Cultural Muslims: Popular Religiosity among Teachers in Public Elementary Schools[1] in Turkey

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Abstract

Even though there are many studies about religious life in Turkey, there are very few that examine religiosity within a specific profession. This study explores popular religiosity among Turkish elementary school teachers. Popular religion, folk religion, unofficial religion, invisible religion, common religion, religious populism—all of these terms point to a dimension of religious life that suggests a differentiation between the religion of ordinary people and the religion of theologians, reverends, and other religious professionals. In this study, I use the results of a survey that I conducted with 295 teachers in 12 public elementary schools in Turkey in 2005 to explore popular religiosity among teachers. The results show that popular religiosity is lower among teachers than the majority of population. However, some teachers make religion a part of their cultural life, and see the practice of religion as a cultural habit.

Key words: Popular religion, perception of religion, Turkish Islam, teachers.

[1] Elementary school term refers to grades one through eight.

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Introduction

This paper presents different forms of religious life in terms of perception of religion, popular/cultural religiosity, and official religion among public elementary school teachers in Turkey. In this study, I use the results of a survey that I conducted with 295 teachers in 12 public elementary schools in Turkey in 2005.

Most studies about religious life in Turkey do not discuss the religious life of specific professions. Commonly, people's individual experience of religion has a limited influence on family members and almost no influence on other people. However, teachers are the exception to this rule. Even in secular schools, teachers' perceptions of religion influence students to some degree, especially in elementary schools. Also, in Turkey, *Religion and Ethics* courses are mandatory in primary and secondary education levels. One-half of the teachers in my study taught "Religion and Ethics" courses at least a few semesters. This situation increases the importance of teachers' perceptions of religion. To some degree, every teacher reflects his/her opinions in these classes and demonstrates how their opinions can influence students to have similar beliefs. In addition, there is a global attention to the practice of Islam in Turkey in recent years. This attention has increased since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and has been renewed since then because of societal changes such as the incumbent conservative Justice and Development Party coming to power in 2002 and remaining in power since then, Turkey's desire for membership in the European Union, the increasing soft power of Turkey, the popularity of P.M. Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party among Arab nations, and developments during the Arab Spring. The importance of Turkey in the international arena also increases the importance of understanding Islamic beliefs of Turkish teachers since they socialize the next generation of Turkish citizens. For these reasons, it is important to understand the influence of teachers' perceptions of religion.

Popular Religion

Popular religion, folk religion, unofficial religion, invisible religion, common religion, religious populism—all of these terms point to a dimension of religious life that suggests a differentiation between the religion of ordinary people and the religion of theologians, reverends, and other religious professionals. Ordinary people understand the working of the divine order through its particular appearances in daily experience (Herzfeld 2005: 168). Official religion tends to be the religion of elite, those who exercise effective power and therefore dominate a society. These groups hold religious institutions like mosques, churches, synagogues, temples, and councils and effectively determine what religion actually is (Lippy 1994: 1-5).

According to Bruce David Forbes, there are at least four different relationships between religion and popular culture: 1. Religion in popular culture, 2. Popular culture in religion, 3. Popular culture as religion, and 4. Religion and popular culture in dialogue (2000: 10; also see Chidester 2005: 30-51).

Religion in popular culture refers to the appearance, explicitly or implicitly, of religious themes, language, imagery, and subject matter in elements of popular culture (e.g. themes in movies).

Popular culture in religion refers to consciously or unconsciously borrowing examples, images, languages, themes, and assumptions from popular culture as tools for religion's purposes. In other words, this category refers to the appropriation of aspects of popular culture by religious groups and institutions.

Popular culture as religion means that popular culture sometimes serves as religion or functions like religion for many people.

Religion and popular culture in dialogue means that religion and popular culture influence each other simultaneously.

These four relationships between religion and popular culture are not exclusive; in fact, they might better be seen as interactive. When we look at popular religiosity among teachers, it seems to be more likely under the category of "popular culture in religion." Actually, when we look at the four relationships between religion and popular culture, the impact of popular culture upon religion has been the least examined (Forbes 2000: 13). It is more difficult to see the popular culture in religion than other categories. Without comparing different cultures, researchers may fail to find the origin of some religious behaviors and may assume that these behaviors came from religious orders even though they are reflections of culture. The analysis of popular culture can provide insights about how religions can change and are changed by the cultures that surround them.

While popular religion may have direct connections to the belief system of a formal religious tradition, it may also blend with the beliefs and practices that come from other sources. Indeed, popular religion reflects the need of ordinary people for simpler, more direct, and more practical access to the divine than the trappings of formal religion offer (Lippy 1994: 4).

If we want to understand a society, we need to look at a cut through time—as one takes a cut through rock to find that some strata are older than others (Taylor 1989). Maybe we can think that popular religion is a transition from an older religion to a newer one. It is obvious when people convert to a new religion, they do not completely leave their old habits. For instance, Lippy states about Christianity (1994: 14):

Church historians have long recognized that the precise date of the birth of Jesus is unknown, but that fixing it on 25 December coopted the importance attached to winter solstice festivals among the people. The need to do so indicate that among ordinary people there was apparently little if any conflict in fusing "pagan" belief and practice with Christian affirmation in a popular religiosity. Numerous scholars have shown how the medieval fascination with relics of the saints, the concern of church leaders to quash heresy, the continuing affirmation of the power of witchcraft, and even such devotional practices as pilgrimages represent the way ordinary people adapted features of the formal Christian tradition, fused them with other beliefs and practices, and forged a popular religiosity that allowed them to find a sense of meaning in life.

In other words, Lippy questions whether Roman Empire became a Christian empire or Christianity became a Roman religion. We can find similar situations for other religions, too. I will mention a few examples later about Turkish Islam.

Religion and society have a mutual relationship. Religion affects society, daily life, and culture; society and culture affect religion, too. A religious relationship is similar to the physical relationship such as not only do mass objects magnetize small objects, small and mass objects magnetize each other in physics, the relationship between society and religion is the same. However, in this kind of relationship, mass objects have more advantages. When we look at religion and society, we can say which one is more dominant, or which one has more influence on the other one (Freyer 1964: 65).

A differentiation from an official religion would bring some tensions. Michael Herzfeld uses the term "cultural intimacy" to describe the formal or coded tension between official self-presentation, and what goes on in the privacy of collective introspection. Herzfeld employs his notion of "social poetics" to identify the contours of cultural intimacy, exploring the division between official models of national culture and the experiences of ordinary citizens. He gives an example of this conflict that the play between "Turkish" and "Frankish" styles in Turkey point up an enduring ambivalence rooted in the tensions between Islamic and Kemalist (in other words secular) vision of Turkey's future (Herzfeld 2005: 1-18).

Islam and Turkishness are two major identity referents in Turkey (see Table 1). Despite the secularization efforts and the restrictions on religious practices, Islam has remained one of the major identity referents in Turkey, and it continues to be an effective social reality, shaping the fabric of Turkish society (Kucukcan 2007: 193). However, the religion does not have the same meaning for every member. Religion appearing in popular culture can be different than religion appearing in mosques.

Table 1: Turks' Primary Identity

Primary Identity	Percentage of Respondents
Muslim	44.6
Turk	29.9
Citizen of Turkish Republic	19.4
Kurd	2.7
Alevi	1.1
Other	1.3
No Reply	1.0

Source: TESEV 2006.

In a widely used metaphor, beliefs and popular culture are like a mirror of social events and reflect who we are. Yet when we look into a mirror, the images are somewhat altered or distorted, because only portions of our realities, interests, values and desires are reflected back to us, with a selectivity that is influenced by the personal perceptions and intentions of the creative forces behind popular culture. For this reason, some scholars refer to popular culture as a "funhouse mirror" (Forbes and Mahan 2000: 5).

When we look at the differences between indigenous and ordered/hierarchical religions, especially in indigenous religions, beliefs depend on economics, physical and daily life, and society very much (Freyer 1964: 66). For instance, ceremonies and practices are related with the cultivation of crop and harvest time in agricultural societies; related with the birth time of animals and sheep shearing in society that deals with livestock. A society that is predominantly agricultural will tend to formulate its religious symbols in terms drawn from the natural world; a warlike society will have warrior gods; a feudal society will depict its gods as feudal lords. We can find female gods in a society where women are dominant, or we can find male gods in a society where men are dominant. The god of the sea can be found only in a society that lives near a shoreline (Williams 1989: 13).

As a result, indigenous/ancient folk religions were mostly influenced by physical environment that they lived in, circumstances of economic and social environment more than ordered/hierarchical religions.

When we look at ordered/hierarchical religions like "universal religions," even though they show some differences and diversity from indigenous religions, they are a mirror of understanding the tendencies of mass society, too. However, the effects of society on these religions tend to be more artificial, and are not realized easily. The differences in these

religions represent themselves as congregations and sects. Formation of these elements is again derived from the needs of the society. Ordered/hierarchical religions, which are shaped by religious elite, take a new shape, which is agreeable in new situations in different societies, cultures, history, life styles, circumstances, and economical structures. For instance, as it seen, there is a huge difference between Islamic life and practices in Turkey and the Arab Peninsula or Europe (Aslan 2004: 23). As Geertz puts it, societies, like lives, contain their own interpretations (1987).

Serif Mardin describes this situation (differences between popular religion and official religion): "It is a mistake to understand the religion [Islam] from publications of the Presidency of Religious Affairs[2]. Religion is what families teach their children" (1992: 64). This statement shows us that religious doctrine and religion in daily life do not always get along with each other. We can describe this fact, differences between official and unofficial religion, as popular religion, which is referenced earlier. After a while, popular religion may replace official religion.

As I previously said, we can find popular religiosity among ordered/hierarchical religions. When universal religions (e.g. Islam, Christianity) expand, they find more believers from different cultures. These new converts bring some of their old beliefs like witchcraft to their new religion and continue them in a covert manner. These kinds of popular religions can find a place inside of all universal religions. Moreover, sometimes this kind of popular religion can gain an official identity like I mentioned above for Christianity, too. Because, even though old religion is broken down by the newer one, people can secure some of their old beliefs and habits (Mensching 1994: 140).

When we look at how formation of popular religion enters universal religions, during a human lifetime, popular religious practices appear during important transition times like marriages, births, and deaths. In these transition times, which are so important for people and society, many ceremonies are made and arranged to provide a suitable atmosphere for popular religious practices.

Mustafa Aslan brings together formation of Turkish popular religiosity and the elements that assure their permanency under six subcategories (2004: 133-140):

1. *Ancient Beliefs and Customs of Turks:* When early Turks came to Anatolia, they brought their custom and traditions and combined them with Islamic discourses and the Anatolian culture. Early Turks were introduced to Islam by unofficial ways like wars at borderlines or congregations. Thus, they converted to Islam through mystic forms (e.g. ceremonies at congregations), and unofficial Islam/popular religion was diffused among them.

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[2] The Presidency of Religious Affairs is an official institution that deals with religious issues in Turkey.

Hence, from the beginning of this new religion, congregations held an important place in Turkish Islam. Especially, "Alevi" and "Bektashi" communities held more traces of old beliefs, customs, and traditions.

2.   *Gaza (holy war) Islamism:* Spirit of gaza affected Turkish popular religiosity very much because it was so active in Anatolia when early Turks converted to Islam. That is why some religious figures like Ali (one of the companions of the Prophet Mohammed), Battal Gazi, and the like gained mythological characters and became legends.

3.   *Residue of Ancient Cultures that lived in Anatolia:* Civilization and cultures like Babylon, Assyria, and Hittite that lived in Anatolia before Turks and disappeared from history and religions like Christianity, Judaism, and others, which lived before Turks in Anatolia, have some influence on Turkish Islamic customs, beliefs, and traditions by their varying cultural and religious myths and beliefs.

4.   *Congregations:* Congregations influenced religious beliefs and practices, too. Mysticism and congregations are both grass roots of popular religion and secure and sustain preservation of popular religion.

5.   *Sunni Islam:* Even though popular religiosity contains some non-Islamic beliefs and practices, it includes some Sunni Islamic tradition, too.

6.   *Alevi (partisans of caliph Ali):* We usually see Alevism in non-script culture. It is a kind of expression of old beliefs and traditions among Turks. Alevi mind fuses with Sufi tradition and forms popular religiosity of rural areas and nomadic communities.

Because of the reasons that I mentioned above, popular religion is widely approved among Turks. As a result of this approval, we can see many different forms of popular religion in daily life among the mass society like "Mawlid" (poem by Suleyman Celebi celebrating the birth of the Prophet Mohammed), tying cloths and rags to tombs of religious leaders and making wishes, and drinking the water after one person recites some verses from Quran and blows his/her breath to this water (believing that this water heals illnesses and diseases when sick people drink it). They also visit tombs of religious leaders as tourists or believing that they help to buy a car or house, find a good spouse, or healing. This kind of religiosity is more likely to be ceremonial than essential. This ceremonial religion gradually replaces official religion.

Even though it is expressed numerous times by the Department of Religious Affairs, the media, and by Imams in sermons, as well as written at the entrance of tombs that many of these kinds of behaviors are superstitions, many people continue these kinds of behaviors. In addition to psychological reasons, we need to look at historical and social causes that I mentioned above to understand the reasons for these behaviors.

When we look at human society, it seems women are more likely to have popular religiosity than men because of sociological factors. As social groups, peasants, soldiers, hunters, and sailors are more likely to apply popular religion, which originated from witchcraft, because these professions are in a field that people cannot control by their physical powers. This situation makes them dependent on some beliefs. Rain for a farmer, wind and storm for a sailor, and a bullet that may hit him/her for a soldier are very important for these people. People want to control these kinds of effects, which are so important for them and their family. Thus, they seek to invoke magical power to control these potential threats and they feel safe (Mensching 1994: 140).

Above, I mentioned how "old beliefs, customs and traditions" and "cultural residue" coming from old cultures in a living area affect religion. Now, I will look at how these effects change in different nations and locations. The study of Ali Kose (1997) about converted English Muslims suggests that English converts do not have fear about the afterlife, or they have little fear when we compare them to born and raised Muslims. None of these converts mentioned that when they converted to Islam, they secured their afterlife and they would go to heaven; if they did not convert, they would go to hell; or their family members who are not converted would go to hell if they did not convert; or if they did not convert, they would go to hell. Even though interpretations that non-Muslims go to hell are very common among Muslims, we do not see this interpretation among converted Muslims (Kose 1997: 105-106). This situation shows us that interpretation of religion depends on cultural background.

We can see similar effects of different cultural backgrounds among Korean converted Muslims, too. A research that was conducted in 1985 studying 260 Korean converted Muslims indicates that 61 percent of Korean converted Muslims drink alcoholic beverages and 77 percent of them eat bacon and pork products. Another study conducted in 2001 in Korea indicates that 25 percent of Korean converted Muslims continue drinking and 16 percent of them eat bacon and pork products (Kim 2003: 23-74). When researchers asked the reasons for these behaviors, which are definitely forbidden by Islam, converts pointed out the importance of drinking for socialization. One Korean converted explained this situation: "I couldn't leave drinking. Non-drinking seems harmful for social relations in Korea. Because of this reason, even though I do not like drinking, I drink when it seems necessary." This instance shows that the same religious prohibitions can be implemented differently in different cultures. My previous research suggests similar results: 70 percent of teachers state that they do not eat bacon or pork products. On the other hand, only 45 percent of teachers state that they do not drink because of Islamic ban. We can interpret this 25 percent differences between these two categories that implementation of religious bans highly depend on cultural and traditional background.

Another example of how religiosity depends on cultural background is that respecting for bread in Turkey. When people see a piece of bread on ground, they usually take it and put it in a corner of a building or a higher place; however, they do not show the same respect to other foods. Ali Kose explains this situation as "collective subconscious." Even though bread does not have any superiority to other foods in a religious sense, it takes superiority because Turkish society has lived through famine many times and bread is a primary food staple (1997: 1).

In summary, the expressions of theoretical and practical religion are firmly dependent on each other. First the theoretical part, then the practical part (practices) occurs; however, the theoretical part follows the practical in time.

Next, I will look at how popular religion that I explained above reflects on elementary school teachers in Turkey.

Data and Methods

Survey

In this study, I use the results of a survey that I conducted with 295 teachers in 12 public elementary schools in Turkey in 2005.

In the survey, I investigated participants' beliefs about God, prophets, holy books, afterlife, and some other beliefs related to religion like angels, destiny, the devil, and witchcraft; also, frequency of practicing prayer, worship, and fasting; and participants' knowledge about religion, reasons for beliefs, attitudes towards religion, religious order and ban, and teachers' points of view on some of the contemporary issues like the women's headscarf, missionary actions in Turkey, and secularism. These questions are developed to cover official, traditional, and daily life of religiosity.

Sampling and Data

For my sampling, I chose one of the sub-cities, Bahcelievler, of Istanbul. This city shows a transition between two cities—on the one side having a high level of socio-economic welfare and on the other side having a low level of socio-economic welfare and high migration. Thus, in addition to being a middle class city, some districts of Bahcelievler do show the characteristic of a high level of socio-economic welfare; on the other hand, some districts have the characteristic of a low level of socio-economic welfare. Therefore, Bahcelievler has a strong socio-economic representation of both Istanbul and more generally Turkey.

There are 36 public elementary schools in Bahcelievler. These schools have 1791 teachers. 1051 of them are primary school teachers; others are specific course teachers. There are four school districts in Bahcelievler which are divided by socio-economic factors. To cover all of these districts, I surveyed three schools in all four districts by random sampling—a total of 12.

Surveys were conducted in 2005 between the days of September first through the ninth. This survey reached one of three schools (1/3) and one of six teachers (1/6) in this city. When we divide total teacher number (1791) by school number (36), it shows that every school has approximately 50 teachers. This study reached about 25 teachers in every school. The reasons for this gap are that some teachers did not want to reply to the survey as well as some teachers did not return from summer vacation yet by taking official or unofficial permissions, some had medical absences, some female teachers were absent because of pregnancy or breastfeeding, some male teachers were absent because of recruiting in mandatory military service. Also, most school administrators did not want to reply to the survey since there is always a suspicion against confidentiality of political and religious surveys in Turkey. Also, completing the survey in nine days reduced the chance of reaching other teachers.

Difficulties of the research

As with every study, this study encountered some difficulties during survey collection. Even though this study was conducted among an educated class in Turkey, I faced some negative reactions. At the very beginning of the survey of the first school, a teacher questioned whether that project was a way to report to the Turkish state about teachers' beliefs. Some teachers, who knew me personally, since I was a teacher in the same region, did not question my sincerity, but they were skeptical about the intentions of my M.A. advisor. He could possibly work for the government, and even I would not know that. I explain this skepticism by the negative experiences of interviewees during the period of military coups in Turkey.

Even though these difficulties were caused because of religion-related questions, this study reached about the same ratio of respondents of a school related study which was conducted three years before this study (Engin 2002). Also, some respondents expressed that one of the teacher unions, Eğitim-Sen, made a survey about teachers' problems at about the same time period, but almost nobody paid attention to it. These examples show that lack of participation is not only explained by religion related questions; also other factors should be considered.

Results

Popular Religion among Teachers

In this section, I will look at popular religion among Turkish teachers. I will be using the results of the survey mentioned in the introduction, which I conducted in 2005 with 295 teachers in 12 public elementary schools in Turkey.

Some practices that are ordered or not ordered by religion, and even forbidden by religion, can all live in the same society. Some of these practices can even gain religious value. It is not necessary that these different practices are related to "the real religion." I talked about "popular religion" in this way in the theoretical part. Therefore, next, I will look at the reflection of popular religion on teachers.

Official Religion

First, I would like to look at the practice of official religion among teachers to understand the importance of popular religion.

When we consider the six principal beliefs in Islam about God, angels, prophets, holy books, destiny, and after-death, the survey shows that teachers' belief in God has highest score at 92.5%; of these believers, 6% do not see religion as necessary; 4.1% of respondents have some problems or doubts about believe in God; while 3.4% of them do not believe in God.

When we look at belief in Quran, 84.4% of respondents believe that Quran was sent by Allah; 7.1% of them believe that the Quran was sent partially by Allah and was written partially by the Prophet Mohammed; 4.7% of them believe that Quran is a book about the Prophet Mohammed and his friends; 3.1% of them believe that Quran was written just only by the Prophet Mohammed.

No question was asked about belief in prophets since it might show similarity to belief in Quran.

When we look at the other principal beliefs, they decreased when compared to belief in God and the Prophet Mohammed: 79.4% of responders believe in destiny; 78% believe in after-death; and 76.3 % believe in angels.

One of the survey questions was, "do you describe yourself as Muslim?" and 93.6% of respondents describe himself/herself as Muslim. When I compare the ratio of respondents who describe himself/herself as Muslim and the ratio of six principle beliefs, I can say that the intersection of these beliefs are very low. Around 78% of responders believe destiny, after-death, and angels, which are among the six principle beliefs in Islam. About 15% of

respondents identifying themselves as Muslim said that they do not believe these principle beliefs. I can say that 15% of teachers hold the title of Muslim as a cultural fact rather than a religious fact. I call these people "cultural Muslim."

When we look at worship among teachers, 10% of responders say they never worship. Most teachers see worship as a necessity for appearance of belief. Only 5.8% of them think worship is unnecessary. When we look at prayer, the results suggest that even responders who say that they never worship and responders who think worship is unnecessary still pray. Only 4.5% of responders do not pray.

The most important reason for non-worship is that 41.8% of respondents felt it was something they could do later; 30.2% of teachers believe God looks at our hearts, not our deeds. It seems that this kind of thinking is a very popular gateway for many people. 22% of responders say that they do not or cannot worship because of their job.

Half of the teachers surveyed think people cannot be a "good Muslim" without worship. Nevertheless, 11.4% of responders think that the time that is spent for worship is unnecessary and can be used for better things.

When we look at worship level among teachers, the survey indicates that fasting has the highest score, with 72.9% of respondents saying that they fast during the whole Ramadan month, 12.2% of them fast sometimes during Ramadan month, 14.9 of them do not fast at any time.

Prayer (salah) is as not as popular as fasting; 23.4% of responders pray five times every day, 29.8% of them do not pray at any time. The other responders pray sometimes.

Comparing results to the Pew Research Center's 2012 survey suggests that both principle beliefs and practices are lower among teachers than general Turkish population. According to Pew's research on Turkey, belief in God and Prophet Mohammed is 97%; angels 96%; destiny 92%; heaven 92% and hell 87% in Turkey. Practices are lower: fasting 84%; pray five times a day 27%, while pray several times, but not all five 15% (Pew 2012).

Popular Religion

In table 1, I list some beliefs in descending order to easily show the differences between them: destiny 79.4%; angel, 76.3%; evil eye, 67.6%; devil, 67.2%; genie, 58.5%; witchery, 28.6%; genie possession, 19.2%; and fortune telling, 2.8%. As I mentioned above, even though destiny and angel beliefs are among six principle beliefs in Islam, their score is low when we compare them to responders who describe themselves as Muslim. The evil eye is the name for a sickness transmitted—usually without intention—by someone who is envious, jealous, or covetous. It is also called the invidious eye and the envious eye. The evil

eye belief is that a person can harm you, your family and assets by looking at them with envy and praising them. In Turkey, some people wear the blue "evil eye bead" or attach to their possessions to protect themselves and their properties from the evil eye. The evil eye belief has a higher score than that of belief in the devil and genie, even though they are explicitly mentioned in Quran (for instance see: Quran 6: 100, 128-130 for genie, 142 for devil). There are some Islamic discourses about the evil eye and witchery among Muslim scholars; however, there is not a consensus about these beliefs. These results suggest that some popular religious practices can have higher scores than official ones. One of the controversial topics is genie possession. It is believed that bad genies can harm people. Even though it is expressed by Quran that nobody can know the future except Allah, 2.8% of responders believe fortunetellers. However, these kinds of popular religious beliefs are higher among the general populace: believe in Jinn 63%; evil eye 69%; and witchcraft 49% (Pew 2012).

Table 1: Believe in Destiny, Angel, Evil Eye, Devil, Genie, Witchery, Genie Impact, and Fortune

Do You Believe in		**Destiny**	**Angel**	**Evil Eye**	**Devil**	**Genie**	**Witchery**	**Genie Possession**	**Fortune Telling**
Yes	N	228	219	194	193	168	82	55	8
	%	79.4	76.3	67.6	67.2	58.5	28.6	19.2	2.8
No	N	59	68	93	94	119	205	232	279
	%	20.6	23.7	32.4	32.8	41.5	71.4	80.8	97.2
Total	N	287	287	287	287	287	287	287	287
	%	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Traditional Religious Practices

In table 2, I list some religious-traditional practices in descending order to easily show the differences between them, too. The results suggest that these practices can exist among teachers in some way; however, when we compare them to the general populace, it seems these kinds of practices are very low (see Pew 2012).

Table 2: Attitudes against Traditional Popular Religion

		Agree	Somewhat Agree	Do not Agree	TOTAL
Ecclesiastical law should be implemented about circumcision, wedding, and funeral services	N	187	55	38	280
	%	66.8	19.6	13.6	100
I do not have good opinion about persons who have titles like saint, sheikh, dervish	N	66	67	146	279
	%	23.7	24.0	52.3	100
I feel spiritual serenity when I am in a tomb of a saint	N	138	70	73	281
	%	49.1	24.9	26.0	100
For the peace of the spirit of dead person, it is needed to read Mawlid or Quran	N	122	96	63	281
	%	43.4	34.2	22.4	100
Quran blown water heals illness	N	53	84	143	280
	%	18.9	30.0	51.1	100
If you believe in God and pray and wish something, your wishes will be done some day	N	33	100	146	279
	%	11.8	35.8	52.3	100
Zikir (repeat the name of God) ceremonies conducted by communities and sects increase religious feeling/sensation	N	32	75	168	275
	%	11.6	27.3	61.1	100

There are 66.8% of responders who fully agree and 19.6% who somewhat agree to implementing ecclesiastical law about circumcision, wedding, and funeral services. Even though this traditional-religious practice has the highest score among the questions that I asked, it has a lower score than in mass society.

The results suggest that 76.3% of responders do not have a negative opinion about persons who have titles like saint and sheikh. While 74% of responders feel serenity when

they are in a tomb of a saint, when we look at reasons of visiting tombs of saints, teachers differ from mass society (Table 3). Mass society usually visits tombs of saints because they think when they visit saints' tombs, saints help them to become richer, healthier, or fulfill other mundane wishes, or help them to go to Heaven. Eighteen percent of responders visit saints' tombs for similar reasons in my research. The others visit saints' tombs without awaiting any benefit. In fact, more than the half of responders (52.3%) does not believe that prayers and wishes are accepted by God just because they are made in a saint's tomb, while 35.8% of responders think these prayers and wishes can be accepted by God, but that visiting a saint's tomb is not enough reason by itself. Finally, 11.8% of responders believe that prayers and wishes are accepted ultimately if they are made in a saint's tomb.

There were 43.4% of responders who agree with the opinion of "For the peace of the spirit of the death person, it is needed to read Mawlid or Quran" after their death; 34.2% of them somehow agree with this opinion. Generally, this group, which somewhat agrees, mentions that reading of Quran is helpful for dead, but reading of Mawlid does not provide any help for the dead people. Some of the responders mentioned that if these activities are made by dead person's child, it can help the dead person; otherwise, they do not help; 22.4% of responders believe that deeds that are made after someone's death do not help them in any way.

One other popular belief is that "Quran blown water heals illness"; 18.9% of responders agree with this statement while 30% of them partially agree. More than half of responders (51.1%) do not believe this. Some of the responders said/wrote that they saw/heard something like that the first time in their life and asked "is this possible according to Islam, or not?" I think this surprised reaction from the responders shows that many teachers are far away from broad popular religion.

The last question that was asked about popular religion is whether zikir (repeat the name of God) ceremonies conducted by communities and sects increase religious feeling/sensation, or not. Only 11.6% of responders think that zikir ceremonies increase religious feeling/sensation, while 27.3% of them partially agree, and 61.1% of them do not agree with this statement.

Most studies suggest that popular religious practices are more common among women, and women are usually more pious than men. However, in this study I anticipated that the piety of female teachers might be less than male teachers. The level of female teachers' popular religion supports this hypothesis. Except for the opinions about "Quran blew water heals illness" and "If you believe in God and pray and wish something, your wishes will be done one day", the results suggest that female teachers support of popular religion is less than male teachers. Even though these differences are small, they suggest a

significantly important difference (p<0.5) in the opinion of zikir (repeat the name of God) ceremonies conducted by communities and sects increase religious feeling/sensation.

When we look at visiting the tombs of saints (Table 3), 80% of responders visited a saint's tomb at least once; 78% of responders who visited a saint's tomb went to these places for touristic purposes and to pray for the dead in the tomb; 17% of all responders went to these tombs for help from these saints. As I mentioned above, 11.8% of responders believe that prayers and wishes are accepted ultimately if they are made in a saint's tomb; and 35.8% of responders think that these prays and wishes can be accepted by God, but that visiting a saint's tomb is not enough reason by itself. When we compare the results of these two different questions, they show parallels.

Table 3: The Relationship Between Reasons of Visiting Saints' Tombs and Gender*

Do you ever visit a saint's tomb?	Gender		TOTAL
	Male	**Female**	
Never	28	30	58
Visiting	60	88	148
Pray for the dead who in the tomb	49	56	105
School exam	6	10	16
Healing from illness	2	7	9
Having baby	1	2	3
Finding a spouse	1	1	2
Other reasons	11	11	22

*Responders are free to choose multiple choices.

This survey shows that 19.4% of female responders never visited a saint's tomb, while this percentage increases 21.1 for male responders. We can expect that since female responders visit saints' tomb more, they are more likely to expect their prayers and wishes would be accepted in these places.

Religious Holidays, Days and Nights

Table 4: The Relationship between Celebration of Religious Holidays & Gender and Marital status

How do you celebrate religious holidays?		Gender		TOTAL	Marital Status		TOTAL
		Male	Female		Married	Single	
According to traditions	N	116	128	244	183	57	240
	%	85.9	81.0	83.3	86.3	75.0	83.3
Celebrate them because many people are doing so	N	14	22	36	19	16	35
	%	10.4	13.9	12.3	9.0	21.1	12.2
Do not care about religious holidays	N	5	8	13	10	3	13
	%	3.7	5.1	4.4	4.7	3.9	4.5
TOTAL	N	135	158	293	212	76	288
	%	100	100	100	100	100	100

P = 0.532   P = 0.022

We can find popular religion in religious holidays, days and nights also. Religions assign more meaning to some particular days. Rituals in these days usually receive more attention than other times.

When we look at the importance of religious holidays[3], days and nights[4] among teachers, 83.3% of responders celebrate religious holidays according to traditions, while 12.3% of them celebrate holidays because many other people celebrate it, which can be

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[3] Eid ul-Fitr (Ramadan Holiday) is the holiday celebrating the end of Ramadan, the month-long fast.

Eid ul-Adha is celebrated in honor of the prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son as a proof of his loyalty to God.

[4] Laylat al-Qadr (the night in which the Qur'an was first revealed.) Laylat ul Isra and Mi'raj (the night when the Prophet Mohammad went Mescid al-Aksa and from there ascended to the highest level of the heavens.) Laylat ul Bara'ah (it is considered a night when Muslims are graced with Divine Mercy and blessings.) Mawlid (the birthday of the Prophet Mohammad). Laylat al-Regaib (it is believed that it is the night when the Prophet Mohammad's mother learn she is pregnant to Mohammad.)

interpreted as social pressure; 4.4% of responders do not celebrate religious holidays. The results suggest that there is not a statistically significant difference between single men and women for celebrating holidays; however, married people are more likely to celebrate holidays than singles.

Table 5: The relationship between celebration of religious days and nights & sex

How do you celebrate religious days and nights?		Sex		TOTAL
		Male	Female	
Pray	N	75	85	160
	%	55.6	53.5	54.4
Do not pray but celebrate relatives and friends by email and text messages	N	36	50	86
	%	26.7	31.4	29.3
They have no differences than other days	N	24	24	48
	%	17.8	15.1	16.3
TOTAL	N	135	159	294
	%	100	100	100

P = 0.622

The results suggest that besides religious holidays, responders consider important other religious days and nights. Even though how they spend religious time can differ from person to person, 54.4% of responders pray on these days and nights. Even though 29.3% of responders do not pray on these days and nights, they give an importance these times and celebrate other people. In Turkey, according to cell phone companies, text messages are used most on these days and nights.

In all, 16.3% of responders do not give any attention to these days and nights. This situation shows that these days and nights are not as important as religious holidays among teachers. We can understand the importance of religious holidays from the fact that 61.1% of responders, who did not describe themselves as Muslim, declared that they celebrate religious

holidays. This situation shows that religious holidays have more value than just religious; they have also cultural and traditional values.

Conclusion

In this paper, I examined different forms of religious life, including perception of religion, popular/cultural religiosity, and official religion among public elementary school teachers in Turkey. I used the results of a survey that I conducted in 2005 with 295 teachers in 12 public elementary schools in Turkey.

Even though the level of popular religion among teachers is less than I expected and smaller than mass society, the results suggest that popular religion has a significant amount of popularity among teachers.

Mustafa Aslan brings together the formation of Turkish popular religiosity and the elements that assure their permanency under six subcategories: 1. Ancient Beliefs and Customs of Turks; 2. Gaza (holy war) Islamism; 3. Residue of Ancient Cultures that lived in Anatolia; 4. Congregations; 5. Sunni Islam; 6. Alevism. I believe that these six categories are very useful to explain popular religiosity among Turkish teachers also. For instance, we can see the effects of ancient beliefs and customs on beliefs about saints' tombs. Many Islamic nations offer the interpretation that expecting help from dead people as a sin; however, it is very common in Turkey. When we look at the reasons of these expectations, it seems that Turks are influenced by the Shamanism. We can think that the same situation is valid for beliefs about witchery and fortune telling. Raymond Williams' terms "residual and emergent cultures" are useful to explain this situation (Williams 1980). According to Williams, every culture is a mixture of residual and emergent forms. Residual refers to a set of experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture, but which are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social formation. Emergent means that new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, are continually being created (Williams 1980).

One other effect that increases the importance of saints and martyrs' tombs is Gaza (holy war) Islamism. For more than one millennium, Turks have believed that they have been the guardians of Islam. This situation increased the importance of martyrs and their tombs. We can see the effects of residue of ancient cultures that lived in Anatolia. The residue shows up on beliefs such as the devil and the evil eye. Also, congregations, Sunni and Alevi Islam

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are very influential on popular religion. They affect beliefs about the importance of religious ceremonies.

One factor that diminishes popular religiosity is modernization. As a member of the middle/upper-middle class, teachers are more influenced by modernization. Modernization affected religion and caused that religion has gone through an evolutionary process and adapted to the modern world (Giddens 1993: 488). In other words, as Simmel stated, a new religious form, a new series of beliefs, took the place of an outmoded one. The supernatural objects of religious belief have been radically deliquesced for a relatively large number of people; however, their religious impulse has not been eliminated (Simmel 1971: 390).

Moreover, I can argue that middle and especially upper classes form a new kind of (popular) religiosity. Simmel (1957) states a similar case in writing about social forms:

Social forms, apparel, aesthetic judgment, the whole style of human expression, are constantly transformed by fashion, in such a way, however, that fashion … affects only the upper classes. Just as soon as the lower classes begin to copy their style, thereby crossing the line of demarcation the upper classes have drawn and destroying the uniformity of their coherence. The upper classes turn away from this style and adopt a new one, which in its turn differentiates them from the masses; and does the game goes merrily on (Simmel 1957: 545).

Religion (at least some religious beliefs and popular beliefs) is among the social forms that are mentioned by Simmel. Popular religiosity is not common in upper class because upper class do not want to believe the same things that are common in the lower class. The upper class' religiosity is more likely to be "official" one. However, there are some beliefs that we cannot explain by official religion. On the other hand it is not possible to explain them by popular religion. For instance, in my study, 7 percent of respondents, who described themselves as Muslim, stated that they drink alcohol but they do not accept that Islam prohibits drinking or it is a sin. We can suggest that these people are forming a new kind of religiosity. Especially the idea/belief that "God looks at our hearts, not our deeds" is a very popular thinking among these people. We can explain this situation by referencing the phrase that on the one hand "times change" (Eickelman 1985) and on the other hand these people are forming a new kind of "popular religion" belongs to this class.

In conclusion, we can see that some teachers made religion a part of their cultural life, and look at religion as a cultural habit. Some teachers hold the title of Muslim as a cultural fact rather than a religious one. For this reason, I call these people "cultural Muslim."

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