

**Extended Abstract**

## Imam Hatip Schools' Mission against "Religious" Manipulations\*

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### Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to discuss the educational precautions that can be taken against the manipulative "religious" formations which are encountered these days with motion from the reality of religious abuse experienced in Islamic history. In line with this the main objective is the analysis of the functions that madrasas of the past had performed on this subject and the mission that is placed on the Imam Hatip Schools these days. The topic is covered under two subheadings. The first is religious abuse, whose actual merit is never lost. Religious abuse is primarily introduced through a conceptual analysis of what it means, through which motives it is made, and the forms it realizes. Later, examples of exploitation experienced in the process of the emerging political and social formations that have led the way in Islamic history and the measures developed against these exploitations, are analyzed particularly in an educational sense. The madrasa institution constitutes the axis of this analysis. Additionally, the problem of abuse that continues to exist today as it has in the past is contemplated over current reflections and concrete examples. The second sub-heading for this topic relates to the function that Imam Hatip Schools undertake against the issues of today that introduce the problem of abuse. In this context, the mission that Imam Hitap Schools have undertaken (from what was established in the past to today), the sociological platform on which these schools are based, and the role of religious education against the currents of religious abuse that are carried out from within and without are analyzed. In particular, recent changes in form and method focus on the changes that need to occur in Imam Hatip Schools' educational program as an educational measure against the manipulative formations that create devastating effects in the Islamic world. The method used in this study will be in the form of an evaluation of the results obtained through a detailed analysis of the data from historical records and studies performed in relation to this topic.

### Keywords

Religious abuse • Education • Madrasa • Imam Hatip School

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The subject of this article examines systematic religious education's function of social protection, from madrasas to the Imam Hitap Schools, against religious abuse and religious manipulations. In this context, the role of systematic religious education is addressed in the disposal of religious abuses that have been frequently encountered in the history of Muslims and the manipulative movements that have been nurtured there. Our aim is to make determinations about what can be done by way of religious education in the face of religious manipulations that have started taking a more complex form today and develop proposals to resolve them.

Religious abuse is defined as using religion without any established commonality or sharing of an ontological world with religion, exploiting it for certain purposes, and seeing religion as profit-generating capital. Religion-based abuse is mainly nurtured from two sources; first of all, it needs to have an attribute of being apparently sanctified. The second nurturing sources of the abuse are religious members who consent to their own "religiousness" being used in such a relationship.

The most effective instrument used in the process of religious-based exploitation is undoubtedly the diversion of religious discourse from its purpose. Those who exploit generally use the religious commands and values for the goal they want to reach in a way that serves their own by deviating them from their established intention. This malicious use is defined in Islamic tradition through the concepts of "tevil" (willful misinterpretation) and "tahrif" (deception). Over time, however, this effort of deception (tahrif) has become so organized and complex that many different concepts began to develop that express this. In particular, the commission of technological facilities, communication tools, and other means for guiding mass psychology has begun to render the possibility of using religion as an instrument of exploitation just like other values in political/ideological conflicts. The concept of manipulation is used today to describe this situation.

When looking at the exploitation movements facing the Islamic world today, one sees that all countries that have a relationship with this geography, from America to Europe, are seriously interested in the rhetoric and actions of these structures. In short, those who exploit, who up to now have been fending for themselves, today see an international market and support that they had not hoped for. Have a look at these lines from a current report (Küçük, 2016, pp. 6–11) that explains through clear examples how projects for falsification and destruction are held in the grip of Islamic manipulations: Concepts like "political Islam," "moderate Islam," and "Islamic terror," which have been used in recent years to describe Islam, have been developed by US think-tanks and are Western in origin. These manipulations, which intend to destroy the religion of Islam, blur people's minds and create different perceptions of Islam that, in fact, do not exist.

Whether made for personal interests or for some international accounts, manipulation in every case profits by using religion, turns religious values into commodities, and deceives believers. Religion, intervening in each of these two forms, is estranged from its genuine reality; this form, which impersonates a new one, is available for sale as a commercial/political commodity. Harmonious and manipulative discourses turn into a tool that mostly serve the effort of *conquering from within* by using certain agents from within the Muslims that belong to forces who are accountable to Islam and Muslims. So much so that in time, religious abuse has become an almost institutional structure.

### **The Role of Education against Abuse**

The incidence of abuse generally stems from masses that are ignorant or simple-minded on the topic of religion (Güler, 2000 p. 66). Education is undoubtedly the healthiest way to avoid this ignorance. Since the time of the Blessed Prophet, educational activities that have gone on nonstop in masjids and mosques have gained a more systematic and formal identity through the madrasa system, whose establishment began in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The madrasa also continued this qualification up until the last days of the Ottoman Empire. The formalized history of the madrasa in a real sense was initiated generally by Nizamiye in 1067. From this date onward, so to speak, the government has been directly involved in religious education, being government-supported until the end of the Ottoman Empire but having its existence continued through the "civil initiative." The most important reason for this intervention is to maintain political and social unity. At that time, the state, facing Shia and esoteric trends, decided to politically reinforce and universalize the madrasa institution through the state budget in order to simultaneously protect the Sunni doctrine and its own political existence.

The experiences of yesterday shed light on today. From the Great Seljuks to the Ottomans, if the educational institution had not been supported and developed, social unity and state/nation integrity would not be as uncomplicated as it is. Remembering in this way the effect of the loss of quality that the class of Muslim scholars suffered in the decline of the Ottoman Empire is beneficial.

One can say that most whets the appetite of the beneficiaries in this region, particularly in the struggle of international interest experienced in Islamic geography, has been the manipulative discourses prevalent among Muslims. Exclusive approaches, most notably those that incite sectarian conflicts and violence, have been assessed as the most suitable materials for use. The effectiveness of pro-violence structures that in recent years have never left the world agenda and have constantly brought harm to Islam and Muslims through their actions cannot be understood any other way. On the other hand, the existence of mysterious structures that "distract" humans through arguments which have no tangible scientific foundation and interpret without

principles or training according to its own fundamentals of religion is a serious problem that consumes the energy of the Islamic community.

### **The Role of Imam Hatip Schools against Religious Manipulations**

Even as the Islamic world tried to eliminate the abuse and manipulation it faced using the systematic education embodied in the madrasas of the past, similar studies need to be done today. The century of experience that Turkey has gained through the Republic passing into a new political structure shows that religion is still the most important source of unity and cohesion in the land. At the same time, in the case of a neglected religious domain, weakened social support with an environment open to religious abuse becomes a likely situation.

The point that is most effective in preventing an orientation toward abusive religious groups is having individuals with sturdy and sufficient knowledge in the religious domain. Necessary changes must be made to the education system so that an authentic religious education from every level can be provided and so that basic teachings can be grasped holistically through fundamental religious sources like the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Apparently, protection from religious abuse is a quality that needs to be included in the basic mission of religious education. Imam Hatip Schools, unique to Turkey, are the only institutions to undertake this mission. The fairly integrated situation of these schools within the education system and its reputation with the people is a huge fortune for Turks. What has been experienced from the establishment of the Republic until today teaches Turkey that no other pursuits are necessary. The questions "Why religious education?" and "Why Imam Hatip?" are left aside; from now on Turkey must concentrate on the question "What kind of Imam Hatip?" While looking for answers to this question, one needs to keep in mind that which needs to be done in the face of religious abuse and religious manipulations, which these days especially have begun to occupy people more.

The need for Turkey to cultivate personnel in order for every type of religious service to be met and for expertise in the field of religion, which the Law of Unified Education points toward, is no less today than it was yesterday. In addition to this, promoting a systematic religious education is essential for maintaining a certain level of sensitivity against all the kinds of religious abuse that Turkish society faces. To emphasize again, Imam Hatip Schools are the most appropriate institutions that can facilitate the work of the state and society on this topic.

Before anything else, emphasis on finding a clear sensitivity against exploitation in the vision and mission of the projected program for the Imam Hitap High Schools

should be noted. As a matter of fact, in the case of the field of religious education being left empty, attention is drawn to the superstitious information that will fill its void in a way at the very onset of the program. Therefore, some of the urgent things that need to be done related to opening these schools can be summarized as:

1. To correctly determine the legal and social position of Imam Hatip Schools: The Law of Unified Education (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu), which identifies the indispensability of these schools, and the article related to the Basic Law of National Education #1739 (Milli Eğitim Temel Kanunu) are legal regulations that identify these schools as an institution that prepares both vocational and higher education. That these schools have been welcomed and appropriated by society since their foundation is also a known fact. The Imam Hatip School, in the eyes of society, is not just a vocational school, at the same time it is an address where children learn about both their religion and the world. Additionally, these schools have also become an important tool where in society stakes its claim on education and the state.

2. To break the influence of ideological debates conducted around the Imam Hatip Schools, studies on how these schools correspond to one reality in a pedagogical, sociological, and legal sense must be deepened and replicated.

3. To re-evaluate the formation that religious services require: When considering the conditions of today, one cannot deny that the quality and quantity of religious services that society will feel it needs require an advanced level of information and equipment. Therefore, the staff who will provide services in this area needs to have at least a bachelor's degree. Imam Hatip Schools must be evaluated as an educational institution that prepares individuals for their undergraduate education.

4. As such, Imam Hatip Schools' undergraduate program needs to be partially revised. More specifically, the topics that need to be known at an expert level in classes such as Fiqh, Tafsir, Hadiths, and the Qur'an need to be satisfied with basic information instead of removing these topics from the program.

5. The programs and courses of Imam Hatip Schools must be re-examined with the intent of raising a generation that is responsive in the face of religious abuse. Cognitive and affective gains related to this topic should be identified and content appropriate to this should be formed. Students must be made aware, especially these days, of the religious manipulations that they will come across in different forms through discourses. In this scope, needed awareness can be provided in content for the Siyar, Fiqh, Tafsir, Hadith, Akaid, the Qur'an, the History of Religions, and Islamic Culture and Civilization courses, related especially to topics that exploiters will want to use.