piety, but instead, produce a lot of Pharisee-minded people who lived during the time of Jesus.

The sermon dated 15.12.2017, titled 'Dagger Stabbing Fraternity: Backbiting/Kardeşliğe Saplanan Hançer: Gıybet', stated that perception operations, lies, corruption, and mischief have become an industry. The congregation in the mosque, of course, did not have the luxury to ask the question of who carried out these operations during the sermon. But, based on more analysis of the contents of the sermons, we will witness a series of serious perception operations that were carried out by Diyanet through its sermons. Diyanet, which was supposed to embrace everyone in the country, prefers to exert all its effort to guarantee the continuation of the current political administration. It is a tragicomic scene that when this sermon was delivered, almost 90% of the national media was already under the guidance of the AKP government. It is a well-known fact among Turkish public that the Diyanet and its sister religious groups (also known as pool media), which carry out a mission at the religio-social level similar to these propaganda devices, are not any different from each other. When we look at the Hizmet movement during the time of this sermon, we see that all their media outlets were confiscated and all other institutions together with their sympathisers' property were closed or seized. In other words, Diyanet's journey in the orbit of AKP policies was started in the Görmez era and reached the summit with Erbaş. In this transformation, Diyanet became one of the two soft powers that

### *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

shaped the conscience of the people as a media emperor in Turkey. Thus, Diyanet was arguably the only institution, within the pool media, that had the power to potentially alter perceptions. There is a famous Turkish proverb ‘merd-i kıptî şcaat arzederken sirkatin söyler,’ which literally means ‘a brave gypsy will brag about his robberies’. This proverb’s main message is to say, ‘Do not brag about the things that are unworthy’. Now, Diyanet, as the most powerful institution in the country at a time of unilateral media and monophony, is complaining about perception operations. It seems that this paradox is the best perception operation the Turkish public has experienced as compared to anything else in its history.

After a controlled coup on July 15, 2016, the sermons prepared and given consecutively (22.07.2016, 29.07.2016, 05.08.2016, 12.08.2016, 19.08.2016) by Diyanet introduced the Hizmet movement, whose religio-ethical life was quite apodictic by many, as the most terrible plague that has spread across the country. Bearing in mind the gradual politicisation of Diyanet in the hands of the last two directors, the question of why the highest official religious authority of a country wasted the most distinguished and intellectual member of the society of that country in a snap loses its meaning here. Worse still, being an umbrella institution and being expected to stand neutral, and at the same time act as an alternative movement or group and enter the race of virtue and piety with the Hizmet was the clearest evidence of the institutional stinking and political indecency of the Diyanet.

At this juncture, the sermon delivered after the controlled coup (22.07.16) entitled ‘The Day is the Day of National Docking and the Building of Our Future’ is worth noting to conceptualise the marriage of religion and politics in the Turkish context. The selection of the verse as a caption of the sermons is interesting: ‘Do not, then, be faint of heart, nor grieve, for you are always the superior side if you are (true) believers’ (3:139). The title and the verse are very timely, meaningful, and carefully chosen. If one attentively scrutinises this week’s sermon’s content, he/she can get the right information and a clear direction about the developments that will follow in the aftermath of the staged coup. In contrast to the non-systematic and often thematically shallow earlier Friday sermons, this week’s sermon was substantially professionally prepared, and we were faced with a high-quality discourse that contained a message in every sentence. On the one hand, the love of God, flag, homeland, and nation were

being imbued (nationalism was being pumped),<sup>49</sup> and on the other hand, being *Anşārs* (such as Madinan Muslims who embraced their Meccan brothers and sisters wholeheartedly and welcomed them during the time of the Prophet), the Turkish people were asked to see the help and grace of God by protecting the immigrants (here referring to Syrian refugees), oppressed, and victims. And then, the sermon confirmed that God's mercy will be on the side of this nation, who are the children of martyrs, highlighting an interesting theme that was often emphasised: do not surrender your minds, your perceptions, your conscience to a person or group.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the sermon reduced the volunteers of the global Hizmet movement to the category of naïve people who followed Mr. Gülen blindly. The writer of the sermon was so immersed that he forgot to stop and continued to present the followers of Hizmet as the people who spread the seeds of corruption and mischief, those who are obsessed with the ambition of revenge, who are victims of their own anger, and who are far away from the truth. It is quite surprising that these statements, many of which were based on the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition, were pronounced so easily about the Hizmet people. However, the events following the coup indicate a clearer understanding of what the Diyanet wanted to do with a wholesaler approach in its sermons; because in the days following the controlled coup, the Diyanet granted legitimacy—the country's most distinguished institution (!)—for massive layoffs and arrests by the AKP government. Finally, the author(s) of the text, while the iron was hot, ended the sermon with a vivid nationalist rhetoric to keep the spirit of the July 2016 staged coup alive and the prayer sentences that revived the perception of the enthusiasm of *Anşār*.

---

<sup>49</sup> Here we are not talking about a self-critical middle way nationalism in which one is aware of the pros and cons of this ethno-cultural background. Diyanet, with the help of these sermons, instills constantly in the 25,000,000 Turks a sense of extreme nationalism, including racial superiority and chauvinistic differences. In these sermons, the Diyanet has created a modern atavism that emulates ethnic codes with religious colouring.

<sup>50</sup> In the sermon on 29.07.2016 it was said 'our heart, our mind, our soul, our will, our minds will not deliver to others'. Similarly, in the sermon on 05.08.2016, it was said that we will not capture our minds, our hearts, our conscience to others. On the contrary, we will surrender our existence to eternal truths, not mortal personalities. Although Diyanet's interlocutors are very well aware of the addressee of these sermons, Cübbeli (gowned) Ahmet Khodja, an eccentric preacher in modern religious discussions in Turkey, complains that the address of such Friday sermons is not certain, and he wants the Diyanet to give a clear name (See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBBCWkm8ayA>). Like an epidemic, we witness a clear example of the likeness of the Diyanet to other religious groups. In fact, a much more consistent and important evaluation on this issue was made by Dr. Ahmet Kurucan: The Diyanet cannot go back from its duty to legitimise the policies of the state in order to demonise and destroy Hizmet that it willingly or unwillingly entered. Neither the state nor the government, nor the politics, nor the mentality and the self-interests allow it. The dead end is this way for the Diyanet. They incorrectly buttoned the first button of the shirt they were wearing (<https://zamaustralia.com/2018/12/31/2016-2017-2018de-din-diyamet-ve-cemaat/>). There is no way to express the miserable situation of the Diyanet, which cannot criticize the single lie of AKP cadres and aim no other than to honour Erdoğan's hypocritical politics, better than Kurucan.

## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

In the sermon dated 29.07.2016, while the tone related to the nationalist discourse increased one more time, it was also observed that the issue to host the refugees in Turkey had come back on the agenda. The failure of the controlled coup was directly linked to the Turkish nation staking a claim on the refugees. In summary, on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016, the Almighty God did not embarrass the nation (the generation of Âsım)<sup>51</sup> against the disbelievers and hypocrites (followers of Hizmet are implied) who carried out corruption and trap in the guise of religion. Erdoğan's division between good and bad in the political arena was transformed by Diyanet with a simpler revelation but a more powerful spiritual tone in the religious field. The enemy was clear, namely the Hizmet people; the attacks on the enemy in question continued systematically in the following sermons. Without realizing the gravity of the danger, the Diyanet, with its silent approval, supported all acts of exaltation and apotheosis in favour of Erdoğan and AKP. In addition, under the guise of nationalism (racism is the right term), the Turkish nation was constantly introduced as elected people like the chosen children of Israel. From the outside, this illusion of Diyanet was no different from ISIS's mentality that sheds Muslim blood based on the conjecture that they are doing jihad. The constant contrast between us and them in the sermons' discourse was the most striking example of the extreme politicisation of the Diyanet. However, the climate of fear in Turkey prevented many people from seeing that Diyanet, with excessive Hizmet criticism and hostility, turned into a activist or to some extent militarist organization. But the real danger was in Diyanet's transformation into the materialistic structure with its unrestricted approval given the illegal activities of the AKP government, such as stealing the property of the nation through appointing gangs of thieves under the name of trustees (*kayyim*). The picture of the Diyanet, which appears to be 'an avatar of the AKP, portrays an institution that exploits religion, and thus, leads people away from religion.

When we look at the text of the sermon dated 05.08.2016, we will see similar scenes. This sermon concludes with the prayer 'do not give any opportunity to those who deceive us with religion, faith, the Qur'an, and the Prophet'. As mentioned above, the accusation of hypocrisy against the Hizmet movement was made a long time after the 17<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> December 2013 scandals. However, the most interesting discourse that made the slander (hypocrisy) in question permanent was being put forward as if it was being spoken to anonymous people in the

---

<sup>51</sup> The generation of Âsım (orig. Âsım'in nesli) refers to the famous poetic work of the national poet and the writer of the Turkish national anthem, Mehmet Akif Ersoy.

sermons, but the addressee of the sermon was definitely the Hizmet people. Thus, the sermons kept telling the congregation that there are people who appear in the image of righteous but always sow the seeds of corruption and mischief among the nation.<sup>52</sup> In the sermon dated 23.11.2018 and entitled ‘Our Greatest Wealth is the Youth’, the Diyanet mentioned the most paramount dangers in the country for young people are ‘harmful movements, currents, and toxic ideologies’. And then, the sermon pointed out the same address by saying that ‘the youth are the target of religious traders who claim to represent Islam, but in reality, are the treacherous and shattering networks of bloodshed’. Here the sermon presented hypocrisy in the form of a merchant and it underlines how the movement instrumentalised religion. The verses that were made the caption for the sermon dated 29.07.2016 are remarkable (2:11-12) ‘And when it is said to them, “Do not do cause corruption on the earth,” they say, “We are only reformers”. In fact, they are the troublemakers, but they are not aware’. In this sermon, which had been prepared with much thought again, it was implied that the Hizmet movement, which claimed to have good people who improved others’ lives, in fact, includes corrupt people and troublemakers.

The selection of the introductory verse to the sermon entitled ‘Right Path/Sırât-ı Müstakim’ on 12.08.2016 was 9:31 ‘They have taken their rabbis and their priests as lords instead of God...’ is also worth focusing on. This time, the direct target of the sermon was the architect of the movement, Fethullah Gülen Hocaefendi, rather than Hizmet itself. A week before this sermon, the need to serve only God and not the people was emphasized. However, the sermon did not neglect to point out that the Hizmet people glorified Hocaefendi. In the sermon dated 12.08.16, it was stated that Hocaefendi destroyed and emptied religion or created a new religion. Although he was not named directly, it was stated that Hocaefendi distorted the religion and changed well-established norms of religion. Although the sermon did not mention the kind of distortion Hocaefendi made, this continual item of the agenda topic was inscribed into the hearts of the congregation by means of the sermons. In brief, there have been many religious deviations throughout history, and nowadays, the Hizmet movement represents this deviation under Gülen’s leadership. This spiritual sledding is not merely a simple betrayal, but rather a real transgression, *zulm*. To sum up, no one should be sanctified. As it can be seen, the Diyanet delivered sermons that accused Hizmet heavily in the 15<sup>th</sup> July period, especially after the

---

<sup>52</sup> See the sermons delivered on 05.08.2016, 12.08.2016, 14.07.2017, 11.08.2017.



## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

staged coup. However, when it came to President Erdoğan, Diyanet was silent enough to absorb all kinds of intellectual, religious, and spiritual deviations.<sup>53</sup>

In the sermon titled, ‘Believer and Consciousness of the Trust-Safety/Mümin ve Emanet Bilinci’ dated 19.08.2016, the previous nationalist rhetoric (flag, homeland irrigated with martyr's blood, putting emphasis on the emblem of Islam, namely call to prayer, and so on) continued. At the same time, the Hizmet people and other oppositions were targeted again for being traitors and exploiting the sincere faith of the nation constantly. The most noteworthy point in these sermon groups was that while Diyanet represented righteousness, the Hizmet people represented wrongdoing and superstitions. Similarly, while the Hizmet was accused of treason, the Diyanet was the address of patriotism in the country. As mentioned above, Hizmet represented advocates of seditions and spreading of disorder (*ifsād*), while Diyanet was the sole advocate of reform and correction, *işlāh*. In other words, Diyanet was the only true interpreter and practitioner of the religion, and the Hizmet people were the greatest distorters and corruptors. This view, which was regularly dictated to the congregation in the mosques through sermons, was not a simple operation. It was a comprehensive and well-studied parsing operation carried out in the mosques. While the AKP officials were conducting this operation almost everywhere and at every given opportunity, the mission in the mosques seemed to have transferred to the Diyanet. As it can be seen, the Diyanet’s leadership did this job to the extent that they pleased their masters.

After the staged coup in July 2016, the notion of martyrs had been brought to the agenda at regular intervals in the sermons if the opportunity was found. Occasionally, those martyred on July 15<sup>th</sup> were remembered when people lost their lives in a terrorist attack whereas, at other

---

<sup>53</sup> It is very interesting that this period is full of examples in which Tayyip Erdoğan was idolized by non-Islamic principles. Fevai Arslan, AKP Düzce MP, publicly said the following about Prime Minister Erdoğan: ‘There is a leader who gathers all God’s attributes in himself. But the enemies wanted to block his rise’ (see <https://www.timeturk.com/tr/2014/01/16/ak-parti-li-vekil-erdogan-allah-in-butun-vasiflarini-uzerinde-toplayan-bir-lider.html>). Another AKP MP, Ethem Sancak, said that looking at Erdoğan's face is a form of worship and good deed. He also introduced Erdoğan as his idol. For the details of the interview with Sancak see <http://www.haber7.com/medya/haber/348802-sancak-tayyip-erdogan-idolum>. Others raised the bar further and said that Erdoğan is a Prophet or a Mahdī (see <http://www.hayatinalaminedir.com/beklenen-mehdi-recep-tayyip-erdogan/>). Seyfi Say said that Erdogan has become the seventh principle of faith and the sixth condition of Islam (see <https://tebyin.wordpress.com/2013/12/22/akparti-caminin-mihrabini-kirletirken/>). It is a pity that the Diyanet did not even make a single statement against this kind of glorifications of Mr. Erdoğan. Diyanet, which is always in the mode of having something to say on almost every issue and subject in the country, kept quite in the face of the ridiculous discourses by pro-AKP people in which religion was provokingly offended. All this shows that the Diyanet does not actually act due to its sensitivity about Islam and faith in the country. The only concern of this institution, which used to be a very respected, seems to be how to please the AKP leaders.

times, it appeared in the context of celebrating the victory of the war of Dardanelle. The main emphasis was that this nation, which does not give way to many traitorous attempts from the past to the present, will not give an opportunity to such attacks. As stated in the sermon on 16.12.16 titled ‘With Hardship Comes Ease / Her Zorlukla Beraber Bir Kolaylık Vardır’, to protect the Turkish nation and the Islamic Ummah against external and internal enemies, the special prayer is being said. As the sermon elucidates, the internal enemy here was the Hizmet movement, which was more dangerous than the PKK. The most interesting aspect of the July 15<sup>th</sup> controlled coup related sermons was seen in the first anniversary of this event on 07.07.2017. The sermon titled ‘Tests of Our Faith and Our Humanity: Refugees’ was prepared as a springboard for the following week’s sermon. Plainly, the people were reminded that (our) nation constantly runs to the aid of the oppressed and poor all over the world. It was heralded that the first anniversary of the betrayal of July 15<sup>th</sup> on the existence and values of this great nation would be celebrated a week later. Imams also reminded their congregations that *khaṭm* (reading the Qur’an from beginning to end) was distributed in mosques for the martyrs and the mass commemoration program was said to be held on July 14, the eve of the staged coup. Here, the July 15<sup>th</sup> coup attempt was described as an anniversary. One week later, it was presented as *sene-i devriye* in Turkish, which literally means ‘the turn of the year’, used only in the context of religious celebrations. It is safe to assume that Diyanet’s unconditional support for AKP was reflected in the usage of this term. Clearly Diyanet incisively transferred very dramatic and secular events into religious festivities through this heavily religious connotated expression. Although in the first sermon (07.07.2017), the expression ‘sene-i devriyesini idrak etmek<sup>54</sup>/encountering and realising the first anniversary of it’ was used, full canonisation of the staged coup was implemented during the next sermon entitled ‘the Resistance Witnessed by *Şalās*<sup>55</sup>: July 15/Şalāların Şahit Olduğu Direniş: 15 Temmuz’ on 14.01.2017. As a result of the careful and systematic works of the Diyanet, the resistance against the July 15<sup>th</sup> controlled coup attempt is now included in the Islamic calendar as one of the biggest motifs of Islam. Probably there has not been a time in the history of the young republic where religion was as widely utilised as an instrument of politics. The caption of this sermon is the 5<sup>th</sup> verse of Surah Mā’idah.<sup>56</sup> It is emphasised that as of Manzikert, Dardanelle, and Sakarya wars, the promise of

---

<sup>54</sup> Again, we are seeing another heavily religiously echoing word.

<sup>55</sup> *Şalās* is a recitation of the praise and blessing of God upon the Prophet before Friday’s first *adhān*.

<sup>56</sup> Today all good things are made lawful for you. And the food of those given the Scripture is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them. So are chaste believing women, and chaste women from the people who were given the Scripture before you, provided you give them their dowries, and take them in marriage, not in adultery, nor as mistresses. But whoever rejects faith, his work will be in vain, and in the Hereafter, he will be among the losers.

## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

God took place with the 15<sup>th</sup> July military coup. And then, it is stated that with the prayers of all the members of the ummah in Pakistan, Africa, Gaza, Bosnia, and so on, the men and women, old and young, the last fortress of the Islamic Ummah (Turkey) has not fallen.

After this loaded national and spiritual discourse, the mosque community was reminded of the diabolical Hizmet movement so that they would never forget it. It does not escape our attention that this time the tone was more hardened and detailed than the previous one. Contrary to the political leaders' daily speech, for the first time in this sermon, we observed a clear hate speech against the Hizmet in the sermons after the July 15<sup>th</sup> event. Although Diyanet had not yet used the magic word 'Fetö'<sup>57</sup> in the sermons, we have serious difficulty in understanding this discourse. At this stage, we cannot pass without asking why the director Görmez, who left his office just after 14 days, allowed a sermon with such harsh content? One wonders if he might have tried to give someone a message for his next career with this sermon. So, Hizmet was not only a tool for general political use but also for personal ambitions.<sup>58</sup> It is good to give some examples of this harsh epilogue by the sermon: 'a group who pretends to be righteous is actually the betrayal network that exploits the religion, faith, values, feelings, charity of this nation for 40 years... their act wasted the most valuable wealth of the nation by stealing their children for several generations... their work is in line with the ambitions of the imperialists...their works are actually an act of evil, which are clad in goodness. etc.' If we re-read what this sermon says at the level of locutionary act (*mafhūm al-muwāfiq*), it can be clearer that Hizmet was not national, did not belong to the land (although it originated from Turkey), and was an internal enemy, and the Hizmet's people faith was disabled, immoral, insensitive, and that they were thieves and hypocrites who worked in the interests of external forces. If it is read from Diyanet's perspective, we can confidently say that the victory mentioned in the sermon against the coup on July 15<sup>th</sup> is equated with the expedition of Badr, Uḥud, and the war of Dardanelles. This prominent comparison makes the Turkish-Islamic history solid in religio-national nature. Juristically speaking, the July 15<sup>th</sup> victory was both a *thubūt al-qaṭ'ī* and *dalālat al-qaṭ'ī* (its authentication was certainly the same as its meaning) event. From then on, similar to the sermons being a part and parcel of Friday prayer, the commemoration of the anniversary of the July 15<sup>th</sup> staged coup, with the invention and engineering of Diyanet, became a tiptop religious ritual, taboo, and an essential element of the 15<sup>th</sup> July Friday sermons.

---

<sup>57</sup> Fetö stands for Fethullahist terrorist organization in Turkey (Turkish: Fethullahçı terör örgütü).

<sup>58</sup> Or it can be read as the last move to stay in office.

As it will be recalled, the first messages of Ali Erbaş, whose appointment as the new director of Diyanet was announced in the official newspaper on 17 September 2017, likened Hizmet (Fetö in the words) to Assassins (Hâsan Şabbâh movement). Then, Erbaş continued on to say that despite this similarity, Fetö in a pejorative term is a *sui generis* terror organization.<sup>59</sup> We witnessed that Erbaş, who started to work as a guided bullet and probably did not have the luxury to wait for the next year's anniversary of July 15 (or because he often felt obliged to give a negative message about Fetö), occasionally signed sermons targeting the Hizmet movement. 12 days after his appointment, the sermon titled 'Mosque, City, and Civilization/ Cami, Şehir ve Medeniyet' emphasised that mosques are the centers where the nation raised and resurrected with *Şalâs*. In the sermon entitled 'Being a Passenger of Paradise / Cennet Yolcusu Olabilmek' dated 13.10.17, a subliminal message was given in the hope that the people who try to break the unity and solidarity of the nation will not be given any opportunity. The sermon's caption of the verse dated 26.01.2018 and entitled 'The Spirit of Unity and Togetherness / Birlik ve Beraberlik Ruhu' is also striking. Verse 3:103<sup>60</sup> was quoted and the sermon stated that July 15<sup>th</sup> was the exposure of the greatest betrayal in the Turkish history that resulted in brothers opposing brothers, causing their break, striking the nation with a weapon of sedition and mischief. This nationalistic statement follows the leitmotiv that proclaims 'we can live hungry and without water, but as a nation we cannot live without freedom'. When the sermon is read carefully, the first question that comes to the mind is whether the verse 'hold fast to the rope of God' mentioned at the beginning of the sermon is meant as 'holding fast the rope of the Diyanet' or 'AKP government'. If only the writers of the sermon made it clear, the subject would be understood more easily. In the sermon dated 16.02.2018 and titled 'Jihad: Struggling with Life and Property on the Way of God / Cihad: Allah Yolunda Canla ve Malla Mücadele', and another sermon dated 16.03.2018, entitled 'Struggle for the Existence of our Nation: Dardanelle Victory / Milletimizin Varoluş Mücadelesi: Çanakkale Zaferi', the Hizmet movement is charged with sedition and mischief together with the accusation of setting a trap for the nation.

Although Erbaş started to defame Hizmet quickly, we have observed that no sermons directly or indirectly targeted Hizmet for a period of approximately four months until the 15<sup>th</sup> of July

---

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/diyanet-isleri-baskani-ali-erbas-oldu-2795149>.

<sup>60</sup> 'And hold fast to the rope of God, altogether, and do not become divided. And remember God's blessings upon you; how you were enemies, and He reconciled your hearts, and by His grace you became brethren. And you were on the brink of a pit of fire, and He saved you from it. God thus clarifies His revelations for you, so that you may be guided'.

## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

2018, the second anniversary of the (blessed!) July 15<sup>th</sup>. The reason for this silence is unknown, most probably it could be due to different political agendas or different reasons, but the enmity of Hizmet was certainly not forgotten. Be that as it may, one can confidently say that the worst sermon about Hizmet after the 17 – 25 scandals was given during the time of the second anniversary of July 15<sup>th</sup>. Until the date 13.07.2018, the sermons never mentioned any specific name or there was no direct identification with Hizmet, but in this sermon, for the first time, the pejorative generic title Fetö was mentioned in the first year of Erbaş's directorship. The answer to why the term Fetö had not been used so far in the sermons is quite difficult to get today. However, the definition of this serious allegation (Fetö) that was made by one of the directors, who knew the Hizmet movement best, requires further reflection. As a theologian from the perspective of *qadar* (destiny), I can only say for the time being that there is a plan of God for this privilege that will not be shared with anyone but Mr. Erbaş. From the Islamic perspective, there is no coincidence in the Universe. The verses chosen for the sermon entitled 'Rebirth of the Nation: July 15 / Milletçe Yeniden Doğuş: 15 Temmuz' were the same as that in the sermon given on 29.07.2016. As we mentioned above, the verses were 2:11-12, and they dealt with who was the reformer and who was the spoiler. There was no need to specify who was corrupt at this juncture. Above all, it should be noted that the tone adopted in this sermon was also highly nationalistic. The accusation of the hypocrisy in this verse was directed to the Hizmet movement. All the previous accusations were brought back to the agenda in a more heated manner. It is useful to reiterate a number of issues arising between the lines of this sermon's text. The sermon began with a focus on the concepts such as presenting Turkey as a land of forefathers (*ecdat diyarı*) and trust of the martyrs, a mention of the Dardanelle and the Independence wars, after which the listeners were reminded that Muslims were praying for the Turkish cause from all over the world, and so on. The sermon, with this dense religious-national excitement discourse, softened the hearts of the interlocutors first. The sentences that came after this preparatory soft and emotional discourse were heavily critical expressions. For example, the sermon presented the July 15<sup>th</sup> coup as an attempted invasion under the guise of religion. It was clearly mentioned that Fetö, who looks righteous but serves with vanities, used and abused all religious sentiments and national values of society. The notions of faith, love of the prophet, morality, almsgiving, and charity were good illustrations of them.

In addition, as previously mentioned in the sermon titled 'Clear Religion of Islam / Din-i Mubin-i İslam' dated 28.10.2016, it was again re-emphasised that attempting to build an Islamic life on mystery, arcanum, dream, inspirations, miracles, and future imagination is

unacceptable. Furthermore, this sermon compared Hizmet to the marginal religious groups and cults in the west. Hizmet was also depicted as a movement that was based solely on subjective sources of information and far from intellectual and rational thinking. Among other additional Hizmet criticism were basing the religious life on certain personalities, deviating from a straight path (mainstream line), burning the country with the fire of sedition, being a servant for the servant, not learning Islam from authentic sources, and so on. The most interesting sentence of the sermon given in this anniversary week of 2018 was the expression of protecting the Anatolian lore, *'irfān*. While the Hizmet movement was declared to have a lack of knowledge on the one hand, it was also implied that it does not belong to the land of Anatolia. In sum, Hizmet did not have the domestic and national (yerli and milli) heritage that is a theme of the AKP and the Diyanet partnership. Put it another way, although Hizmet did not belong to this land, Diyanet, which is fully supported by AKP, is presented as the most essential element of this land and lore. Of course, by extension, AKP is also the main element of the land due to its unwavering support of the Diyanet.

Three weeks after the second anniversary of the sermon (15<sup>th</sup> of July 2018), the sermon titled 'Mosque and Etiquette of the Congregation' and dated 03.08.2018 stated that the Hizmet movement, which exploited all kinds of values, plays with the DNA of the concept of the congregation/cemaat': 'It must be regretted that an organisation (Hizmet) that exploits all our religious values and concepts has tried to distort the concept of the congregation/community and caused it to lead to segregation, making this concept, which is the symbol of unity, monotheism, and revelation, remembered with corruption and betrayal'. As it is seen in the abovementioned quotation, Diyanet, using every opportunity and power in its hands, created a false world by means of sermons. According to this fake world, the Hizmet movement was the source of every evil and the Diyanet was the source of every goodness. In addition, as briefly mentioned above, another point to be emphasized is Diyanet's desire to be the only center and source of religious knowledge and life and in order to gain a strong ecumenical structure. One wonders if the reason behind the Diyanet–AKP joint operation to destroy or end the Hizmet movement with all its institutions was to open a space for the Diyanet and its subsidiaries (in the pursuit for collecting all kinds of domestic and foreign aid—scholarship, charity, sacrifice, and so on). It has been observed that there was a significant increase in mosque-congregation related themes of the sermons during 2017 and 2018.<sup>61</sup> It is also important to note that there were many indirect references to this topic in non-mosque thematic sermons to further

---

<sup>61</sup> See specifically the sermons dated as follows: 29.09.2017, 03.08.2018, 17.08.2018, 28.09.2018.

## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

emphasise the greater theme of unity. The question that should be asked at this moment is that were there any other reasons behind the scenes for the rapid quantitative increase of the sermons about the role of mosques and congregation. Anyone who has any experience of the strong ecumenical, hierarchical religious structures should not forget the fact that an extreme corporate protectionism of official religious establishment turned people away from religion. Whether Diyanet was aware of the danger or not, there were two major reasons behind the proliferation of mass atheistic and deistic tendencies in Turkey: first, to limit the spiritual and religious lives of the people only to the official institution, and second, efforts of the state and Diyanet to deliberately marginalise civil religious initiatives. At this juncture, the question ‘whether Diyanet was really involved in the mission of cooling people from religion as a figure of a state apparatus?’ is losing its significance in the light of the abovementioned role of this institution.

July 15<sup>th</sup> themed sermons are not limited to the above. As long as the current government and AKP-oriented Diyanet cadres are in power, it will become a custom and commonplace to see new sermons of July 15<sup>th</sup> with new topics and dimensions. The last sermon that we want to draw attention to in this context is dated 24.08.2018 and titled ‘The Effort is from the Believers and the Victory is from God / Gayret Müminlerden Zafer Allah’tandır’. The caption verse of this sermon, which was the last day of the Eid al-Aḏhā (because it coincided with a Friday), was the most frequently repeated verse in the sermons, namely Anfāl (8:46) ‘And obey God and His Messenger, and do not dispute, lest you falter and lose your courage. And be steadfast. God is with the steadfast.’ Although the content of the sermon does not seem to be in harmony with the heading, the point to be explained in the sermon was as follows: ‘Just like yesterday, our nation did not allow those who attacked with an attempt to invade our nation on 15<sup>th</sup> July. Likewise, today, the nation will know very well how to resist fearlessly against all kinds of economic and technological attacks.’ After mentioning the themes of veterans and martyrs (drinking the sherbet of the martyrdom) both at the beginning and at the end of the sermon, the issue of the sudden rise of the dollar in the country was presented to the congregation as an international conspiracy. Of course, we did not expect the Diyanet to bring the failure of the current economic measures of the AKP policies to fore. However, it is worth noting that the decline in the purchasing power of the people and the rapid course of the economic crisis was directly connected to July 15<sup>th</sup>. The miserable situation of the Diyanet lies in its rhetorical call that urged the mosque community to support the government to overcome this economic war and conspiracies. What was even more distressing is that in many mosques, the imams, who gave this sermon, went beyond the text of the sermon and added that the Hizmet movement

was the reason for the rise of the foreign currency (American dollars) in the country. In the light of frequent scapegoating of the Hizmet movement, we can only say that we are now at a point where words fail to depict the tragedy. If a proper discourse analysis of the sermons regarding the Hizmet movement is made, it will be seen clearly that Diyanet is the fourth invisible partner for the Erdoğan-Akar (former head of army and present minister of defence) and Fidan (director of Turkish secret agency) partnership that aims to destroy the Hizmet. It is safe to assume that Görmez and Erbaş have the biggest share in this dividend.

## **Conclusion**

From 2015 – 2018, there were three messages that the Diyanet tried to give through its sermons. The first message reiterated the notion that in the name of learning religion authentically there was no other reliable source other than itself and it became the only place or institution that represented religion in the country. In doing so, Diyanet marginalised civil socio-religious movements, especially the Hizmet movement. It is Diyanet's duty to interrupt any kind of religious activities to be done by other groups in the country. Thus, Diyanet's new mission was to prevent competition from any organisation that worked for the promotion of religion in the country. Secondly, Diyanet utilised the religious, national, and ummatic discourse developed by the AKP government in order to alleviate the effects of the policies that turned the region into a fireball following the Arab spring. The Diyanet, who transformed the old Turkish-Islamic synthesis into a more national-ummatic structure, tried its best in balancing the political perception of the AKP government at home and abroad. The AKP government's Syrian policy (or lack of policy) forced not only 4 million Syrian refugees to migrate to Turkey in deplorable conditions but also resulted in them leaving behind a destroyed country. Moreover, the disorder in Turkey, hate speeches, and divisive policies caused by the AKP were serious matters. However, many of these problems were covered up by the Diyanet, under the concept of *Anşār-Muhājir* discourse. On the one hand, Diyanet is exerting great effort in alleviating this problem with the rhetoric of religious fraternity, and on the other hand, it is working towards counterbalancing the nationalist rhetoric that began before and after July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016. This was revealed in the spiral of sermons that were beautifully titled but poor in content.

We have also observed that Diyanet, with the initiatives of Görmez, considers itself as the sole authority to speak on every subject, be it religious or non-religious. Nevertheless, whatever Diyanet says generally consists of approving some of the current government's non-legal and inhumane policies. This caused Diyanet to lose a lot of credibility because of its efforts not only to politicise this great institution but also to dictate government policies to the masses. In



## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

addition, contrary to the perception of human rights and democracy, the last two presidents proved that the Diyanet clearly entered the service of politics or turned into one of the sects or cults that it frequently criticised. As the late Egyptian scholar Muhammad Ghazali stated, the half-guilt and sin of the spread of irreligiosity is on the neck of religious people who keep people away from God. According to our analysis, the Diyanet disrupts the social fabric and the national structure in the country with the hate language it exhibits in sermons. Diyanet should leave this new role, decreed by the current government, as soon as possible and return to its factory settings. If Diyanet continues legitimising AKP's malpractices and discriminations against its oppositions, it will lose its own legitimacy. As can be seen from the above analysis, the Diyanet is becoming increasingly intoxicated as an institution and it acts as if it is not bound by any moral or religious codes. This privileged and power drunkenness of the Diyanet reminds us of a statement written to a relative by Pope X Leo (Giovanni di Lorenzo de Medici), who died in 1521: 'God has granted us the papacy, so let us enjoy it'. Thus, while Islamists of AKP do not know any boundaries in politics, shadow Islamists (Diyanet) follow a similar path in the religio-spiritual field.

We also refer frequently to the danger of AKP's efforts at making Diyanet almost the only religious authority in the country. Sadly, Diyanet is presented by the AKP staff as immune from any sin and mistake. This attitude raises Diyanet to a position where it can question and criticise every person or group religiously and morally. One of the reasons behind the reckless activities of the Diyanet, and especially the attack on the Hizmet movement, is the share of innocence given to it by a political party that has a stain on its character. This new share of the Diyanet is as blemished as the AKP government. Diyanet does not imply that it is the only truth in itself, as it is clearly seen in the sermons, but it also states that it is a unique institution that will decide what is wrong and right. This new role gives Diyanet the authority to exclude anyone or group who oppose AKP from Islam. <sup>62</sup> However, Diyanet stands out as a structure that may be much more troublesome when compared to the moral, religious, and spiritual aspects of its institutional piety and other groups. In fact, this institutional ecumenicity and bigotry of the Diyanet is one of the reasons for the extreme decrease in the rate of religiosity in the country and especially the decrease in the search for spirituality in young people. If it continues with this perception and understanding, in the very near future, it will become a self-

---

<sup>62</sup> Similar to middle-aged Church fathers' motto (*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*), probably in the very near future, the Diyanet will say, there is no salvation outside Diyanet-AKP oriented institutionalised Islam. It seems the most important reason for the insidious ecumenism of Diyanet lies in its systematic politicisation. The next step for Diyanet would be to push believers out of Islam in the context of their political stance or their civil resistance.

destructive institution in the hands of its insensitive and inconsiderate leaderships. When it comes to hostility to the Hizmet, in an environment where every rightist-leftist, religious-secular sector has attacked without hesitation, Diyanet joins the same choir of attackers with a strong voice. While criticizing the religious perception of the members of the Hizmet movement, the Diyanet, which keeps it in line with the choir who directly criticise religion, actually cuts off the branch on which it rises.<sup>63</sup> What is even more interesting is that the majority of these anti-democratic groups, who hold together in the face of the Hizmet together with Diyanet, keep the same attitude on the anti-Diyanet front when the existence of the Diyanet is in question.

As mentioned above, Diyanet has not only lost the confidence of the society but has also destroyed the legitimacy that it had entrusted in politics with the cooperation of Görmez and Erbaş. The true enemy of the Diyanet is Diyanet itself. What we observe is simply that Diyanet that is supposed to embrace all strata of Turkish society, prefers to use the illegitimate actions of the AKP government as a protective shield. This preference is the reason for the death of Diyanet's soul by its own hand as if it fell in love with his executioner in the last five years. Today Diyanet is at a crossroad. Either Diyanet will continue brainwashing millions of people through its sermons, or as an institution that has served religion in the country for a long time, it will keep itself away from daily politics. This is the only way to save this great institution unscathed in the current situation. The separatist language of the Diyanet with the mixture of nationalism sauce has reached a level dangerous enough to put dynamite at its root of coexistence with differences inside and outside Turkey. The continuation of this pattern and form of the Diyanet, which has waged a war against many values of the religion it represents, will only result in a huge ruin. The result will be insurmountable chaos and anarchy with the irreparable spiritual wounds it inflicts on religion and the devout, as well as the damages that it inflicts on an institutional basis. It does not matter if it is aware of this or not, but the reality is that the time for Diyanet is running out. May God protect pious people from all kinds of organisations that put their religion at the disposal of politics.

---

<sup>63</sup> 'Apparent laxity' is an interesting expression that sums up the mood of the masses who remain silent against the genocide of the members of the Hizmet movement. Because the fire just fell on the house of women, men, children who were volunteers of the Hizmet and has not touched the others yet, therefore, inhumane treatment made against members of Hizmet (murder, torture, unlawful proceedings, confiscating their properties, schools, universities, factories, business, threats, blackmail, and so on) would have no direct impact on the others because they have not experienced firsthand tyranny. For this reason, they did not feel any religious, moral, or even human obligation to support the Hizmet people who had been suffering for a long time under the authoritarian of the AKP regime.

## *Friday Sermons and the Notion of Pulpit Imperialism*

### **Bibliography**

- Albayrak, Ismail, 'Friday Sermons and the Question of home-trained Imams in Australia', *Australian eJournal of Theology* 19/1 (2012)
- Baktır, Mustafa, 'Hutbe', *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: Diyanet Vakfı 1998, XVIII.426
- Borthwick, Bruce M., 'The Islamic Sermon as a Channel of Political Communication', *Middle East Journal*, 21/3 (1967)
- Bruinessen, Martin van, 'The Governance of Islam in Two Secular Polities: Turkey's Diyanet and Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs', *European Journal of Turkish Studies Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, 27 (2018)
- Doğan, Recai, 'Cumhuriyet Öncesi Dönemde Yaygın Din Eğitimi Açısından Hutbeler', *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 39/1 (1999)
- Kara, İsmail, 'Din İle Devlet Arasında Sıkışmış Bir Kurum: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı', *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 18 (2000)
- Mutluer, Nil, 'Diyanet's Role in Building the 'Yeni (New) Milli' in the AKP Era', *European Journal of Turkish Studies Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, 27 (2018)
- Nursi, Said, *Mektubat*, -Risaleinur nesil yayinlari online-
- Onay, Ahmet, 'Diyanet Hutbelerinin İçerik Analizi', *İslami Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 17 (2004), 1-13
- Öztürk, Ahmet E., 'Turkey's Diyanet under AKP Rule: from Protector to Imposer of State Ideology', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16/4 (2016)
- Öztürk, Ahmet Erdi, 'Transformation of the Turkish Diyanet Both at Home and Abroad: Three Stages', *European Journal of Turkish Studies Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, 27 (2018)
- Öztürk, A. Erdi- Öztürk, Semiha, 'Diyanet as a Turkish Foreign Policy Tool: Evidence from the Netherlands and Bulgaria', *Politics and Religions*, 11 (2018)
- Öztürk, Hamdullah, <http://www.shaber3.com/hamdullah-ozturkten-dib-ali-erbasa-onemli-sorular-bu-kisiyi-tasvip-ediyor-musunuz-haberi/1313823/>
- Sarakhsī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-, *al-Mabsūṭ*, Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa 1989
- Yaşaroğlu, M. Kamil, 'Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'nın Hutbe Hizmetlerine Genel Bir Bakış', *Yakın Doğu Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2/1 (2016)

Yazıcı, Nesimi, ‘Osmanlı Döneminden Cumhuriyete Hutbelerimiz Üzerine Bazı Düşünceler’, *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 39/2 (1999)

Yılmaz, Ihsan-Barry, James, ‘Instrumentalizing Islam in a ‘Secular’ State: Turkey’s Diyanet and Interfaith Dialogue’, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, (2018)

Zahrah, Muḥammad Abū, *al-Khiṭāba*, Cairo: np. 1980

<https://www.timeturk.com/tr/2014/01/16/ak-parti-li-vekil-erdogan-allah-in-butun-vasiflarini-uzerinde-toplayan-bir-lider.html>

<http://www.hayatinalaminedir.com/beklenen-mehdi-recep-tayyip-erdogan/>

<https://tebyin.wordpress.com/2013/12/22/akparti-caminin-mihrabini-kirletirken/>

<https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/diyanet-isleri-baskani-ali-erbas-oldu-2795149>