

Mona Hassan

**WOMEN PREACHING FOR THE SECULAR STATE:
OFFICIAL FEMALE PREACHERS (*BAYAN VAIZLER*)
IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY**

Abstract

Nearly one-third of Turkey's official preaching workforce are women. Their numbers have risen considerably over the past two decades, fueled by an unforeseen feminization of higher religious education as well as the Directorate of Religious Affairs' attempts to redress its historical gender imbalances. Created in the early Turkish Republic, the Directorate is also historically embedded in (re)defining the appropriate domains and formations of religion, and the female preachers it now employs navigate people's potent fears rooted in memories of this fraught past. In the various neighborhoods of Istanbul, these preachers attempt to overcome conservative Muslims' cautious ambivalence toward the interpretative and disciplinary powers of a secular state as well as assertive secularists' discomfort and suspicion over increasingly visible manifestations of religiosity. Thus, the activities of state-sponsored female preachers are inescapably intertwined with the contestation of religious domains and authority in the secular Republic of Turkey and demonstrate an intricate interplay between the politics of religion, gender, and secularism in contemporary Turkish society.

As the telephone rang in an office of the Central Muftiate in Istanbul, a woman picked it up and answered, "Hello, fatwa hotline." At the other end of the line, an older man gingerly put in his request, thinking that he must be speaking to the secretary: "I was going to ask for a fatwa." The woman, a religious preacher employed by the state, responded, "Go ahead, ask." Flabbergasted, the man exclaimed, "Am I going to ask you? Whom are you going to transfer the question to?" The man seemed to be incredulous that a woman had been assigned to answer his religious inquiry, and the female preacher sought to reassure him that she was indeed capable of the task and willing, at the very least, to provide him with a proper referral in the event that she did not know the answer.¹ Through daily interactions such as these, in the course of performing a wide range of duties, state-sponsored female preachers are disrupting Turkish sociocultural assumptions of the male voice as the exclusive voice of official religious authority. Yet the authority that these female preachers garner through their association with the secular state that educates, trains, certifies, and employs them

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also chafes against the principally charismatic models of female religious edification among independent and officially unsanctioned Islamic groups and movements. The integration of women into the official preaching workforce of Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs represents an expansion of the state's reach and its management of religion and signifies a transformation of hitherto predominantly private forms of women's religiosity into a public affair subject to state regulation. To develop an audience for their moral exhortation, state-sponsored female preachers endeavor to establish their religious authority on an individual basis through trust and personal relations and strive to overcome the wariness of Turkish men and women across a broad and divisive ideological spectrum. More specifically, they attempt to alleviate conservative Muslims' cautious ambivalence toward the interpretative and disciplinary powers of a secular state as well as assertive secularists' discomfort and suspicion regarding religious activity in the public sphere. The work of state-sponsored female preachers is thus profoundly intertwined with the complicated history and contestation of religious domains and authority in the secular Republic of Turkey and demonstrates an intricate interplay between the politics of religion, gender, and secularism in contemporary Turkish society.

RESEARCHING STATE-SPONSORED FEMALE PREACHING
(VAİZELİK) IN TURKEY

This article is based on research I conducted during the 2008–2009 academic year in Turkey, followed by another visit in the summer of 2010. The research process entailed multiple layers that repeatedly intersected and fed into one another, including: historical, comparative, and statistical research in the library of the Center for Islamic Studies (İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi) in Istanbul and at the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı) in Ankara; formal and casual conversations with Turkish academics, religious personnel, and laypeople; procurement of official permission from the Central Istanbul Muftiate (İstanbul İl Müftülüğü) to follow the preaching activities of their female employees across the city as well as to formally interview them; a recorded interview with the vice director of the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Ankara, Dr. İzzet Er, who was responsible for overseeing national religious services including women's preaching; and recorded interviews with four of the female preachers whose activities I had been following in Istanbul as well as with one former preacher from 1993 to 2006, Dr. Kadriye Avcı Erdemli, who was promoted to the position of deputy mufti.² I obtained the verbal consent of all individuals involved in order to observe, converse with, interview, record, and/or photograph them for this academic study. Istanbul was chosen as the primary location for my fieldwork for a combination of practical and intellectual reasons. Turkey's premier cultural center, cosmopolitan Istanbul is home to one-fifth of the country's population as well as approximately one-fourth of the state's tenured female preachers. Some of these female preachers were originally posted to provincial areas before being transferred to Istanbul by the Directorate for various reasons, and the different dynamics of professional female preaching in rural versus urban settings would make for another fascinating study. In expansive Istanbul, I selected which preachers to study based on their geographic distribution between the European and Asian sides of the city, the social and ideological composition of the districts to which they were assigned, and the varying lengths of their employment in this profession. After repeatedly attending

the female preachers' sessions and interacting with them collegially in various settings, which helped me gain familiarity with their unique work, their various audiences, and their different approaches, I recorded lengthy individual interviews with four of the preachers and one deputy mufti over one or two sittings each. In undertaking to study this intriguing profession, I explore, here and elsewhere,³ some of the contours and rough edges of how Turkish state-sponsored female preachers have made inroads into both preexisting official male and informal female domains of religious learning and instruction.

MUSLIM WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM AND PIETY POLITICS

A number of excellent studies have examined the religious activities of Muslim women in such diverse locations as China,⁴ Egypt,⁵ Indonesia,⁶ and Lebanon,⁷ to name only a few recent book-length treatments of the topic. The female subjects of these analyses are analogous in the Turkish context to the many women affiliated with the religious communities surrounding Sufi orders and Islamic movements—about whom surprisingly little work has been done. The pioneering work of Catharina Raudvere explores the activities of one Sufi-oriented group of women in Istanbul, prior to the 28 February 1997 coup that pushed an Islamist-led coalition government out of power, and discusses how their private prayer circle developed into an endowment that conducted regular prayer services, offered basic religious education, and organized charitable and social activities.⁸ A more recent article by Kim Shively examines a women's Qur'an-study group in Sincan amid the charged atmosphere following what has been called the "postmodern" 1997 coup.⁹ These two studies focused specifically on independent women's groups that are expressly unaffiliated with the country's more entrenched religious communities and their pervasive networks. Elisabeth Özdalga and Berna Turam, meanwhile, have contributed perceptive assessments of women's involvement in arguably the largest and most influential of these Turkish Islamic movements, led by Fethullah Gülen. Turam skillfully highlights the marked contrast between the roles of women in the public "window" sites versus the more private settings of the movement and yet remarks almost in passing upon the women's adept textual analyses during their regular readings of Said Nursi's epistles—which form the backbone of women's religious activism in the Gülen movement.¹⁰ In Özdalga's recounting of the life stories of three women who teach in Gülen community-run schools, we learn of the teachers' pious desire to serve others and sacrifice their time, effort, and other professional opportunities for the sake of larger communal goals.¹¹ The dynamics surrounding such varied forms of Turkish women's religious volunteerism merit even more thorough investigation, such as that deftly realized in Lara Deeb's nuanced study of the different context of Shi'i women's public expressions of piety in the southern suburbs of Beirut.¹² In addition to Raudvere's study of the Gönemli Mehmed Efendi İlim ve Hizmet Vakfı, Barbara Pusch's initial contribution in this direction provides a tantalizing view into the vast array of what she terms Turkish "Islamist and religious-conservative" women's nongovernmental organizations, primarily foundations (*vakıf*) and associations (*dernek*).¹³ Even further exploration is needed into how these organizations represent the institutional manifestations of what Jenny White has identified in her work on the Refah political party as indispensable substrata religious communities and social movements.¹⁴ Yeşim Arat's examination of

the widely successful political mobilization accomplished by the women's branch of the now defunct Islamist political party of Refah offers a sense of the promising possibilities in exploring Turkish women's entangled commitments to both a particular organization and its broader-based religious community.¹⁵ This article does not attempt to pursue these compelling avenues of potential inquiry. Rather, it aims to examine another angle of the phenomenon of female religiosity: what happens when the state moves into these women's autonomous domains of religious education and preaching?

Much of the existing scholarship on Muslim women's political participation has concentrated on various aspects of their involvement in the oppositional politics of Islamist movements, which, similar to other social movements, have often subordinated the concerns of their female members to a broader social agenda,¹⁶ in this case the pursuit of a more fully Islamic state and society, however defined. More recently, an increasing focus on piety politics has explored Muslim women's formulations of personal piety and subjectification with a rather tenuous relationship to formal politics.¹⁷ Indeed, the influential work of Saba Mahmood on the Egyptian women's mosque movement has encouraged us to reconsider the political import of efforts to reconstruct a more pious and ethical self. As she succinctly argues, "Once we recognize that political formulations presuppose not only distinct modes of reasoning but also depend upon affective modes of assessment, then an analysis of ethical practices of self-formulation takes on a new, distinctly political, relevance."¹⁸ Yet in contrast to the independent female preachers of Egypt's mosque movement, who mostly managed to evade state supervision due to the state's lack of resources, the women at the center of this study actually *represent* one facet of the modern Turkish state. And the spaces that official Turkish female preachers inhabit—including and especially the mosque—are owned and administered by the state, in its myriad forms. Thus, while the preachers of Mahmood's study do not engage "the usual forms and institutions of politics (such as making claims on the state or the judicial system, using the language of rights and identity and public protest),"¹⁹ the female preachers who work for Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs prompt us to consider a vastly different form of pious political agency enmeshed in a deeply complicated and shifting set of power relations between the laic Turkish republic and its citizens amid the active management of religion in Turkish society.

UNDERSTANDING THE MODERN SECULARITY OF THE TURKISH DIRECTORATE OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

In seeking to avoid the analytical dangers involved in what Deeb describes as "over-privileging individualized practices of piety" in relative isolation,²⁰ we should carefully consider their multilayered and intertwined social, institutional, and political contexts. One cannot fully grasp the significance and potential ramifications of Turkey's state-sponsored female preachers without understanding the contested history and place of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, which has its roots in the early formation of the modern Turkish Republic. Only a few months after the declaration of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the Grand National Assembly abolished the Ottoman offices of the Şeyhülislam through the Abolition of the Ministries of Islamic Law and Charitable Foundations Act on 3 March 1924 and established the Directorate of Religious Affairs (as *Diyânet İşleri Reisliği*) in its stead. This was the same day that the Ottoman caliphate was

abolished,²¹ the decision to expel all members of the Ottoman dynasty was promulgated, and educational institutions were centralized under the sole management of the Ministry of National Education. In similarly dramatic fashion, the new Directorate was formed as a bureaucratic unit reporting to the prime minister and purposely stripped of the prestige, wide powers (including legislative and even some municipal forms), and financial resources with which the Ottoman Şeyhülislam had formerly been invested. Semantically, the term *diyanet* was carefully chosen in legislative discussions to express “religious” affairs in the sense of “matters of personal piety” over its potential alternative *diniye*, which could have implied the new institution’s religious responsibilities in the fields of economy, society, policing, and education, which were intentionally distributed to other branches of government.²² The choice of the narrower term *diyanet* negated the institution’s involvement in these fields and signified a new delineation of the parameters of “religion” as consisting solely of beliefs (*itikadat*) and ritual worship (*ibadet*). Even the 1965 modification of this legal definition, which added the field of ethics (*ahlak*) to the formula, deliberately left out the legislative field of social, economic, and political relations (*muamelat*) as well as the officially banned institutions and philosophical underpinnings of Islamic mysticism (*tasavvuf*), decried as “irrational” and unsuitable for a modern nation. Despite the controversy that the inclusion of “ethics” has sparked in some Turkish secularist circles, we should not overlook the fact that the institution of *diyanet* continues to entail an existentially secular definition of “religion” that consigns Islam to its secularly “appropriate” places. As Erik-Jan Zürcher and Dietrich Jung have elaborated, this process constitutes, in many respects, a continuation—even an expansion—of the centralizing late Ottoman state’s efforts to control and instrumentalize religion.²³ Zürcher elucidates that “the republic actually *increased* the state’s hold over religion,” as the Directorate was given “sole responsibility of religious guidance” and imams and muftis were transformed into civil servants.²⁴

Building upon insights from Talal Asad’s seminal work interrogating “the secular,”²⁵ I underscore that we should not consider Turkey’s Directorate of Religious Affairs to be an aberration from and contamination of secularism, as it has been regularly depicted in a wide range of literature on contemporary Turkey.²⁶ Rather, that the modern Turkish Republic, in all its various formations for nearly ninety years, has deemed it so essential to create, maintain, and preserve a state institution commissioned to manage and redefine “religion” and its appropriate domains highlights exceptionally well the constitutive interdependence of modern secular governance and religion at this particular time and particular place. Similar to processes in France, the United States, the former Soviet Union, and China, Turkey’s continuous regulation of religious life through juridical, legislative, and bureaucratic means (to rephrase and rework Mahmood’s cogent analysis of American policies)²⁷ is not an exception to the norms of either liberal or authoritarian rule but rather an exercise of sovereign power evincing the porous relationship between religion and secular politics. Indeed, secular Turkish republican institutions have repeatedly asserted the absolute necessity for the Directorate of Religious Affairs to supervise and encourage what is understood to be the correct form of religion in order to ensure the modern and civilized formation of the Turkish nation. And there are striking continuities in this state definition of religion despite political changes in the composition of governments and Directorate appointees. As recently as 2006, for example, the Directorate undertook a survey to identify lingering religious superstitions

among the Turkish populace (and found 1,380 of them) that needed to be replaced with sound knowledge and an appropriately rational understanding of religion.²⁸

LOCATING FEMALE PREACHERS WITHIN THE STATE BUREAUCRACY

Endowed with the specific mission “to direct what is related to the beliefs, worship, and ethics of Islam, to enlighten society on matters of religion, and to administer sacred places of worship” (to cite its 1965 articulation), the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs employs thousands of religious functionaries (including muftis, preachers, Qur’an course teachers, imams, and muezzins) as civil servants in order to achieve these goals. Contrary to contemporary European and American perceptions that place imams at the pinnacle of Islamic religious leadership and authority, the duty of leading congregational prayers in mosques is not considered among the most prestigious of positions. Serving as a mufti or as a preacher ranks much higher than serving as an imam in the Directorate’s hierarchy of religious personnel, and for many years the qualifying examinations for these two positions of preacher and mufti were one and the same.²⁹ In contemporary Turkey, the ability to preach, educate, and answer religious questions is more socially, culturally, and bureaucratically valued and esteemed than the ability to lead men and women in prayer. Thus, while female preachers do not lead congregational prayers like imams, they do preach in mosques and other locations, mostly but not exclusively to female audiences, as well as answer the intricate and private religious questions of Turkish men and women at local and provincial muftiates and family bureaus across the country. Even though female preachers work “fatwa shifts” (*fetva nöbeti*) as part of their regular duties, each fielding roughly 100 religious inquires per day (outside of the sacred months when the numbers easily double), they are not technically referred to as muftis or jurists—with the terms “mufti” (*müftü*) and “assistant mufti” (*yardımcı müftü*) being reserved for even more highly ranked positions for men and women in the bureaucracy. The sermons or *vaaz* (*wa‘z* in Arabic) that these women preach at varying locations during the week, like those of their male preacher counterparts, remain distinct from that of the Friday congregational prayer, known as the *hutbe* (or *khutba* in Arabic). Thus, male and female preachers are designated *vaizler* (those who issue *vaaz*) and not *hatisipler*, which is a term associated with the lower-level ranking imams (called *imam-hatip*).

As of July 2010, 1,270 male and female preachers were tenured by the Turkish state,³⁰ and in recent years the number of female preachers has increased exponentially. In 1990, twenty-nine women were employed as preachers for all of Turkey, representing only 4 percent of tenured preachers in the country. During the next decade, the number of female preachers remained fairly stable and represented between 5 to 6 percent of tenured Turkish preachers. In the new millennium, however, their numbers began to rise significantly, reaching fifty-seven female preachers in 2001 and seventy-six in 2003. In 2004, the newly appointed administration of Turkey’s Directorate of Religious Affairs opened scores of tenured preaching positions for women, who have since constituted nearly one-fifth of the preachers employed and tenured by the Turkish state (see Figs. 1 and 2). At the end of 2008, the Directorate decided to open an additional 200 contractual (*sözleşmeli*) positions for women to work as preachers,³¹ alongside the 233 women serving in tenured positions (*kadro*) that year.³² Combined, these tenured and contractual

female preachers represent nearly one-third of Turkey's official preaching workforce (27.93%) as of July 2010, with the potential to increase further if all of the available preaching positions are eventually filled.

Although at first glance it is tempting to attribute this marked increase in the number of female preachers to the election of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or AKP) to power in 2002 and again in 2007, the search for causality is far more complex. Certainly, the "passive secularist" and conservative-democratic inclinations of the ruling AKP (in contradistinction to what Ahmet Kuru has defined as the "assertive secularism" of the Kemalist establishment)³³ facilitated the appointment of female preachers to the tenured cadres of the Directorate—though it should be pointed out that this too had its limits. Following the initial appointment of scores of tenured female preachers in 2004, the concern not to strain the state's long-term budget and fiscal health took precedence in 2008, when another 200 slots for female preaching were designated as merely contractual instead of tenured, that is, deprived of the prospect of job permanence. Yet beyond the ruling government's facilitation and hindrance of these positions, the push to hire more female preachers, as I have demonstrated elsewhere,³⁴ more deeply reflects a combination of social pressures and the sinuous history of engineering religious education in republican Turkey. The country's transition from single-party rule to multiparty competition for popular electoral support facilitated the gradual reestablishment of state-run religious educational enterprises in both regular and vocational public schooling from the late 1940s to the early 1980s, which in turn increased girls' school attendance (even though it was already legally mandatory) as well as their growing exposure to religious training. In 1982, Turkey's seven Islamic institutes for higher education, which trained male functionaries for the Directorate, were transformed into theological faculties (*ilahiyat fakülteleri*), along the lines of the one established at Ankara University in 1949, and were forced to open their doors to female students, who had been previously excluded. Unexpectedly, a feminization of religious higher education began to occur when the 28 February process policies (sparked by the 1997 coup) curtailed the possibility of alternative professional trajectories for religious vocational (*imam-hatip*) high school graduates. These political interventions intentionally confined religious vocational high school graduates to the theological faculties within universities while simultaneously reducing the number of possible student admissions to those faculties. As a result, the number of female students at Turkey's theological faculties began to outstrip that of their male peers, now often reaching a ratio of two to one. The professional demands of these highly educated and qualified generations of female graduates of Turkish theological faculties, combined with diverse societal demands for women's religious services (articulated by some Turkish women and some secularist institutions), appear to have prompted the Directorate of Religious Affairs to hire increasingly more female preachers.³⁵

Administrators at the Directorate of Religious Affairs appear to be especially conscious of the predominantly male-gendered dynamics of religious services that have been historically offered by their institution. The Directorate's two most recent administrations have been led by highly educated academics who were socialized outside of the bureaucracy and regularly interacted with competent female students and colleagues at their universities. In moving from academia to the administration of religious services, these male administrators have sought to improve the Directorate's historical

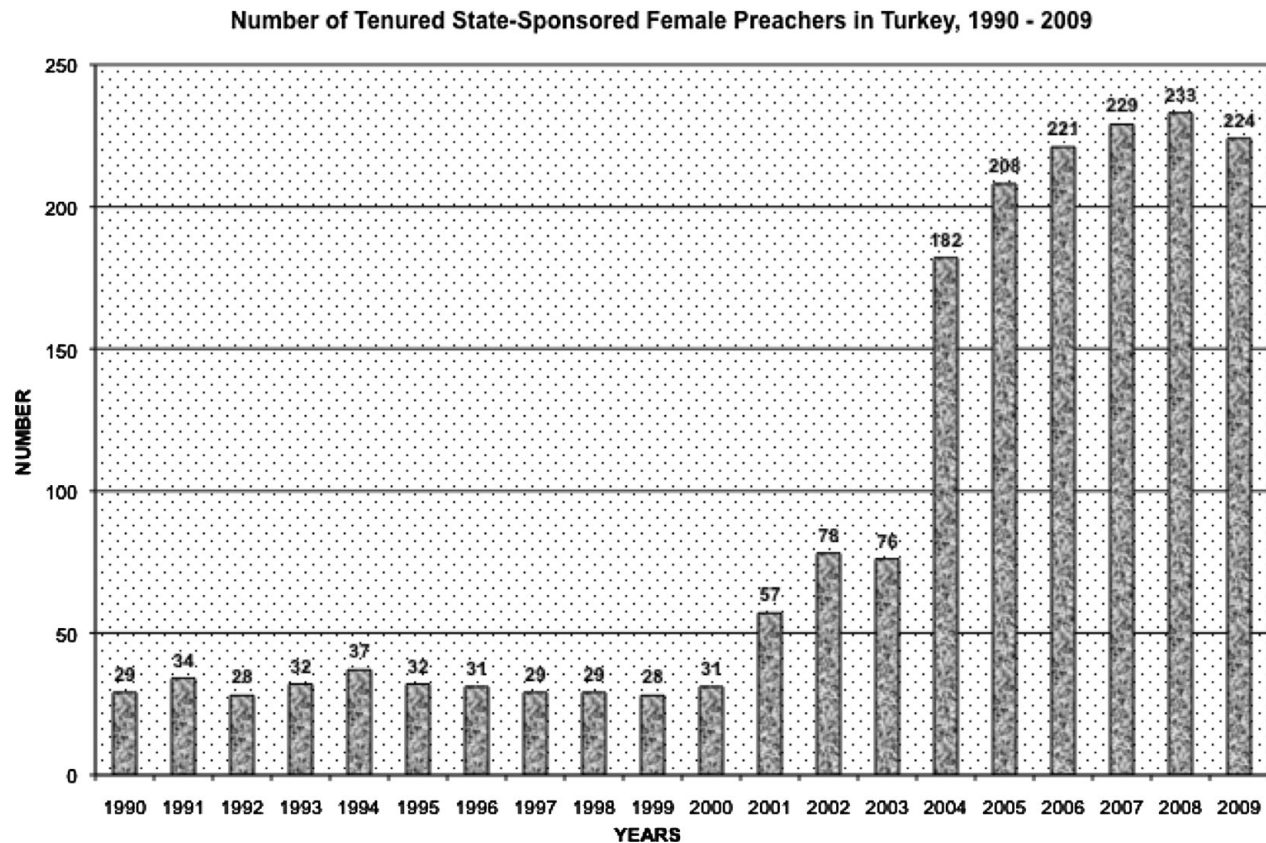


FIGURE 1. Number of tenured state-sponsored female preachers in Turkey, 1990–2009. *Source:* Directorate of Religious Affairs’ annual statistics publications, 1990–2009.

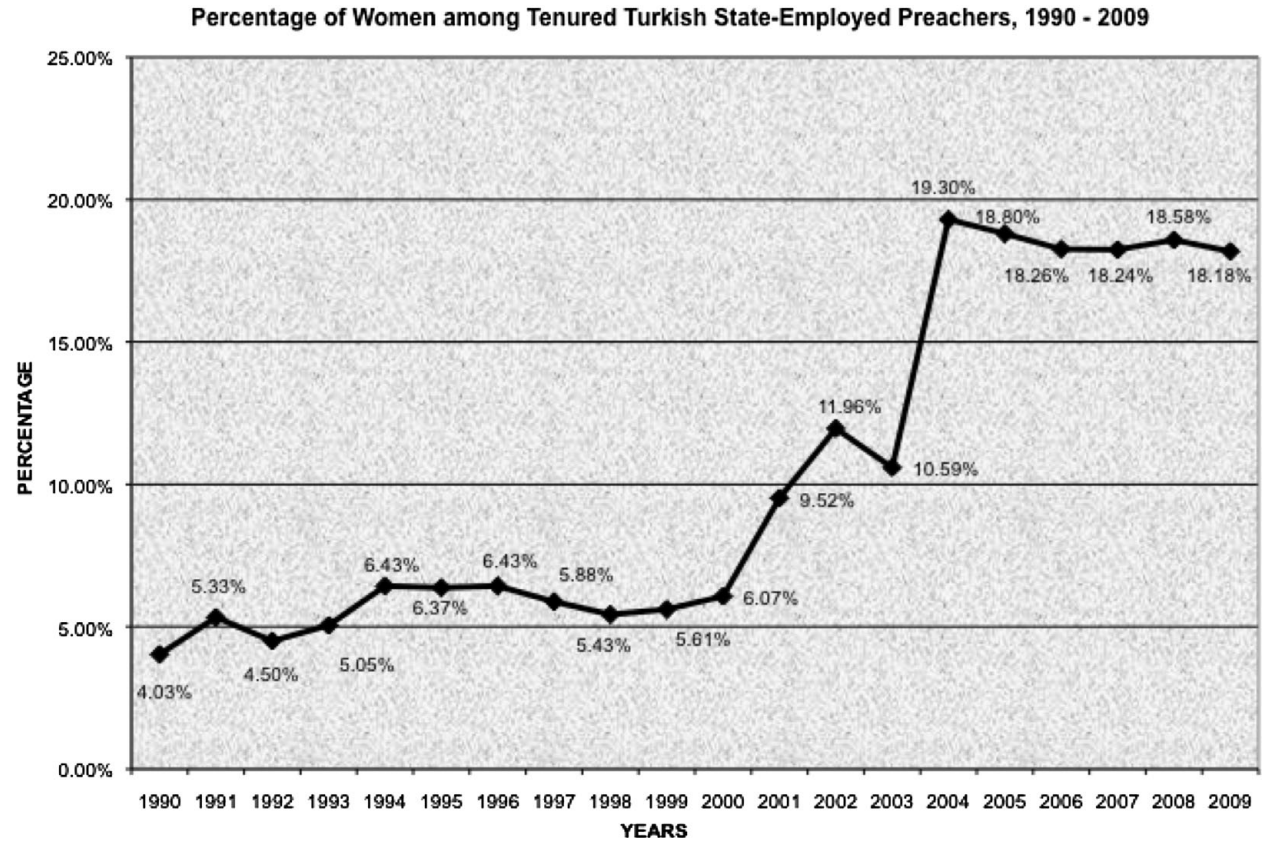


FIGURE 2. Percentage of women among tenured Turkish state-employed preachers, 1990–2009. *Source:* Directorate of Religious Affairs' annual statistics publications, 1990–2009.

gender imbalances and more broadly to change the male-gendered spatiality of Turkish mosques by encouraging the construction of spaces to accommodate women physically, socially, and educationally.³⁶ The recent increases in the hiring of female preachers reflect both of these trends, by altering the gender ratio among Directorate employees as well as creating new female-led activities to serve Turkish women inside the country's mosques. In a 2007 interview in which he condemned discrimination against women as contradicting the very essence of Islam, Dr. Ali Bardakoğlu, who held the position of director of Religious Affairs following his appointment by the AKP government in May 2003 until his resignation in November 2010, discussed some of the gender-ratio improvements in his own institution:

As part of our positive discrimination policy, we pay great care to the assignment of women. Our directorate has become a public organization with the highest number of female employees. Excluding the mosque imams and preachers, more than 40 percent of our current staff members are women. In the near future, female mufti assistants will be appointed to all provinces. This practice is the first in the world.³⁷

The grandeur in Bardakoglu's remarks contains echoes of early republican state feminist rhetoric desiring to transform modern Turkey into a shining beacon of civilization.³⁸ Yet the rhetorical as well as structural integration of positive discrimination into the Directorate's hiring practices, demanded by second-wave Turkish feminist groups of political parties and rejected by the AKP as demeaning to women's capabilities,³⁹ is particularly striking. In contrast to the well-studied and historically low percentage of female Turkish parliamentarians, which has remained in the single digits for decades,⁴⁰ the Directorate now claims to be the state bureaucracy employing the highest number of female civil servants.

Although contractual and tenured female preachers now comprise nearly one-third of the Directorate's preaching workforce, we should not dismiss the vulnerabilities and lack of job stability inherent in the position of nontenured contractual preachers, all of whom are women. In relation to Turkey's population, the 403 tenured and contractual female preachers, as of July 2010, is also remarkably low, representing roughly one preacher per 100,000 Turkish women. However, unlike other Turkish forms of secularist and Islamist gender politics that have sought to insert token women symbolically into prominent positions in the public sphere while disregarding what occurs in private,⁴¹ the Directorate appears to be concerned with ensuring a substantial representation of women within the state bureaucracy as well as with redressing broader social issues that profoundly affect women's lives, such as domestic violence, honor killings, and misogynistic understandings of Islam. On the individualized level of its female preachers, the Directorate carefully examines and certifies these women, yet it does not seek to exert zealous control over the content or format of their religious instruction and instead grants them extensive flexibility in formulating their sermons and activities as they deem appropriate to their particular contexts. This measure of flexibility granted to the Directorate's preachers is especially remarkable given the centralization of imams' Friday sermons by the main offices of the Directorate beginning in 1981 and by its provincial committees since 2006.

POPULAR PERCEPTIONS OF THE DIRECTORATE

Based on surveys published in 2002 and 2005, it appears that the majority of Turkish citizens trust the capabilities of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, with some qualifications. In the first survey, conducted by Kemaleddin Taş, 80.9 percent of participants deemed the Directorate's promulgations regarding religion to be trustworthy, and 76 percent said that one should follow the Directorate's fatwas on religious issues. However, their attitudes toward the Directorate also varied geographically, roughly in tandem with people's attitudes toward the state in general. That is, as Taş summarizes, "People with the most positive attitude are from the Mediterranean region, and people with the most negative attitude are from the Southeast Anatolian region. Those born in Western regions have a more positive attitude when compared to those born in Eastern regions." Overall, Taş found positive attitudes toward the Directorate among a 1,378 person sample group to be more prevalent among older age groups, urban residents, people of relatively high socioeconomic status and income, legal professionals, those without higher education, and those lacking a religious education. Conversely, attitudes were more negative among youth, rural people, lower-income groups and socioeconomic neighborhoods, workers, the highly educated, and those possessing a religious education. The slight differential between categories of people who received a religious education and those who did not is of some interest, as is the indication that people who self-identified with a mystical, communal, or political understanding of Islam held a slightly lower opinion of the Directorate than those primarily identifying with an *ilmi* ("scientific" or "knowledge-based") understanding.⁴² These latter divisions, however, may not be as rigid as Taş's study implies. Assuming the impermeability of such boundaries may divert our attention from investigating overlapping identities and perspectives as well as potential arenas of collaboration among Turks of different philosophical persuasions. Nevertheless, Taş's formulation and analysis of the data appear to indicate somewhat greater trust of the Directorate among Turks who do not primarily identify themselves and their interpretations of Islam in reference to mystical orders, Islamic movements, or political Islamist groups.

Ruşen Çakır and İrfan Bozan's 2005 study of Turkish perceptions of the Directorate among its employees and administrators, regular mosque attendees, religious women (who were tellingly assumed *not* to belong to the prior category of regular mosque congregants), and Alevis is also revealing.⁴³ The communal institutions of Alevis—who initially inhabited remote, rural regions of the country and were not considered to be a religiously based threat to the early republican regime—were not shut down like the Sunni seminaries and mystical lodges, and Alevi religious life was never fully subsumed under state control and management. Yet with the widespread acceptance of the state's discourse on the necessity of the Directorate's provision of religious services, and of the concurrent notion that chaos would ensue in their absence, questions over the extent to which the institution should or should not represent Alevi interests have sparked much debate over the past couple of decades.⁴⁴ As a result, Alevis receive the striking majority of analytical attention and space in the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV or Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı) study of popular views of the institution. Alevi respondents articulated three major opinions: that Alevi interests should be represented in the Directorate of Religious Affairs, that Alevis should have a separate institution similar to the Directorate of Religious Affairs, and that the

state should not be involved in religious organizations and should instead leave religious services in the hands of organized religious communities and their institutions.⁴⁵ While acknowledging the discrimination experienced by Alevis in Turkey, we should likewise recognize the restrictive state policies that persist against independent Sunni mystical and communal institutions and conglomerations; for example, openly establishing Sufi lodges, let alone attempting to claim state resources and benefits for them, remains beyond the pale.

STATE-SPONSORED FEMALE PREACHERS WORKING IN THE FIELD

This diversity of public opinion over the role of the Directorate of Religious Affairs and its services is also reflected in the widely divergent compositions of Istanbul's neighborhoods where official female preachers work. Especially when working in neighborhoods with strong ideological commitments and networks, whether religiously conservative or assertively secularist, female preachers encounter deep social fears and concerns. Among religiously conservative communities, poignant memories of the authoritarian state's repression of widespread religious practices and institutions persist, as do concerns over the much studied exclusion of women wearing headscarves from a Kemalist-defined public sphere, including schools, universities, courts, and the parliament.⁴⁶ As Kuru and Turam have meticulously argued in their recent monographs, the secularist state in Turkey has been undergoing a process of transition with the election of AKP to power, and both state institutions and those who desire greater tolerance for the visible practice of religion have been transforming through their engagement with each other.⁴⁷ Yet there remains a degree of circumspection in some conservative circles over how long this shift to a passive secularist model can last, given abiding resentment and resistance from prominent quarters of the Kemalist establishment. Within assertively secularist circles, people are deeply concerned over the increased public visibility of religiosity in contemporary Turkey, which has been fostered by the country's political and economic liberalization and by urbanization. The appearance of upwardly mobile, visibly practicing Muslims and the emergence of new economic, social, and even political elites who defy the containment of religion to the rural, the "traditional," and the "backward" have been profoundly unsettling. As Nilüfer Göle recently captured this emotional intensity over the perceived intrusion of the urban and modern headscarf: "[The young woman's headscarf] provokes powerful emotions of the secular, anger and aversion to the extent that the temporal comfort (religion as a relic from the past) and spatial separations (personal and public) between secular and religious disappear."⁴⁸ Other scholars have further reflected upon manifestations of this revulsion among first-wave Kemalist and second-wave liberal feminists in Turkey, who, for the most part, vehemently deny any sense of solidarity with Turkish women who wear headscarves.⁴⁹

In this charged field, Turkey's state-sponsored female preachers reach out to educate others about Islam, with varying results, and in districts of Istanbul that are known for their staunch secularist affiliations or in neighborhoods with a particularly thick presence of Sufi orders and Islamic movements, attendance at the official female preachers' sessions is markedly lower than in other parts of the city. The contrast, even within the same district, can be quite remarkable. In one mosque in heavily conservative Fatih, for example, where Hafize Çınar enthusiastically preaches as part of an array of Directorate

services, she regularly draws an audience of a couple hundred women, which doubles in size during the sacred month of Ramadan, when she gives daily sermons. But at another Fatih-district mosque encompassing a sacred relic, which has attracted Sufi orders and other Islamic groups into the surrounding neighborhood, her audience numbers less than twenty. Still, Çınar, who has worked in Fatih since 2006 and feels she has since passed the initial scrutiny and challenges posed by people in the district regarding her knowledge and authority, expresses her optimism that the Directorate will be able to improve its relations with the members of such Islamic groups over time and to encourage more people to embrace a multiplicity of religious educational activities.⁵⁰

Although technically outlawed, Sufi orders and popular Islamic movements have been central to the preservation of religious identity among Sunni Muslims in Turkey⁵¹ and especially so among women, who were historically neglected by the Directorate of Religious Affairs. These independent religious communities have been so active among women that Dr. Kadriye Avcı Erdemli recalls how female preachers working for the Directorate in the 1990s were initially asked which Sufi order (*tarikât*) or Islamic group (*cemaat*) they were from, reflecting the assumption that only these organizations offered religious services for women.⁵² As late as 2005, the secularist think tank TESEV found that practically none of the “devout women” (*dindar kadınlar*) in their sample group knew of any female civil servants responsible for religious affairs (*din görevlisi*), although they were well acquainted with the activities of Islamic groups and mystical orders and regularly participated in home-based meetings for group worship and discussion.⁵³ Given the still relatively low ratio of female preachers to the roughly 38 million or so women in Turkey, it is hardly surprising that their reach does not compare to that of the much more extensive and entrenched popular Islamic networks. Some of the female preachers acknowledge that they cannot offer the same level of targeted services, such as group sessions reflecting a large degree of homogeneity in educational, socioeconomic, and professional status among attendees. And some male imams who not only work for the Directorate but also are privately affiliated with other religious groups reportedly discourage and hamper the activities of their official female colleagues, for example, by leaving the mosque locked ahead of scheduled preaching sessions for the women in their assigned neighborhood, preferring that they receive religious education from the female members of their own order or movement instead. This pervasive notion of exclusive affiliation and social loyalty among members of autonomous Islamic groups also reduces the number of women who are interested in seeking out official preaching sessions organized by the Directorate.

Aware of these myriad challenges to their state-sponsored activities, female preachers hope to offer an attractive alternative to the women’s activities of Islamic groups and mystical orders by presenting an ecumenical and scholarly understanding of Islam. In the field of women’s religious activities, female preachers who work for the Directorate of Religious Affairs are distinguished by their high levels of formal religious education, holding at the very least a bachelor’s degree from one of the country’s university theological faculties, where they studied Islamic studies, foreign languages, and social sciences.⁵⁴ Under Bardakoğlu’s administration, the Directorate of Religious Affairs, perhaps reflecting the academic backgrounds of its leading officials, began stipulating a marked preference for hiring women who had already pursued their graduate studies at the theological faculties. The most recent search for 200 additional contractual female preachers in 2008, for example, actually required applicants to be university graduates

of the theological faculties and explicitly favored those women who had completed doctoral or master's degrees in the field.⁵⁵ Bardakoğlu's administration also actively encouraged those preachers, male and female, who had not already completed advanced degrees to do so while working for the Directorate, offering them time off from their official duties to visit libraries or meet with their academic advisors and sometimes even reassigning them to the same administrative region as their university.⁵⁶ In addition to this religious higher education, all state-sponsored female preachers must have passed a general civil-servant examination (the KPSS or Kamu Personeli Seçme Sınavı) covering the Turkish language, mathematics, geography, citizenship, history, and philosophy, as well as a preaching proficiency examination in religious subjects administered by the Directorate, in order to secure their employment.⁵⁷ After they are hired, the new female employees undergo short-term professional training (*hizmet içi eğitim*) to hone their preaching skills and techniques, focusing on a combination of preaching content, style, and effect.⁵⁸ As Çınar recalls:

We were preaching in front of our friends, and the teacher was commenting, for example, saying you need these gestures and mimicry here and there. The necessary prayers for preaching, we practiced these. A general overview of exegesis [*tefsir*] and hadith. How you preach using verses from the Qur'an. We had homework, for example. They gave us certain verses, and we prepared lectures based on them.⁵⁹

Later on, female preachers may also undergo professional training related to specific scenarios, such as handling natural disasters in conjunction with the Red Crescent or working in the Directorate's newly established Family Guidance Bureaus.⁶⁰

By contrast, the charismatic female figures studied by Raudvere and Shively, for instance, lack any significant formal religious education or training and are primarily self-taught⁶¹—a key difference of which state-sponsored female preachers are acutely aware. Fatma Bayram, who has worked as a preacher in Istanbul since 1990, stresses this distinction between the Directorate's civil servants and other women organizing local religious activities:

If a person has taken a position in the Directorate, this means that s/he has gone through a serious process of elimination. First of all s/he has received official education and taken exams. It is not like somebody who has become an esteemed religious figure [*hoca*] in a neighborhood because his/her voice is beautiful. Because the Directorate employee will represent the Directorate, s/he goes through a serious process of elimination.⁶²

Avcı Erdemli holds that the depth of knowledge acquired by the Directorate's preachers not only surpasses that of women affiliated with autonomous Islamic groups and mystical orders in Turkey but also leads to their popular embrace:

There was initial hesitation about getting to know us: "Where did this come from? Was there such a thing?" First they said, "Which Sufi order [*tarikât*] or religious community [*cemaat*] are you coming from?" But then when they saw that we were graduates of the theology faculties, religious scholars [*hocalar*] who know the religion and the Qur'an and who try to teach the religion in the right way, they liked it a lot. Correct information, if you provide it insistently, is destined to be accepted.⁶³

Dr. Halide Yenen, the official preacher in Şişli since 2004, further reflects upon how her knowledge-centered approach contrasts with the intensity of personal attachment cultivated by female religious figures outside of the Directorate: “I want my congregation to accept and love me but not to be attached to me. I like to leave them face to face with the Qur’an rather than myself. What matters is correct information and not me. Whoever can give it, take it from them.”⁶⁴ Throughout these accounts, state-sponsored female preachers markedly emphasize the centrality of sound knowledge, developed through an extensive formal religious education and certified through a standardized process of examination, which distinguishes their profession from its more common alternatives. In practical terms, though, female preachers rely primarily upon word of mouth to build up their regular audiences one by one.

At other junctures, the pervasive power of the state palpably manifests itself in working to both attract and displace members of autonomous religious groups through the activities of its official female preachers. One day when I met with Bayram, for instance, she was busy serving on an examination committee certifying the proficiency of men and women who lived on the Asian side of Istanbul in their memorization of the Qur’an. Many of them were already affiliated with various Islamic groups and mystical orders, yet it was Bayram and her colleagues, as representatives of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, who could supply formal certification of their Qur’anic memorization, which could then potentially be used for employment or other purposes requiring official validation. Even at this poignant moment of interaction, Bayram hoped that any remnants of their perceiving state employees as nefarious “agents of the regime” were gradually dissolving:

Slowly, we are warming up with them too. For instance, among the people who are coming to this examination, there is a great multitude from those groups [*cemaats*]. This means that they value the certification of the Directorate about Qur’an memorization, because they have already memorized [the Qur’an] and they want to certify it. And there is no other way to certify it. You have to take the Directorate exam.⁶⁵

As a means to accessing desirable resources and social recognition, this formal mechanism of state certification, acquired through intense examination by Directorate employees like Bayram, draws in members of other autonomous Islamic groups and may perhaps be slowly altering their perceptions of the state institution and its officials.

Female preachers sometimes work overtly to supplant local Islamic groups and their popular religious superstitions and practices. One of the mosques where Züleyha Şeker began preaching, for example, reputedly contains the tombs of two companions of the Prophet Muhammad and another pious scholar of the following generation of early Muslims. As a result, it serves as a magnet for Turkish women hoping to benefit from their metaphysical blessings. In this sacred space, a group of women established its own religious activities and began to attract a regular congregation of sixty to seventy women in the mosque on Friday mornings. They would reportedly make wishes on wheat and listen to the sermons of a charismatic woman who led their gatherings. When some people submitted a complaint to the Istanbul Muftiate in 2008 “that the women do unacceptable, superstitious things, that an uncertified woman preaches here” and requested, “You have a female preacher. Why don’t you send her there?” as Şeker recalls, she was assigned to give sermons in the mosque. When she first went, the leader

of the group was away for a spell of time, and it was not until she returned, along with her followers, that the problems began. As Şeker narrates:

They used to preach in the spot [of the mosque] where I am preaching now. As they came and saw me that started the problem: “Why are you coming here? Isn’t there another mosque? Go and preach in another mosque.” That is what they said, but as we explained to them that this is an official activity, that they do not have the authorization to preach in the mosque, that they are actually committing a crime and they can be prosecuted for this, they left. Or if they did not leave, they stopped preaching. They only make supplications among themselves now. We told them that they can pray in another section of the mosque but they cannot preach. In order to be able to preach, you have to be a theological faculty graduate and also receive certification from the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey. After we told this to them, they stopped preaching. Or if they did not stop, they are preaching in places where we cannot see them. They are in such a position vis-à-vis us now. At the beginning, because they did not know that we had government authority behind us, they responded to us in that way. But as we talked with them, and as they understood that they are committing a crime, they gave up.

Before giving up, however, the group attempted to intimidate Şeker, and up until the summer of 2009, she used to come to the mosque with a group of friends for physical protection. This informal group that lacked state sanction also complained to the Istanbul Muftiate about Şeker’s presence, and, even after they were convinced that she was an employee of the Directorate, they still told the mufti, Dr. Mustafa Çağrıncı, that they didn’t want her to come to the mosque anymore and that they wanted to run their own activities. In Şeker’s words:

[The mufti] told them that he cannot allow them to organize such an activity: “It is not allowed by the law. If there will be an activity for women in the mosque, I organize it, and I organize it through my employees. I am sending her there. I see a need for such an activity in this mosque, but if you have a problem, you may go somewhere else. This is our mosque.”⁶⁶

In response to this challenge, therefore, the mufti of Istanbul forcefully reasserted his state institution’s exclusive right to organize religious activities in the city’s mosques, which have remained under the sole jurisdiction of the Directorate of Religious Affairs since the early republican era. And faced with the charge of illegality, the informal women’s group acquiesced to the female preacher’s presence backed by the power of the state by vacating the space for preaching, although they continued to harass the official preacher during her sermons, on occasion, by shouting out disparaging comments from outside the lattice partition in the mosque. Despite their protestation, this particular female group, which had taken the unusual step of gathering publicly in a mosque and was depicted by state authorities as being heterodoxical in its beliefs and practices, was assertively rebuked and physically supplanted by the authorized activities of a certified female preacher educated at one of Turkey’s theological faculties and employed by the Directorate of Religious Affairs.

Yet while official female preachers represent one facet of the contemporary Turkish state, the interests and concerns of its various bureaucracies do not always harmoniously align. One day, as I accompanied a female preacher on her official rounds, we reached a state-run orphanage where she interacted with the children once a week. Upon entering the building, we were first called into the administrator’s office, and the orphanage officials who work for Turkey’s Social Services and Child Protection Agency inquired

with polite concern about the nature of the religious activities she had planned for the children that day. In celebration of the religious holiday Regaib Kandili, she had brought colorful balloons and streamers for the children to decorate their common sitting area, ice cream cones to celebrate the occasion, and a religiously themed cartoon for the thirty-five or so children present that day (half of the usual number) to gather around and watch on a small television screen in one of their living quarters. Afterward the preacher expressed her mild frustration at the situation, noting that just as the orphanage officials were civil servants representing the state, she too in her official capacity as one of the Directorate's female preachers was a civil servant representing the state and its interests. From her perspective, the modicum of moral instruction she could offer might eventually prevent the children from turning to crime after they came of age and had to fend for themselves on the streets of Istanbul. And yet the orphanage officials remained suspicious about her work and delved into the details of her activities, the preacher remarked, as if she was representing an unofficial Islamic group or movement outside the state's purview. She yearned for the Directorate of Religious Affairs to work out a more detailed protocol with the Social Services and Child Protection Agency, and other such state bureaucracies with which official preachers regularly interact, that would spare her and her colleagues the burden of continually explaining themselves and their work to other state officials concerned about the introduction of religious materials into their domains and the preservation of secularist principles.

To compensate for the difficulties of working in strongly secularist districts of Istanbul, female preachers assigned to locations like Beyoğlu and Şişli consciously adapt their sermons and activities to reflect local needs. Yenen, for example, acknowledges that the women in her district, who have lacked exposure to religious training and social networks, are primarily interested in learning how to read the Qur'an in Arabic, which consequently takes a major place in her preaching sessions. At the main prayer niche of the mosque or in a separate cozy section of the building replete with tea and snacks, Yenen first has the women individually read an assigned passage from the Qur'an that they should have practiced during the preceding week, then discusses its commentary and shares a few inspirational sayings of the Prophet Muhammad that the women diligently write down in their notebooks. Beyoğlu preacher since 2003, Şeker, in contrast, prefers to continue issuing well-prepared formal sermons that she reads out from the leaves of her notebook, resting on a small wooden podium, as she turns the individual pages one by one. In terms of topics, however, Şeker makes a conscious effort to accommodate her audience in the district, by spending more time emphasizing basic Islamic beliefs and social ethics rather than the intricacies of Islamic jurisprudence. As she explains:

You feel the difference of Beyoğlu in these ethical issues. People are less attached to each other. Sin is more. There are more threats here. There is drug usage, alcohol, entertainment, etc. If my friends [preaching in other districts] talk about addictions once a year, I talk about them constantly using different opportunities. In Beyoğlu, I try to show them the smiling face of Islam. You need to take people to hell too. You need to show [them] that too from time to time, but in Beyoğlu we try to show them the smiling face of Islam more. Because, people are more involved with sinful things here, their conscience is already disturbed. If you keep talking to them about hell, you make them run away.⁶⁷

By devoting individual attention to and cultivating personal relationships with their congregations, official female preachers are also gradually dissolving secularist fears and hesitations among women in their assigned districts. Bayram, for example, makes a point to socialize with other women in her fairly conservative district on the Asian side of Istanbul through her ever-widening circle of mutual friends, acquaintances, and women who attend her preaching activities. Through these social networks, Bayram frequently comes across and comfortably interacts with nonpracticing Muslims, who in turn slowly begin to attend her lectures and sermons. More importantly, she observes, “As they get to know us and we get to know them, the fear disappears. There are prejudices in Turkey between people. As we get to know each other, they disappear.”⁶⁸ Reflecting on her own personal transformation, one well-educated female professional who had regularly attended Yenen’s personalized preaching sessions at a prominent mosque in Şişli called her on the religious holiday of Regaib Kandili. As she conveyed over the phone, “I used to look at the mosque from here, and the mosque appeared to me to be very strange. I found the people going in there very strange. I asked, ‘What do those people do there?’ . . . You changed my childhood memories. I learned to love the Prophet from you.”⁶⁹ Through her experiences learning with Yenen, the mosque was transformed in this professional woman’s eyes from a place that was disturbingly foreign, designated for “those” people, into a space that could welcome and enrich her life too.

FURTHER REFLECTIONS

Through the sum of their various activities, female preachers are altering the male-gendered spatiality of Turkish mosques⁷⁰ as well as people’s broader perception of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, which administers these spaces, as a male-exclusive institution. The dynamics of female preaching in Turkey differ markedly from the situation in other Muslim-majority as well as Muslim-minority societies. In Egypt, to cite only one well-studied example, feminists began demanding the right to participate in congregational mosque worship in 1911.⁷¹ And today’s flourishing Egyptian women’s mosque movement is dominated by autonomous preachers who began to experience more pervasive state surveillance during the 1990s.⁷² Although Turkish women have not been entirely excluded from all mosque spaces at all times, it can be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible and rather unconventional, for women to participate in daily or Friday congregational prayers in their neighborhood mosques. The two most recent administrations of Turkey’s Directorate of Religious Affairs, however, have aimed to facilitate the inclusion of women in the country’s mosques, which the Directorate alone owns and administers, through creating more spacious physical accommodations as well as hiring more female personnel to serve women’s needs. These state-initiated gender reforms have opened up new public spaces in Turkish society where female preachers employed by the Directorate of Religious Affairs regularly demonstrate their independent intellectual capabilities and religious authority, garnered through years of formal religious education and state certification, via their mosque sermons to female congregations as well as their public lectures and legal responsa to male and female Turkish citizens. In one sense, these female preachers represent an embodied culmination of the popular demand for religious education in Turkish schools beginning in the late 1940s combined with the republican principle of gender equality in the country’s educational

system. From another angle, as civil servants in a state bureaucracy with its origins in the early Turkish Republic, these women are also actively engaged and contextually enmeshed in a modern secular project that continually redefines the parameters and acceptable formations of Islamic beliefs, practices, and ethics for the nation.

NOTES

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¹Fieldwork and interview with Züleyha Şeker on 2 July 2009. In the unusual event that the female preachers on call cannot answer a particular religious inquiry, they transfer the question to the regional specialists of the High Committee of Religious Affairs. If these specialists do not know the answer, because a question may require further research (such as the issues of organ transplantation or surrogate motherhood when they first arose), it is conveyed to the High Committee of Religious Affairs in Ankara, under the leadership of the Director of Religious Affairs, which then investigates the topic thoroughly before issuing a fatwa.

²This is the subject of another piece of mine in progress, "A Female Deputy Mufti in the Contemporary Republic of Turkey: Dr. Kadriye Avcı Erdemli."

³See Mona Hassan, "Women at the Intersection of Turkish Politics, Religion, and Education: The Unexpected Path to Becoming a State-Sponsored Female Preacher," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 5 (2011): 157–76 and "Reshaping Religious Authority in Contemporary Turkey: State-Sponsored Female Preachers," in *Women, Leadership and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority*, ed. Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach (Leiden: E. J. Brill, forthcoming [2011]).

⁴Maria Jaschok and Shui Jingjun, *The History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam: A Mosque of Their Own* (Richmond, U.K.: Curzon Press, 2000).

⁵Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 2005).

⁶Nelly van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam: Reading the Qur'an in Indonesia* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

⁷Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁸See Catharina Raudvere, *The Book and the Roses: Sufi Women, Visibility, and Zikir in Contemporary Istanbul* (Stockholm: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 2002) and "Knowledge in Trust: Sufi Women in Istanbul," *Social Compass* 50 (2003): 23–34.

⁹Kim Shively, "Taming Islam: Studying Religion in Secular Turkey," *Anthropological Quarterly* 81 (2008): 683–711.

¹⁰Berna Turam, *Between Islam and the State: The Politics of Engagement* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 109–33.

¹¹Elisabeth Özdalga, "Following the Footsteps of Fethullah Gülen: Three Women Tell Their Stories," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, ed. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 85–114.

¹²See Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern*; "'Doing Good, Like Sayyida Zaynab': Lebanese Shi'i Women's Participation in the Public Sphere," in *Religion, Social Practice, and Contested Hegemonies: Reconstructing the Public Sphere in Muslim Majority Societies*, ed. Armando Salvatore and Mark LeVine (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 85–107; and "Piety Politics and the Role of a Transnational Feminist Analysis," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (2009): S112–26.

¹³Barbara Pusch, "Stepping into the Public Sphere: The Rise of Islamist and Religious-Conservative Women's Non-Governmental Organizations," in *Civil Society in the Grip of Nationalism: Studies on Political Culture in Contemporary Turkey*, ed. Stefanos Yerasimos, Günter Seufert, and Karin Vorhoff (Istanbul: Ergon, 2000), 475–505.

¹⁴Jenny White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2002), 4–5, 22, 111, 178–79, 199–209.

¹⁵Yeşim Arat, *Rethinking Islam and Liberal Democracy: Islamist Women in Turkish Politics* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2005), 69–88.

¹⁶See, for example, Guida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg, “Reconstructing Social Protest from a Feminist Perspective,” in *Women and Social Protest*, ed. Guida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3–35.

¹⁷See, for example, Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*; idem, “Ethical Formation and Politics of Individual Autonomy in Contemporary Egypt,” *Social Research* 70 (2003): 837–66; Deeb, “Piety Politics”; Farzana Haniffa, “Piety as Politics amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka,” *Modern Asian Studies* 42 (2008): 347–75; Maimuna Huq, “Reading the Qur’an in Bangladesh: The Politics of ‘Belief’ among Islamist Women,” *Modern Asian Studies* 42 (2008): 457–88; Damla Işık, “On *Sabir* and Agency: The Politics of Pious Practice in Konya’s Weaving Industry,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 10 (December 2008): 518–41; and Dorothea Schulz, “Piety’s Manifold Embodiments: Muslim Women’s Quest for Moral Renewal in Urban Mali,” *Journal for Islamic Studies* 28 (2008): 66–93.

¹⁸Mahmood, “Ethical Formation,” 860.

¹⁹Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 152.

²⁰Deeb, “Piety Politics,” S114.

²¹The ramifications are discussed in my book manuscript *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: Religious Imaginaries of the State and Community among Premodern and Modern Muslims*.

²²See especially Biga representative Samih Rifat’s remarks in the Grand National Assembly reproduced in İsmail Kara, *Cumhuriyet Türkiye’sinde Bir Mesele Olarak İslâm* (Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2008), 60–64. Also see Ali Bardakoğlu’s reading of the spiritual and moral superiority of piety (*diyanet*) over its Ottoman Turkish antonym for the judiciary (*kaza*) representing “legal, political, and administrative relations” in *Religion and Society: New Perspectives from Turkey* (Ankara: Publications of Presidency of Religious Affairs, 2006), 10–11.

²³Erik-Jan Zürcher, “The Importance of Being Secular: Islam in the Service of the National and Pre-National State,” in *Turkey’s Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 55–68; and Dietrich Jung, “‘Secularism’: A Key to Turkish Politics?” in *Religion, Politics, and Turkey’s EU Accession*, ed. Dietrich Jung and Catharina Raudvere (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 117–37.

²⁴Zürcher, “The Importance of Being Secular,” 63. Emphasis in the original.

²⁵Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, and Modernity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003) and “Trying to Understand French Secularism,” in *Political Theology: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 494–526.

²⁶See, for example, Ahmet Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion: The United States, France, and Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 166–68; and İştâ Tarhanlı, *Müslüman Toplum, ‘Laik’ Devlet: Türkiye’de Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* (Istanbul: Afa Yayınları, 1993), 159.

²⁷Saba Mahmood, “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation,” *Public Culture* 18 (2006): 324–30.

²⁸*Diyanet Aylık Dergisi* 186 (2006), 1, 9–27, cited in Kara, *Cumhuriyet Türkiye’sinde*, 79.

²⁹Mehmet Bulut, “Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığının Yaygın Din Eğitimindeki Yeri” (PhD diss., Ankara University, 1997), 344–45.

³⁰Information from the archives of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Division of Personnel Appointments, 28 July 2010.

³¹As of 2 June 2009, only 124 of the available 200 contractual positions had been filled, due to the Directorate’s high standards for selecting government-employed preachers, according to Vice Director Er. By 28 July 2010, a total of 173 of the 200 available contractual positions had been filled. A copy of the job advertisement dated 6 November 2008 was posted online at <http://forum.memurlar.net/topic.aspx?id=554779> (accessed 20 July 2009).

³²Figure from *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı İstatistikleri 2008* (Ankara: Strateji Geliştirme Daire Başkanlığı, 2009), 25.

³³See Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion*.

³⁴Hassan, "Women at the Intersection of Turkish Politics, Religion, and Education."

³⁵Ibid. As part of an earlier 2005 study inquiring if it was possible to have a more "civil, transparent, and democratic" Directorate of Religious Affairs, representatives of the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı) conveyed their findings that the Directorate was not reaching religious women and providing them with services to Directorate administrators, whom İrfan Bozan deemed to be responsive to these concerns. See İrfan Bozan, *Devlet ile Toplum Arasında, Bir Okul: İmam Haiip Liseleri, Bir Kurum: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* (Istanbul: TESEV Yayınları, 2007), 91.

³⁶Interview with Dr. İzzet Er on 2 June 2009; Hassan, "Reshaping Religious Authority in Contemporary Turkey"; "Kadınların Cuma Namazı Kılabilceği Camiler Hazırlanıyor," *Zaman*, 20 November 2008, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=762122> (accessed 20 November 2009); and "Bardakoğlu'dan Kadınlara Çağrı: Günlerinizi Camiide Yapın," *Zaman*, 11 December 2009, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=926211> (accessed 11 December 2009).

³⁷Ali Aslan Kılıç, "Bardakoğlu: No Discrimination against Women in Islam," *Today's Zaman*, 6 March 2007, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=104604> (accessed 2 June 2010).

³⁸Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), 164, 168; Deniz Kandiyoti, "End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey," in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1991), 22–47; and Jenny White, "State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman," *NWSA Journal* 15 (2003): 145–59.

³⁹Ayşe Gunes Ayata and Fatma Tütüncü, "Party Politics of the AKP (2002–2007) and the Predicaments of Women at the Intersection of Westernist, Islamist and Feminist Discourses in Turkey," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35 (2008): 375–76; and Edibe Sözen, "Gender Politics of the JDP," in *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and AK Parti*, ed. Hakan Yavuz (Salt Lake City, Utah: The University of Utah Press, 2006), 267–68.

⁴⁰Yeşim Arat, *The Patriarchal Paradox: Women Politicians in Turkey* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989); Yeşim Arat-Pamuk, "From the Private to the Political Realm: Female Parliamentarians in Turkey," in *Women, Family and Social Change in Turkey*, ed. Ferhunde Ozbay (Bangkok: UNESCO, 1990), 28–38; Sözen, "Gender Politics of the JDP," 259–60; Nilufer Narlı, "Women in Political Parties in Turkey: Emerging Spaces for Islamic Women," in *From Patriarchy to Empowerment: Women's Participation, Movements, and Rights in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia*, ed. Valentine Moghadam (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 73–74; Ayata and Tütüncü, "Party Politics of the AKP," 373, 383.

⁴¹White, "State Feminism," 146–47, 154, 158; Alev Çınar, *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 53–98; Turam, *Between Islam and the State*, 109–14, 126–30; and Ayata and Tütüncü, "Party Politics of the AKP," 368. Edibe Sözen also discusses the "gender activism" of the AKP as it seeks to promote Turkish girls' access to education, eliminate workplace discrimination, support non-governmental organizations focused on women's issues, facilitate women's work and income generation, prevent violence against women, and ameliorate workplace conditions for women; see "Gender Politics of the JDP," 266–67.

⁴²Kemaleddin Taş, *Türk Halkının Gözüyle Diyanet* (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2002), 107–55, 162–63, 195–98.

⁴³Republished in Bozan, *Devlet ile Toplum Arasında*, 68–81.

⁴⁴Kara, *Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sinde*, 97–101; David Shankland, *The Alevis in Turkey: The Emergence of a Secular Islamic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2003), 13, 23, 154–72; Kabir Tambar, "The Aesthetics of Public Visibility: Alevi Semah and the Paradoxes of Pluralism in Turkey," *Comparative Studies in Studies and History* 52 (2010): 652–79; Bozan, *Devlet ile Toplum Arasında*, 69–70.

⁴⁵Bozan, *Devlet ile Toplum Arasında*, 73–81.

⁴⁶For a few recent articles on the topic, see Alev Çınar, "Subversion and Subjugation in the Public Sphere: Secularism and the Islamic Headscarf," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 33 (2008): 891–913; Hasan Seckinelgin, "Civil Society between the State and Society: Turkish Women with Muslim Headscarves?" *Critical Social Policy* 26 (2006): 748–69; Ayşe Kadioğlu, "Muslim Feminist Debates on the Question of Headscarf in Contemporary Turkey," in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi' (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 609–23; and Kim Shively, "Religious Bodies and the Secular State: The Merve Kavakçı Affair," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1 (2005): 46–72.

⁴⁷Kuru, *Secularism and State Policies toward Religion*; Turam, *Between Islam and the State*.

⁴⁸Nilüfer Göle, "The Civilizational, Spatial, and Sexual Powers of the Secular," in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, ed. Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 256.

⁴⁹Berna Turam, "Turkish Women Divided by Politics: Secularist Activism versus Pious Non-Resistance," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 10 (2008): 482–85; Pusch, "Stepping into the Public Sphere," 499; and Gül Aldıkaçtı Marshall, "Ideology, Progress, and Dialogue: A Comparison of Feminist and Islamist Women's Approaches to the Issues of Head Covering and Work in Turkey," *Gender and Society* 19 (2005): 104–10.

⁵⁰Fieldwork and interview with Hafize Çınar, 30 June 2009.

⁵¹See, for example, M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Elizabeth Özdalga, "Transformation of Sufi-Based Communities in Modern Turkey: The Nakşibendis, the Nurcus, and the Gülen Community," in *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Celia Kerslake, Kerem Öktem, Philip Robins (Oxford: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 69–91.

⁵²Interview with Dr. Kadriye Avcı Erdemli, 9 July 2009.

⁵³Bozan, *Devlet ile Toplum Arasında*, 71–72.

⁵⁴Based on the annual statistics of the Directorate of Religious Affairs for the years 1990 to 2009, only rarely have women received forms of higher education other than the Turkish theological faculties or solely a secondary school education in Turkey's religious vocational schools. For details of the curriculum at Turkey's theological faculties, see Mehmet Pacaci and Yasin Aktay, "Seventy-five Years of Higher Religious Education in Modern Turkey," in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi' (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 128–29, 131, 132–34, 137–39.

⁵⁵T. C. Başbakanlık, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Duyuru, Sayı: B.02.I.DİB.0.71.00.01/902.99/ 6452 06.11.2008, Konu: Sözleşmeli Vaizler, <http://forum.memurlar.net/topic.aspx?id=554779> (accessed 20 July 2009).

⁵⁶Fieldwork and interviews with Dr. İzzet Er on 2 June 2009, Dr. Halide Yenen on 30 June 2009, and Hafize Çınar on 30 June 2009.

⁵⁷Their professional preaching proficiency examines their knowledge of such fields as the Arabic language, the Qu'ran, hadith literature and methodology, theology, jurisprudence, exegesis, Islamic thought, and Islamic history as well as their ability to explain scriptural sources in a modern context. Fieldwork and interviews with Dr. İzzet Er on 2 June 2009 and Hafize Çınar on 30 June 2009.

⁵⁸Interestingly, the Directorate does not require its female preachers to undergo the much longer thirty-month specialization training (*ihstias eğitimi*) expected of male preachers, because of its sense that female preachers are demanded urgently by Turkish society and should begin working as soon as possible.

⁵⁹Interview with Hafize Çınar, 30 June 2009.

⁶⁰Fieldwork; interviews with Dr. İzzet Er on 2 June 2009, Dr. Halide Yenen on 30 June 2009, and Hafize Çınar on 30 June 2009; İzzet Er, "Religious Services of the PRA," *Muslim World* 98 (2008): 275. The first Family Guidance Bureaus in Turkey were established as pilot projects in Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Adana, Samsun, and Elazığ in 2003 and were then extended in 2006 to Antalya, Balıkesir, Batman, Bursa, Diyarbakır, Erzurum, Gaziantep, Kastamonu, Kayseri, Konya, Malatya, Mersin, Sakarya, Sivas, Şanlıurfa, Trabzon, and Van. By the end of 2009, there were fifty-three Family Guidance Bureaus distributed across Turkey, and by July 2010 there were sixty-seven such bureaus—a phenomenon I hope to analyze in more depth elsewhere.

⁶¹Raudvere, *The Book and the Roses*, 79–82; and Shively, "Taming Islam," 688–89.

⁶²Interview with Fatma Bayram, 8 July 2009.

⁶³Interview with Dr. Kadriye Avcı Erdemli, 9 July 2009.

⁶⁴Interview with Dr. Halide Yenen, 30 June 2009.

⁶⁵Interview with Fatma Bayram, 8 July 2009.

⁶⁶Interview with Züleyha Şeker, 26 June 2009.

⁶⁷Fieldwork and interview with Züleyha Şeker on 2 July 2009.

⁶⁸Interview with Fatma Bayram, 8 July 2009.

⁶⁹Interview with Dr. Halide Yenen, 30 June 2009.

⁷⁰For further discussion of the male-gendered spatiality of Turkey's mosques and its gradual transformation, see Hassan, "Reshaping Religious Authority in Contemporary Turkey."

⁷¹See Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 69; idem, "Competing Agenda: Feminists, Islam, and the State in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Egypt," in *Women, Islam, and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1991), 205; and idem, "Islamic Feminism Revisited," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 9–15 February 2006, republished in Margot Badran, *Feminism beyond East and West: New Gender Talk and Practice in Global Islam* (New Delhi: Global Media Publications, 2007), 41.

⁷²Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*.