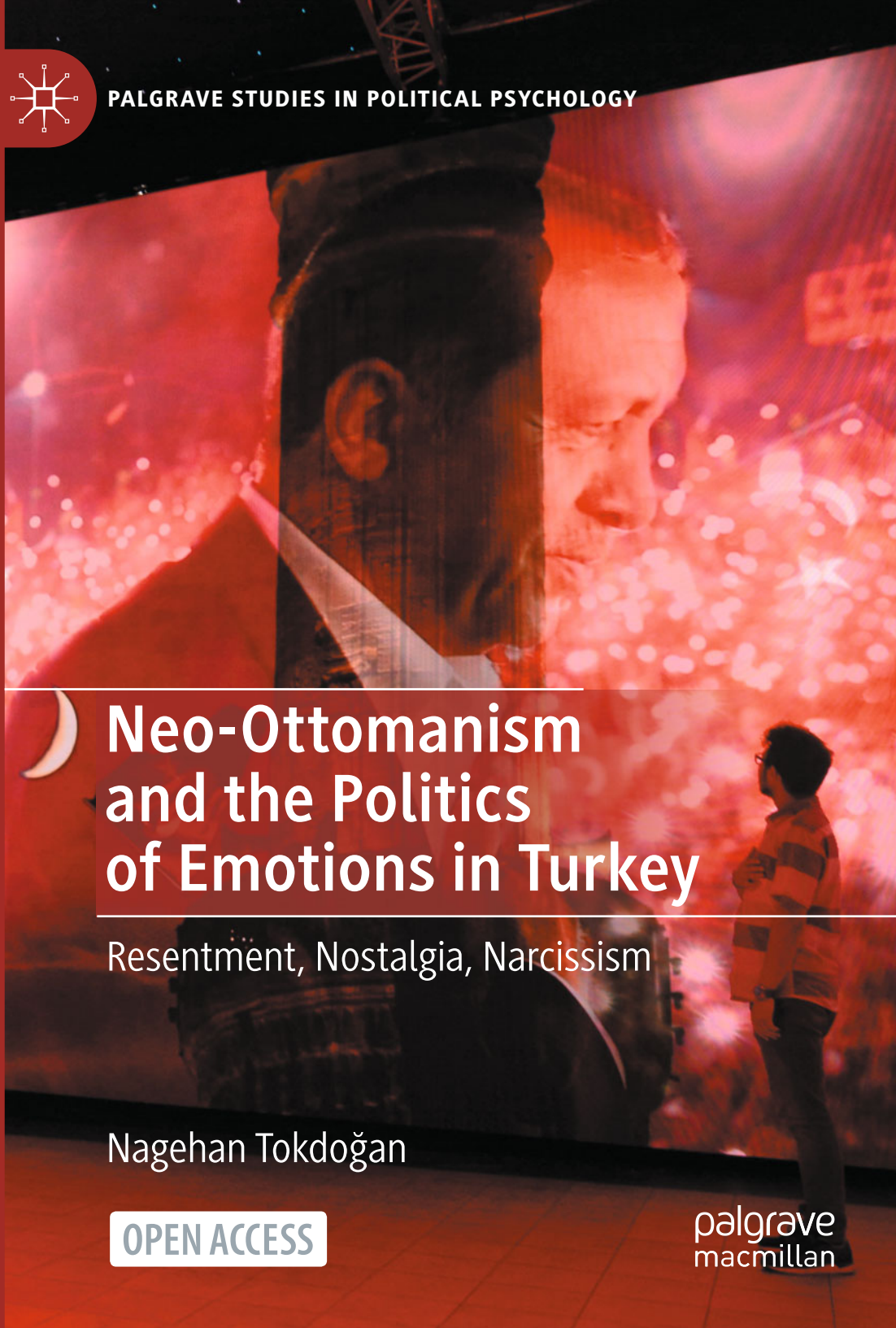

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Neo-Ottomanism and the Politics of Emotions in Turkey

Resentment, Nostalgia, Narcissism

Nagehan Tokdoğan

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To my father.

Foreword

The political history of Turkey is typically written as a history of thought and action—a history of political parties, circles, interactions and ideas. Yet for those who act within this history and, equally, for those who write and read it, emotion plays a central part. It is there in what they love, what they hate, what they fear, what they hope for. Generally, those historical moments when emotions are worth examining, as collective phenomena that transcend the individual, are times of crisis. The question, 'How did an entire nation become convinced of a crazy idea?' is one that requires understanding the mood of a nation rather than the power of ideas.

This book provides a powerful portrait of how such moods are constructed: through which ideas, symbols and emotions. It shows that this construction is always more than simply a story of manipulation. Ordinary people do not get lost in the 'mass spirit', for if such a spirit exists, it is something that demands active participation to maintain its existence. In taking part in such a spirit, in being present within it, people become political subjects.

In order to understand the history of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the period of its rule in Turkey, it is not enough to examine the AKP's intellectual roots and organizational dynamics. Such an approach cannot make sense of the statement, in the party's early years, 'We took off the garb of National Vision, the AKP is the continuation of the Democrat Party (DP)', nor Necmettin Erbakan's words about Erdoğan: 'He went and became the handle of the axe of Sevres'. To get

at the meaning, one must take into account the emotional dimensions of the story.

Through an exploration of the history and dynamics of Neo-Ottomanism as a privileged position in the 'emotional snapshot of the AKP period', Nagehan Tokdoğan develops such a perspective: she shows us the story's emotional dimension. We see that this dimension is more than the manipulation of voters. We notice why and how the story of the 'poor but proud young' takes hold. We attend to those critical moments when victimization turns into victory; when a story of victimhood evolves into one of power; how nearly the same symbols are used, though this time with different emotions, in the construction of a different national mood.

If one can speak of a crisis, it seems to be an ongoing one. Crisis has been the basic feature of the global world since the last quarter of the twentieth century. The same is true for Turkey. We live in crises that are entered, exited, circumvented, overcome and overtaken. To see the emotional dimension of the political, then, we do not need the question, 'How did an entire nation become convinced of this crazy idea?', but rather, 'How did the ideals of justice, freedom and equality lose their meaning for the majority of people?' As grand ideals of humanism slowly vanished, what took their place? In this great transformation, what role is played by symbols and by the emotions that 'stick' to them? Which symbols? Which emotions?

Neo-Ottomanism and the Politics of Emotions in Turkey: Resentment, Nostalgia, Narcissism approaches the challenging period we are passing through with such questions and develops an impressive understanding of the political meanings and relations of everyday language and ordinary objects. Contrary to theses declaring the end of politics (or history, or the subject), this book draws our attention to new forms and means of politics, reminding us that these might be the means not just of power, but of opposition, too.

Academic interests and curiosities always have a personal dimension. That is, if they are genuine interests and genuine curiosities, of course. Our emotions—our fears, anger and hopes—surface in our academic work, and set its emotional tone and colour. Not only is the book you are about to read a brilliant work of social science; behind it lies the genuine curiosity of the author about the world she lives in and the people she lives with. Though hard work is needed to pursue this curiosity, she prefers the

difficult road to the comfort of familiar stories, memorized lines and easy generalizations. This ambitious work, handled with success, rekindles my hopes about both academic life and politics.

Ankara, Turkey
2018

Aksu Bora

Acknowledgements

This book wouldn't be possible without the generous support of my PhD supervisor, Prof. Aksu Bora, who was also kind enough to write a foreword for it. My hearthful thanks to her as the book benefited greatly from her scholarly guidance and intellectual stimulation. I would also like to thank the editor of the book's Turkish version, Tanıl Bora, who always supported me in my intellectual journey. I am thankful to the Center for the History of Emotions at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin, for their support in each phase of publishing the book in English: To Ute Frevert for her precious support, to Margrit Pernau for encouraging me to publish the book in English, to Anja Berkes for her always-incredible solidarity with me, and to Daniela Petrosino for her wonderful work on proofreading of the manuscript. I also owe thanks to Max Planck Society and the Max Planck Institute for Human Development for providing Open Access funding of the book and to Philipp Schwartz Initiative for financially supporting my work during the last three years. Finally, I would like to thank my dear friend Erhan Güzel for carefully reading the entire manuscript.

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About the Author

Nagehan Tokdoğan received her PhD in 2018 from Hacettepe University, Faculty of Communication in Ankara, Turkey. She worked as a post-doctoral fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Center for the History of Emotions between 2020–2024. At present, she is an independent researcher based in Berlin, Germany. Her main subjects of interest are political sociology of emotions, migration and emotions, Turkish society and politics, nationalism, conservatism, right-wing extremism and authoritarianism.

Abbreviations

AKM	Atatürk Cultural Center
AKP	Justice and Development Party
CHP	Republican People's Party
DP	Democrat Party
DYP	True Path Party
HDP	People's Democratic Party
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party
MNP	National Party of Order
RP	Welfare Party
RTÜK	Radio and Television Supreme Council
TRT	Turkish Radio and Television Corporation
TOKİ	Housing Development Administration of the Republic of Turkey

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Every loss that has not been symbolized
always returns to haunt subsequent generations.
Erdoğan Özmen

Over the past two decades, a particular concept has become increasingly prevalent in Turkish political and social life: Neo-Ottomanism. The reason why it has become so ingrained in political discourse and in our social and cultural repertoire has much to do with Neo-Ottomanism exceeding the use of the terminology of the political sphere and becoming increasingly commonplace in daily life. Neo-Ottomanism exists as a constructed story, as a narrative of the glorious past, as a political framework into which individuals and collectivities place themselves, as a means for knowing, understanding and interpreting the world and as a way of forming political identities. The intensity of the emotional investments in this narrative, both by ruling elites and among supporters, has itself become an object of scholarly inquiry.

The Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, hereafter AKP) has left its mark on more than two decades of Turkish politics, and attracted no shortage of academic interest in this time. Yet, none of the studies on the party's rule have included emotions—which I believe are deeply embedded in the AKP's mode of conducting politics—as a central unit of analysis. For this reason, what might be termed an 'emotions-proof' perspective on politics, the support the AKP has received over the years has often been evaluated within a reductionist,

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judgemental and even condescending framework that does not attempt to understand the emotional motivations of its supporters. The point of departure for this study lies in interrogating emotions.

Taking up the AKP's politics of emotions in a way that encompasses both the past and the present requires locating a medium, an object of the symbolic politics in which people have emotionally invested. Deriving its power from the emotionally charged nature of the party's journey, the most arresting political narrative, both as an increasingly visible phenomenon in everyday life and in its capacity as a receptacle of emotion, is Neo-Ottomanism. Throughout the 2000s, an alternative to the republican narrative of the past was constructed by the AKP, with the help of its supporters. Grounded in an alternative reading of history by elites, Neo-Ottomanism challenges the republican regime in Turkey as founded on the overthrow of the historical institutions, symbols and practices reminiscent of its Ottoman past. The republican symbols that had dominated the official narrative for nearly a century were replaced under the AKP by an alternative recollection of national belonging that glorified the Ottoman past and mobilized collective emotions of pride and pleasure. Neo-Ottomanism was not only a strategic political narrative, it was an outlook enthusiastically embraced by both the ruling elite and the people as well. It permeated everyday life through various symbols and thus became an object that was constantly reproduced, refreshed and felt. It was transformed into a powerful symbolic political tool determining the country's *ethos* and *pathos*. As such, Neo-Ottomanism is the perfect framework for unravelling and understanding the emotional dynamics of the AKP's longstanding and unwavering grassroots support.

So, how do the symbols of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative speak to their recipients? What do these symbols ask of them? Which emotional needs are behind the adoption of Neo-Ottomanism by the people, and how do these conform to a new understanding of national identity? What role do emotions play in linking past, present and future and thus in fostering a national mood? I argue that Neo-Ottomanism functions foremost *domestically*, exposing, transforming and activating the desires, ambitions and anxieties of the people. For the ones who eagerly embraced the narrative, Neo-Ottomanism enabled the transition to a new phase of emotional experience in the national consciousness, and paved the way for the creation of a national mood quite unlike what came before. The AKP's rise to power led to the emergence of a new collective that needed symbolic recognition, a segment of society that had always made sense

of its own story within a narrative of oppression. The definition of this collective necessitated the redefinition of national identity. Thus, in Neo-Ottomanism, the AKP has found its most effective tool to respond to the emotional needs of some segments of society.

This book focuses on the emotions that act upon the Neo-Ottomanist symbols circulating in the political and social sphere. It looks at how emotions stick to symbols and, contracted by them, and move around the surfaces of collective and individual bodies. In doing so, it aims to develop a perspective on both the political nature of emotions and the emotional nature of the political. I argue that the political narrative of Neo-Ottomanism most clearly reveals the AKP's politics of emotions and the support it has received through this style of politics. I aim to demonstrate that the emotions which emanate from this narrative are a projection of the historical-emotional journey of the Islamic conservative tradition from which the AKP emerged—at times, the journey of the Turkish subject in a broader sense. I discuss Neo-Ottomanism as a new *pathos* of national identity, a kind of mechanism for the production of national emotion that functions to disclose, transform and mobilize the desires, ambitions and anxieties of the people. This book takes seriously the dialogical dimension of the politics of emotions—in other words, it examines how the emotions addressed by Neo-Ottomanism are attributed meaning by its supporters, and in which forms they are reproduced, transformed and strengthened.

* * *

Chapter 2 is devoted to a theoretical discussion of the relationship between emotions, politics and political symbols. I examine the intellectual motives behind the longstanding neglect of emotions in modern political science. Based on the claim that emotions are collective as well as individual phenomena, the effort here is to introduce a new understanding of emotion. The chapter argues that the objects of emotions in politics are political symbols. It demonstrates the crucial role of symbols and symbolic politics in establishing the relationship between politics and emotions. It further aims to theorize how symbolic politics function as a means of forming dialogic, productive and emotional bonds between the ruling elite and the people.

Chapter 3 focuses on the journey of Neo-Ottomanism as a political narrative in Turkey's political history. Primarily through a method

of historical excavation, it uncovers the traces and motivations behind the political moves directed at the Ottoman past and its revival. It then attempts to reveal the concrete manifestations of the glorification of Ottomanism as a narrative of national identity that characterized the *zeitgeist* in Turkey in the 2000s, not only in the political discourse of the ruling elite, but also in the enthusiastic embrace and glorification of this narrative by large segments of society.

The remaining chapters of the book are devoted to what I consider to be three powerful political-symbolic *sites* of Neo-Ottomanism: the leader, space and myth. At each site, I examine the emotions that evoke and mobilize the mood that the Neo-Ottomanist narrative prescribes. Chapter 4 focuses on the journey of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as a leader and symbolic political figure prior to the foundation of the AKP and up to its present position, and on the emotions inherent in this journey. Erdoğan has played a key role in the transformation of Neo-Ottomanism into a new narrative of national identity. The emotional climate that enabled Neo-Ottomanism to move from a minor narrative of belonging that appealed to a limited segment of the population to a dominant element of national identity is embodied in Erdoğan's biography, political history, personality, symbolic actions and discourse. This chapter reveals how *humiliation*, *envy*, *disgust*, *hatred*, *anxiety* and *anger* are manifested in cathartic forms through the symbolic acts and language of Erdoğan during AKP rule. It thus demonstrates that Neo-Ottomanism is built on an emotional basis of *ressentiment* that transcends the sum of above-mentioned emotions.

Chapter 5 reveals how the emotions addressed by the Neo-Ottomanist narrative are fleshed out through space, namely, Istanbul. Throughout the AKP era, Istanbul has been vigorously appropriated as the founding site of nostalgic interest in the Ottoman past, as well as the site of a symbolic war waged against republican regime over the city. The country witnessed the revival of Ottoman Istanbul against the Ankara of the Republic. Above all, Istanbul has been a symbolic political site that most powerfully embodies the loss, disillusionment, longing for a golden age and nostalgia of the Islamic conservative tradition from which Erdoğan and the AKP emerged. From the Hagia Sophia to the Çamlıca Mosque, from the Ottoman Military Barracks to the Panorama 1453 Museum, in the bridges, the new airport, the Marmaray and Eurasia tunnels and finally, in the Conquest Festivities, the restoration and renovation of Istanbul under the AKP exemplifies a nostalgic longing for a golden age, a vision of the future

that aims to restore this glorious past along with a vengeful domestic imperial appetite.

Chapter 6 proposes a reading of the 15 July 2016 coup attempt through the lens of a Neo-Ottomanist politics of emotions, questioning how the events of that night were framed and mythologized to appeal to narcissistic emotions by the ruling elite. For the AKP, the 15 July transformed a narrative of history dominated by defeat and oppression into a radically different narrative of the present and future, which I interpret through the concept of *narcissism*. Indeed, this story was not limited to the AKP; in the aftermath of the failed coup, calls were made for a new national spirit in an effort to imbue it with inclusive content that might appeal to all citizens of the Republic of Turkey. Considering 15 July an attempt to create a myth reflective of the narcissistic mood invoked by Neo-Ottomanism will allow us to see the transformation of emotions across the AKP's two decades in power.

* * *

This book was written at a particularly tough time in Turkey's political history. I would like to think of it as a 'taking notice' of the relationship between emotions and politics in Turkey. Far from exhausting the matter, this book aims to initiate a debate on the role of emotions in Turkish politics. Of course, my pen might have slipped at times while trying to capture a process already in progress. I, as the author, take full responsibility for any shortcomings and defects of this work.

CHAPTER 2

On Emotions, Politics and Political Symbols

The second half of the twentieth century saw the emergence of a literature that placed emotions as a unit of analysis at the centre of political studies. The study of emotions and politics as interrelated phenomena is considered quite novel,[1] yet reading classical political philosophy from today's vantage point, one may be surprised to see the distinct place that emotions occupied in the corpus of many thinkers, from Plato to Aristotle, Machiavelli to Hobbes, Locke to Rousseau.[2] Even so, in politics, especially in the field of political science, emotions have largely been neglected. Beneath this tendency in modern political science, which has

[1] See Barbalet, J. (2002). *Emotions and Sociology*; Demertzis, N. (2013). *Emotions in Politics*; Berezin, M. (2002). Secure States: Towards a Political Sociology of Emotions; Goodwin, J. and Jasper, J. (2006), Emotions and Social Movements.

[2] This tendency is, in fact, evident not only in the field of political philosophy, but in all disciplines of the social sciences: In the works of leading thinkers, emotions are made mention of, at times obliquely, at times with intensity. Through a retrospective reading, among the postulates that underscore the centrality of emotions in the sociological and political life of communities are: Marx's proposal of the concept of alienation as one of the constitutive features preventing a class from recognizing their interests (Robinson, 2014, 189), Simmel's analysis of emotional life in urban studies (Clarke et al., 2006a, 61), Weber's argument that a political community acquires its force and legitimacy from its 'emotional foundations' (Berezin, 2002, 34), and Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence (von Scheve et al., 2013, 4).

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been described by some as 'emotions-proof', lie a number of presuppositions and assumptions, chief among them assumptions about the nature of emotions. Scholars have debated whether emotions, as a part of human existence, are immanent or rather socially shaped and learned. Emotions occupy the negative position as reason's 'other' in a binary framework (Calhoun, 2001, 52). Considering that forms of Western political and social thought in the modern period have been based on oppositions such as reason/body, order/chaos, man/woman, agent/structure and individual/society, it comes as no surprise that emotions have long been perceived as private rather than public, irrational rather than rational (Heaney, 2013, 244).

In particular, the public/private dichotomy, which emerged alongside modernity, is thought to be one of the main reasons emotions have been overshadowed or eclipsed in political analysis, both conceptually and historically. Relatedly, in basing research into the nation-state, the law, voting behaviours and political parties on the concept of rationality, political scientists tend to consider emotions aberrant categories of analysis. The conceptualization of politics as by definition a collective phenomenon, together with the assumption that emotions are experienced individually and are ontologically momentary, drives this tendency (Berezin, 2002, 34–36). For instance, Jack Barbalet argues that the concept of emotion has long been tethered to a pejorative framework, both in the sciences generally and in the social sciences in particular (2002, 1). Going one step further, Nicolas Demertzis claims that studies in politics and sociology are characterized by a form of 'emotion blindness', the principal reasons for which he lists as: (a) the marginalization of emotions as romantic or utopian elements believed to be unrelated to the modern public sphere and, thus, to the political; (b) the prevalence in political science, since the eighteenth century, of analyses focused on 'interest' (taken as the adverse of emotion); and (c) the adoption of a rational choice paradigm in both North American and European schools of political science, and the concomitant perception of emotions as obstacles to the rational thought of political actors (2013, 1–2).

Among the arguments countering reductionist claims about emotions as rooted in biology or as solely individual phenomena are those that apprehend emotions as the result of socialization within the culture into which one is born—as 'patterns of learned behavior'. According to this perspective, which is known as the social constructivist approach,

emotions are significant elements of social relations, arising from interactions with others. In this view, far from being biological or universal entities, emotions are social constructs that vary from culture to culture and context to context, and change over time (Clarke et al., 2006a, 6–7).

In both political science and sociology, the claim that emotions are cultural and social constructs gained acceptance only gradually.[3] In the second half of the twentieth century, Western political science began to

[3] Following the publication of this book in Turkish in 2018, many leading studies which specifically address the relationship between emotions and politics have been published: Jan Slaby and Christian von Scheve's edited book *Affective Societies: Key Concepts* (2019, Routledge) is collection of fundamental concepts for theorizing and empirically investigating societies as Affective Societies, inquiring the role of emotions in both social coexistences and conflicts such as migration, political populism, or local and global inequalities. Simon Koschut's edited book *The Power of Emotions in World Politics* (2020, Routledge) explores the ways in which discourse evokes, reveals, and engages emotions regarding the power relations in world politics. Jonathan G. Heaney and Helena Flam's *Power and Emotion* (2020, Routledge) seeks to unite and deploy both concepts, emotion and power on a diverse array of topics including social movements and politics. Ute Frevert has extensively written on the relationship between politics and emotions. *The Power of Emotions: A History of Germany from 1900 to the Present* (2023, Cambridge University Press) shows the political power of emotions through major events in German history. *The Politics of Humiliation: A Modern History* (2020, Oxford University Press) delves into the role that public humiliation has played in modern society, how it has been used as a means of coercion and control from the worlds of politics and international diplomacy. Last but not least, her edited book *Feeling Political: Emotions and Institutions since 1789* (w/Kerstin Maria Pahl et al., 2022, Palgrave Macmillan) combines empirical case studies to show how participatory politics depends on emotions being mobilized, shared, communicated, reassembled and negotiated.

Moreover, as a powerful emotion of our times, anger has been receiving a recent scholarly attention. Pankaj Mishra's *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (2018, Penguin Books) has been very influential in terms of his attempt to explain the origins of the massive wave of paranoid hatreds of modern societies ranging from India, to Britain and the U.S.A. Steven W. Webster's *American Rage: How Anger Shapes Our Politics* (2020, Cambridge University Press) argues that anger is the central emotion governing contemporary US politics, with powerful, deleterious effects. He shows how anger causes US citizens to lose trust in the national government and weaken in their commitment to democratic norms and values. From a different perspective, James M. Jasper's *The Emotions of Protest* (2018, University of Chicago Press) displays how, again, anger dominates the contemporary protests in the American context. Davin L. Phoenix's *The Anger Gap: How Race Shapes Emotions in Politics* (2019, Cambridge University Press) focuses specifically on the 'black anger' and sets a framework on how racial differences in emotion translate into racial disparities in political participation. Adrián Scribano's *Politics and Emotions* (2018, Studium Press) explores the role of emotions in the new politics of a hyper-globalized world. Within a context of the Global South, specifically of Argentina, he reveals the intersection of globalization, social conflict and the theory of emotions.

abandon both the dichotomy of emotion/reason and the assumption that emotions are subjective and biological, thanks to new approaches and research from various disciplines, in tandem with particular political, economic and cultural developments. Among the forces that moved the scholarly perspective away from an understanding of emotions as purely individual, psychological and internal phenomena were: in psychoanalysis, theories of the subject and the problem of subjectivity; in post-structuralist feminist theory, notions of the body and materiality; the emergence of queer studies; and an increase in sociological interest in matters such as melancholy and trauma (Athanasiou et al., 2008, 5). Furthermore, thanks to the cultural turn and its focus on language, meaning and discourse, the field of political science began to expand its categories of analysis. Studies emphasized the importance of understanding struggles over culture and lifestyle, in addition to those over political and economic power. At stake in these works is the acceptance of culture—composed of traditions, beliefs, values, symbols and rituals—as the core issue underlying struggles over identity and recognition (Goodwin & Jasper, 2006, 616). In making sense of the processes of these struggles, emotion now appears as an inevitable category of analysis. Increasingly, emotions are seen as determinative elements that characterize social movements and collective behaviour. Claims that emotions constitute or transform ties between the social structure and actor, and as such play a central role in social interactions, have increasingly gained ground in the literature (Barbalet, 2002, 3–4). Studies carried out in this framework consider themes including the effect of emotions on voter behaviour, their role in conflict and post-conflict processes, their potential to define the emergence and course of political and social movements, their importance in political campaigns and political communication, their effect on governance and policy-making processes and their close ties to international relations and to ideologies such as nationalism (Clarke et al., 2006b, 4–6).

The literature on social movements has also begun to attend to emotions as a central category of analysis. However, the fact that such studies tend to look at emotions solely in terms of how they mobilize and characterize movements against those in power means they also risk labelling such movements as somehow beyond or outside of formal power and thus less rational; they risk associating formal politics with interests and reason, and social movements with emotion (Ost, 2004, 236). Some approach emotions in politics as though emotions were peculiar to the

people subject to them, and not experienced by ruling elites (Barbalet, 2006, 32). Against this trend, David Ost argues that emotions occupy a powerful place in both authoritarian and democratic systems, and that political parties assure the mobilization of the people by producing or activating certain emotions, or by attempting to suppress them (2004, 237).

The growing tendency to focus on emotions is the product of certain intellectual efforts. For instance, at the heart of the paradigm that Patricia Clough has conceptualized as the 'affective turn' (2007, 206–228) are the views of Spinoza, the first thinker to write in depth about emotions as both a concept and a social phenomenon. Writing, remarkably, in the seventeenth century, Spinoza is a point of departure for a school of thought—one that we would today call the sociology of emotions or affect studies—based on the relationality, sociality and political nature of emotions. Spinoza's *Ethics* is a classic, presenting profound philosophical propositions not only about God, humankind, the mind and freedom, but also the body and affect. In a lengthy section of the book, Spinoza puts forward his views on the nature, origins and force of affect. He holds affect as something that increases or diminishes the body's ability to act, as an enabling or disabling force (2011, 317). In his view, anything that causes an increase or decrease in the body's capacity to act, or that brings about or inhibits this potential, also causes an increase or decrease in the thinking capacity of the mind (2011, 347). Consequently, for Spinoza, mind and body (or thought and emotion) are not opposite notions. Indeed, he rejects any premise that implies a superiority of mind over body (Deleuze, 2011, 26).

According to Spinoza, the emotion that increases the mind and body's capacity to act is joy, whereas sadness decreases it. He asserts that emotions such as hope, trust, anger, hate and jealousy, which derive from the aforementioned two central emotions and yet which are assumed to arise spontaneously, actually have clear causes, and are only intelligible through such causes (2011, 315). Yet underlying Spinoza's understanding of emotions—as phenomena emerging from causal relations—are the notions of contact and encounter. When bodies encounter other bodies, or ideas other ideas, they sometimes unite to form a more powerful whole, though sometimes one dissolves and dissipates the other. Emotions therefore make their presence felt primarily as the singular traces that contact and encounters—whether with others, images or ideas—leave on the body

and mind.[4] Emotions assume an image or an idea, yet appear to be irreducible to these images or ideas (Deleuze, 2011, 66–68).

Spinoza's claims about the nature of emotions are striking for their relationality and their particularity, and are an early example of a scholar asserting the social and political nature of emotions. Therefore, though it can be asserted that political science began to focus on emotion as a crucial analytical category in the second half of the twentieth century, this can also be understood as a rediscovery. Today, many scholars working in the fields of political philosophy, the sociology of emotions or affect studies base their approach to emotions on Spinoza's intellectual legacy. One of the central inspirations for this book, Sara Ahmed, whose work takes seriously the ties between emotions and politics, translates a philosophical Spinozan approach into the field of sociology and politics through her theses on the stickiness of emotions; how they scatter and spread, how they adhere to individuals or groups. For Ahmed, emotions should be considered less in terms of what they are or whom they belong to, and more in terms of what they do to us (2014). Emotions, which are shaped by our contacts with other people or objects, are relational. However much they may invite assumptions about interiority, due to the influence of psychology, emotions are, at base, social and cultural practices. They are not things we possess or hold; rather, they circulate—and produce, and create—on the surfaces and borders of the objects to which our bodies gravitate. Emotions act between our bodies, spreading through contact with others (2014, 13–20). 'Collective emotion' is Ahmed's term for a mood that has spread to a group in such a way as to affect this group's way of thinking, feeling and acting. This concept stems from the commonality not of emotions, but of the objects of emotions: whereas collective emotions appear as the result of the collectivity in which we exist, fundamentally they constitute its cause because what makes us part of a collective is our feelings about objects

[4] Spinoza draws a conceptual distinction between emotion and affect. According to him, whereas affect (*Affectio*) names the effect of encounters on the body, emotion (*Affectus*) marks the duration and process occurring between affects that manifest in the body. In other words, while emotion is more mental and transitional, affect is more bodily and momentary or instantaneous. Emotion refers to the process of transition from one state to another of a body affected by encounter, and affect refers to the condition of a body affected by encounter, and implies the existence of the body affecting the former (Deleuze, 2011, 64–66).

or about others. The emotions we feel together with others surround us 'like a thickness in the air, or an atmosphere' (Ahmed, 2014, 21).

One can perhaps make Ahmed's thinking on the collective nature of emotions more concrete through Raymond Williams's notion of 'structures of feeling' (1990). Williams approaches structures of feeling as phenomena that come about through the active experience of historically and socially constructed meanings and values. According to Williams, feelings are not the opposite of thought, but should be conceived of as the felt form thought takes. Structures of feeling are processes, rather than something static. They are socially shared and often go unnoticed because they are embedded within social relations, though they become recognizable when they are reshaped by institutions (1990, 105). Collective emotions, as long as they are managed by ruling elites and institutions or by social actors, create a pathos, which Ahmed attempts to explain using the metaphor of atmosphere, suggesting that the objects of emotion make it possible for this pathos to emerge.

2.1 Symbols as Objects of Emotional Investment

What is it, then, that we speak of when we address objects that prompt the formation of collective emotions and allow these emotions to ensconce us, like a thickness in the air? Might political symbols ensure that members of a collective feel a sense of belonging, and make it possible for them to see themselves as part of the collective; might political symbols mobilize their emotions and become the objects of their emotional investment? In this attempt to explore the relationship between politics and emotions, can we see political symbols as reservoirs of emotion?

In order to conceptually ground this claim, let me first consider how symbols function, as well as the many meanings they harbour politically. This will facilitate a discussion of the significance of symbols in politics, as well as of the function of symbols in producing and channelling political emotions. The etymology of 'symbol' hints at its nature: the Greek root *syn* means alike, jointly or together with, while the word *symbolon* signifies an earthenware pot broken in two, the pieces serving as material evidence of an agreement between two people. That which establishes a tie between these two, which unites them, is at the same time what separates them from others (Tuğrul, 2010, 135). Thus symbols influence relations between people, they can be used to articulate what separates

'us' from 'them', they are the concrete, material, visible or utterable manifestations of this relationality. David Kertzer claims that politics performs mostly in indirect ways; rather, it is largely expressed and carried out through symbolism. He argues that comprehending political processes necessitates understanding how the symbolic is enmeshed in the political, how political actors make use of symbols and how people are bound by political symbols (1988, 2–3).

Nevertheless, most studies carried out in the field of political science tend to overlook the vital role of the symbolic in political processes, and of processes of emotional investment in symbols. The symbolic field is rarely read critically in analyses of political phenomena due to the neglect of cultural and symbolic dimensions in politics (Aydın, 2015, 214; Demirer, 2015, 67). Yet understanding political phenomena requires developing theories and methods regarding the modes of carrying out symbolic politics. This is the case because 'symbolic politics, which operates through culture and historical consciousness […] is related to such concepts as memory, information storage, collective joy, and mourning' (Demirer, 2015, 67).

Upon further inspection, one reason for the lack of attention to symbols in political science literature is that many studies treat politics as a matter of 'give and take' driven by self-interested people. However, people are not only material beings; they also produce and use symbols. Indeed, at times, and in ways contrary to their material interests, people even choose to die in the name of various symbols. Kertzer bemoans rational choice arguments that prioritize politics as the 'real stuff' and designate the rest effluvia,[5] arguing that this 'effluvia' is actually what makes up political symbols, the basic determinants of politics (1996, x–4). Similarly, Stuart J. Kaufman, in another critique of the rational choice paradigm, notes that people's political actions are motivated more by feelings than any cost-benefit calculations. He proposes an alternative: symbolic choice theory, arguing that people make political choices in response to emotionally loaded symbols. In his view, political choice constitutes an emotional expression, and symbols constitute the principle objects of such expression (2001, 27–28).

To be sure, as societies grow more complex, people increasingly turn to symbols as a means of relating to the world, partly because 'the claim

[5] Undesirable scent, foul smelling.

to dominance of modern forms of power and the volume of social and economic actors they aim to control [have expanded] to a degree incomparable to what came before' (Aydın, 2015, 211–212). As a consequence of this expansion, political authorities have used and diffused symbols to shape collective memory and collective emotions. They did this by systematically repeating the symbols they use. Thus emerged what we now call symbolic politics, a style of conducting politics that has been so effective as to make it impossible to approach the political field solely through materialist and rationalist modes of thought. In order to make sense of this style, while being cognizant of the deficiencies of both the positivist perspective and rational actor models (Kaufman, 2006, 201), analysts have begun to investigate how the production of social meaning and value (as important drivers of social and political transformation) is entangled with political consciousness and political action. In seeking to answer this question, symbols have become an indispensable unit of analysis (Brysk, 1995, 560–561).

One of the main claims made by contemporary studies of symbolic politics is that emotionally laden symbols, and not individual interests, determine political behaviour (Kaufman, 2006, 202). Yet what we term 'interests' are not fixed needs but stories crafted and adopted to fulfil these needs. Political actors create new political opportunities for themselves, challenging existing narratives about interests and identities and putting forth new ones. Symbolic politics fundamentally aims at the establishment and transformation of power relations through normative emotional representations. Consequently, its practitioners strive to construct a collective political identity and a sense of belonging through the configuration and reinterpretation of narratives and through the emotional convection of experiences, for instance, through an evocative speech. It is here that collectives are established, as new narratives are put into circulation and activated through a range of symbolic and practical performances—the tools and mechanisms of persuasion that ensure the adoption of such narratives. The successful operation of symbolic politics renders possible the transformation of what came before, the reconstruction of collective identities, the reformulation of the social agenda and the challenging of prior forms of political legitimacy. Symbolic politics creates legitimacy by articulating narratives about justice, rights and identities in a society. In so doing, it hails first hearts, then minds (Brysk, 1995, 561–564).

And indeed, the basic function of symbols in politics appears to be the creation of a certain emotional state in people. Emotions surface when the predispositions of both ruling elites and the people are channelled into political symbols thought to fit them. In electing to adopt the symbols they are presented with, people establish ties to other symbols or transfer their emotions from one symbol to another. Symbols chosen by either ruling elites or the governed increase people's capacity to act, and mobilize them by calling upon certain values and ideas. As such, the process of symbolic politics seems to be primarily concerned with the orientation of reflexive and emotional responses to symbols (Mach, 1993, 37; Sears, 2001, 14–17).

The chief actors in ensuring the effective implementation of symbolic politics are political and social institutions. Institutions create memories through a range of mnemonic symbols such as texts, rites, spaces and monuments (Demirer, 2002, 54). In this way, in addition to cultural identities, they also shape emotional experiences (Robinson, 2014, 190). The execution of symbolic politics does not stop here, however. Approaching politics strictly as a field of political actors and institutions and thereby confining symbolic politics to a fixed top-down framework amounts to treating the people as 'sheep' prone to manipulation and deceit. It is certain, though, that members of a society respond to social situations through the very symbols that institutions put into circulation, and the meanings with which these symbols are freighted.

The meanings attributed to symbols are broadly accepted, and allow subjects to adopt certain roles and develop shared emotions. Yet at the same time, social actors also willingly create meanings and narratives related to the symbols they have chosen and the identities they have taken on. These meanings and narratives are never fixed, but vary according to context (Robinson, 2014, 191–192). Emotions spread and disseminate through mutual interaction, through the dynamics in operation between institutions and people, and through the processes of symbolic meaning-making.

Indeed, most studies on symbolic politics presume that symbols and emotions move from those who hold power to the people (a top-down model) or that they are even imposed on the people (Bechhofer & McCrone, 2012, 547). Alison Brysk sees this approach as one of the main limitations of studies of symbolic politics. Instead, her focus is on how collectives own and act on such symbols and emotions (Brysk, 1995, 571). Murray Edelman, meanwhile, argues that the processes of meaning

making between ruling elites and people can only be holistically interpreted by looking at language (political discourse), action (ideological activities), actors (leaders), space and people. He notes that one of the basic methods for bringing out the dialogical interaction between these elements involves the analysis of ritual and myth, two of the most important symbolic forms in political institutions. According to Edelman, rituals and myths exist not to deceive the people, but to act on what they want, what they fear, what they see as possible and who they wish to see themselves as (1967, 20). Through a selective reading of the past, rituals and myths establish narratives about the future and legitimize interests/desires/gains in the present. People live by perpetually reconstructing and representing their pasts, presents and futures in light of the rituals and myths that appeal to them: they create their own worlds around shared images.

Examining the nature and function of powerful political symbols can thus expose what people wish to believe, both about themselves and about states (Edelman, 1967, 187–191). Kertzer notes that, in the absence of symbols, the past is chaotic. Symbols are what render the past tangible, translate it into meaningful themes and allow us to find a place within it (1996, 7). Particularly in periods of political transformation, ruling elites may come into conflict with the past, rewriting it and challenging current identities; they tend to symbolically reconstruct the past. It is here that ritual and myth step in. Myths give shape to the past, presenting a narrative configured in relation to it. Rendering the past in the form of a story, they constitute the basis of rituals. Rituals, meanwhile, function as a powerful mechanism for myths to circulate and spread. They create a stage for the performative act within which myth materializes. They do not simply echo the myths in circulation; they produce them (Kertzer, 1996, 7–16). Furthermore, the shared emotions and ideas that make up a political community's sense of togetherness are strengthened through rituals (Tuğrul, 2010, 140). The reason for this is that ritual invites participants to what is, in a symbolic sense, a shared act. Creating a feeling of accord and harmony among the members of a community, ritual ensures a kind of emotional satisfaction and joy between community members (Edelman, 1967, 16–17). By offering participation without requiring expertise, rituals reflect the people's modes of self-recognition and their commonalities, while also presenting a stage on which people experience a sense of 'identity satisfaction' (Demirer, 2002, 77–78).

One could say, then, that politics is characterized not just by rational choices but by the creation and maintenance of moods, for which both rulers and the ruled feel a need. Political symbols are the fundamental instrument for bringing about these moods. Some emotionally invested symbols are based on reason, and some on an imaginary or a conscious fantasy. Yet in both cases political reality is created chiefly through symbols. Of course, the power to circulate, manipulate and popularize symbols also bestows the privilege of constructing reality, *the* distinguishing feature of power. People, meanwhile, develop a symbolic attachment to the language, practices, actors, spaces, rituals and myths circulated by those in power (Edelman, 1967, 179–184). As a consequence of this entanglement, symbols enable individuals and collectives to recognize themselves and to identify with a political group; symbols ignite social action. They provide people with an instrument to give meaning to political processes.

2.2 Nation-State, National Identity, Symbolic Politics and Emotions

In modern nation-states, symbols make the nation more tangible by attributing a certain character to it, linking the institutional with the everyday. Once the designs, emblems, objects and written or oral signs that make it possible for the nation to be seen and understood by all its members—that make possible the imagination of the nation in their minds—are chosen and set in motion, they acquire social and cultural worth: to even a small piece of cloth, priceless value can be attributed (Bechhofer & McCrone, 2012, 546). In a nation-state, symbols are circulated through objects, spaces and signs that refer to an idealized past, and when they circulate in the social and cultural field, a process of 'emotional contagion' results (von Scheve et al., 2013, 5). The more visible that symbols become, and the more they are embraced in the cultural field and in everyday life, the more likely this process is to occur. Ultimately, as emotionally laden entities, symbols are powerful instruments to spread and make concrete the abstract imagining of a nation (von Scheve et al., 2013, 4–5).

We know that the development of nation-states since the 1800s has resulted in such symbols of national identity as flags and marches. In the work of modern theorists of nationalism who analyse it in relation to the socio-cultural field and not solely as a political ideology,

nearly all touch on symbols in different ways, yet neglect to consider in detail the determining role of emotions in the construction of national identity in particular. For instance, Anthony Smith notes that national identity can be considered a meaningful category in the sense that it fosters shared understandings, hopes, feelings and ideas with which people might identify and thus experience a sense of belonging (2009). He claims that foundational elements of national identity present a multi-dimensional and complicated structure, as symbols like flags, money, anthems, uniforms, monuments and celebrations remind individuals in a community of their shared heritage and cultural proximity. For Smith, nationalism should be approached as 'a form of culture, an ideology, a language, a mythology, symbolism and consciousness' (2009, 147). Only then can national identity be examined as something more than an expression of the shared characteristics of a political community: as a category of belonging apparent across an entire cultural field. Yet, however much culture, symbols and emotion feature in Smith's theses on national identity and nationalism, he makes no strong claims concerning the emotional dimension as an analytical unit in its own right. Another modern theorist of nationalism, Eric Hobsbawm, takes up national identity through such concepts as the invention of national identity and social engineering, and he does mention collective belonging as a category (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2007). Yet he does not focus in any depth on what sorts of emotional needs cause feelings of collective belonging to emerge. Benedict Anderson, meanwhile, underscores the modular structure of national identity and nationalism, and analyses national identity as a particular kind of cultural construct. Among these theorists, he perhaps most clearly articulates the need to scrutinize the cultural and emotional dimensions of nationalism when he discusses imagined communities and the affection that members of a community feel for one another, and the fear and anger they feel for others (2009, 20, 159).

Contemporary studies that emphasize the need to analyse politics, symbols and emotions together show that, emotions have also been neglected in the literature on nationalism. Still, none of the leading theorists mentioned above exclude emotions from the foundational elements of national identity. Although they may not have attended sufficiently to the determining role of emotions in their analyses, their arguments nevertheless constitute an instructive foundation for zooming in on the emotional dimension of national identity. A contemporary thinker who does focus on the production and circulation of emotions in the context

of the nation-state and nationalism is Mabel Berezin. She notes that the feeling of national belonging is perpetually produced anew by both institutions and symbolic practices. According to her, the feeling of national belonging, which is generated by mandatory institutions such as the education system and the army, must be continuously sustained through images, words, symbols, art and other practices that characterize national identity (2002, 43). Consequently, the imagined communities produced by nation-states manifest as 'communities of feeling'. The making of communities of feeling is enacted through marches, official holidays and public rituals fabricated by the state or by political powers (Berezin, 2002, 39).[6] In particular, political rituals organized in public space are vital for citizens to develop collective feelings of national identity. National identity appears, then, as a practice-based category; in determining thoughts and experiences, it organizes political actions and discourses—and emotions (Heaney, 2013, 249, 252).

Jonathan Heaney has pointed out that emotions have not been given sufficient consideration in conceptual debates on the construction and maintenance of national identity, arguing that they are treated, particularly in empirical studies, as an ambiguous and static category imposed from above. For Heaney, national identity forms a structure that can be fabricated from below, whether by local networks or institutions of civil society, and adapted to different contexts. That said, this concept seems to have lost something of its explanatory force due to the effects of rationalist and modernist paradigms. Thus, Heaney proposes the concept of national habitus rather than national identity, to capture at the empirical level the contextual and emotional aspects of contemporary processes of national belonging (2013, 255). The notion of habitus points to a process of continuous reconstruction through the use of various emotional, cognitive and symbolic elements. In referring to national states of mind, he conceptualizes national habitus as a fluid, variable and practice-based

[6] Berezin interprets the efforts of modern nation-states to produce shared feelings (through a range of symbols) in relation to contemporary transformations to the definition of citizenship. According to her, the definition of citizenship now is undergoing a shift, away from a discourse of rights, and towards rules of inclusion and relational processes. As such, citizenship is not just a legal status, but a category of identity hailing feelings of national loyalty and belonging. The reason here is that the institutions of the nation-state have shifted the epistemological dimension of citizenship as a category to a dimension of sense of citizenship as an emotion (2002, 41).

dynamic process. So understood, national habitus appears to be far more useful than the concept of national identity.

2.3 Towards a Neo-Ottomanist National Identity

In Turkey, the definition of national identity is coloured by context and influenced by various historical developments. Additions and subtractions are made here and there to its content. As such, it generally presents a slippery and flexible structure (Smith, 2009, 164). One of the main premises and points of departure for this book is that in Turkey, the narrative of Neo-Ottomanism—which refers to a new collectivity and national mood, one which has been particularly influential in the past decade—functions as a new national habitus. In this particular historical period, the narrative of Neo-Ottomanism has gained powerful legitimacy and visibility in Turkey. The discussions above present us with a theoretical basis from which to consider this narrative as an emotional reservoir with its own symbolic materialization. Throughout this book, I approach symbols as emotionally laden objects that contain the discourses, myths and performative rituals evoked by the narrative of Neo-Ottomanism and its selective view of history and territory. What undergirds the adoption of this narrative by individuals and groups? How has Neo-Ottomanism come to form the basis of a new national identity? The answer lies in the fact that the narrative contains a great many emotions, which are experienced socially and have been transmitted across generations. The production and circulation of political symbols, those primers of the establishment of Neo-Ottomanism, function in a dialogic and emotional process between those in power and the people. Which historical and social experiences led to the emergence of this narrative? How and through which symbols has this narrative been pressed into service and transformed into a foundational element in the creation of an alternative national mood? To better understand these processes, one must begin by examining the political journey of this narrative.

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CHAPTER 3

Neo-Ottomanism as an Alternative Narrative of National Identity

To understand the narrative of Neo-Ottomanism in Turkish politics and the symbols that accompany and give substance to it, one must first trace its history. This involves considering more closely from the outset the implications of the narrative of Ottomanism and Neo-Ottomanism, which spans nearly a century. While this study focuses on the symbolic manifestations of Neo-Ottomanism in the 2000s, the political narrative is clearly not specific to the period of AKP rule; Neo-Ottomanism has circulated throughout the history of the Republic of Turkey at different moments and through different political actors. What, then, makes the AKP period particularly notable within the context of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative? The answer lies in the transformation, by various symbolic means, of this narrative of a glorious past into the constituent of an alternative national identity, one which has come to dominate both the political and social fields.

This chapter proposes archaeology of the narrative of Ottomanism and Neo-Ottomanism, exploring the particular moments, frames of meaning and motives of its deployment. I will look at how the appearance of this narrative in the 2000s differs from past uses, and explore the political and social manifestations of these distinctions. To what kind of symbolic universe does contemporary Neo-Ottomanism correspond, for the political field and the people? In which aspects of daily life, through what forms, do we encounter Neo-Ottomanism? Which emotions does it call

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up? Which emotions does it invest in? These questions will help us to look more closely at Neo-Ottomanism's actual symbolic sites, and thereby enable a reading of symbolic politics focused on emotions—something seldom discussed in Turkey.

Turning, then, to the historical exploits of Neo-Ottomanism, let us begin by noting that in its uses as a political narrative, it proceeds along two main axes: foreign policy and national identity. However politically disjointed these axes may appear, in the coming pages it will become clear just how symbiotic their relationship is. In this chapter, I will examine how the narrative of Neo-Ottomanism has been framed and deployed throughout Turkish history in terms of both foreign policy and national identity. The overall aim of this chapter is to understand the role that this narrative plays in attempts to construct and reconstruct national identity.

3.1 The Birth of the Ottomanist Narrative as a Governmental Strategy

While the concept of Ottomanism (the meanings it contains and those attributed to it) has undergone dramatic shifts throughout Turkish history, it initially emerged in the nineteenth century—during the Ottoman state's decline. Historians hold that this narrative was framed and put into circulation by ruling elites at the time as a constitutionalist project of equal citizenship, a means of keeping the Ottoman Empire alive during a period of dissolution. Between the *Tanzimat*-era reforms (1839–1876) and the First World War, Ottomanism emerged as a strategic political narrative that aimed to unite imperial subjects with varied religious and ethnic affiliations through a kind of shared or supra-identity (Çetinsaya, 2013, 361). Throughout the 1800s, and while the empire was facing nationalist and separatist movements in the Balkans, a group of Ottoman-Turkish intellectuals, later known as the Young Ottomans, led efforts to create a new shared narrative of identity for Ottoman subjects, with the aim of preventing the dissolution of the empire. It was thought that identification with this new identity (which was meant to supersede extant religious, ethnic and local differences) would serve as an adhesive for Ottoman society and state. As such, the 'basic effort of the Young Ottomans, was to construct a new form of social capital, one that emphasized cultural, traditional, and historical unity among members of the empire' (Ongur, 2015, 418). The aim was to circulate a narrative of

collective identity that might transcend *by rendering secondary* all pre-existing, heterogeneous forms of identity through creating an imagined Ottoman *millet*[1] based on the principle of religious, ethnic and linguistic pluralism. From this perspective, Ottomanism became a new technique of government, one that emerged in a particular historical period, touted a vision of cultural plurality and, through its aim of dissolving differences into a single melting pot, heralded a modern system of citizenship (Çolak, 2006, 590).

The Young Ottomans, a group made up mostly of bureaucrats, artists and journalists, put significant energy into spreading Ottomanism both culturally and politically. In order for this new form of identity to be embraced by both ruling elites and the people, the Young Ottomans began to underscore notions such as a shared country and a shared past—as exemplified in literature by Namık Kemal, or by the journalism of İbrahim Şinasi—capable of bringing society together. The ideals that Ottomanism contained (the idea of citizenship, freedom, equality and the imagining of a shared country) were ultimately crushed under the force of ethno-nationalist trends within the empire, and rendered useless by major territorial losses. As a result, after the First World War, the narrative largely dropped out of official circulation (Onar, 2009, 231). Yet the trend towards modernization continued through other avenues. When the ideals of Ottomanism failed to take hold, a new prominence was given to one of the empire's other dominant elements of identity: Islam. This set in motion the search for a synthesis of Islamic identity and modernization, undertaken to prevent the collapse of the state and the people. In 1876, Sultan Abdülhamid II announced the transition to a constitutional regime of government through the creation of an assembly, espousing a vision of government deeply coloured by an Islamism that aimed to grow its imperial ambitions, particularly in Islamic territories where Muslims were the majority.[2] However, with the growing strength of Arab nationalism and the eventual Arab revolts of the First World War, hopes that an Islamist approach would help the government were dashed. As of the First World War, the common Ottoman identity was narrowed down within the

[1] The term millet, which originates from the Arabic *milla*, had three basic meanings in Ottoman Turkish: religion, religious community and nation.

[2] Abdülhamid II is one of the fundamental symbolic sites to which the contemporary narrative of Neo-Ottomanism returns again and again. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan presents a mythical and real political analogy, a point I expand upon in the next chapter.

framework of Turkism.[3] Across this pursuit of a shared identity, the question of how Islam (a chief component in the identity of the state) was to be situated within the emergent modernization movements became one of the most controversial issues of the time (Koyuncu, 2014, 37–38).

The period of National Struggle (1919–1923) was set in motion by Mustafa Kemal and his associates, former Ottoman pashas. Together, they made up the cadre of the republic, adopting a more secular vision throughout Ottoman attempts at modernization (Koyuncu, 2014, 39). Compared to previous periods, the quest for a shared identity proceeded along a fairly consistent axis in this period. The War of Independence, which began in 1919, was carried out on two fundamental grounds: Islam and Ottomanism. In the period between 1919 and 1922, the word *Osmanlı* (Ottoman) was used with particular frequency in official speeches, correspondence and verdicts.

> Consequently, it would certainly not be incorrect to say that those who organized the movement in Anatolia brought forward 'Ottoman' and Ottomanism (if not at the level of ideology, then at least at the level of discourse) as a form of belonging, and something in the name of which one could go to war. Yet by the end of this period, and in particular after the recapture of Izmir, the leaders of this movement, taking advantage of the amphilogism of national (millîci) terms, quickly began to distance themselves from the use of modes that called to mind religion, Islam, the sultanate, and the caliphate, and instead began to foreground rather more nationalist (ulusalcı) facets. (Çalış, 2001, 390–391)

This historical perspective argues that the role played during the war by Islam and 'Ottoman' (in the sense that this shared identity fuelled the War of Independence) had no place in the official history of the Republic of Turkey, which was founded after the war. In the years following the declaration of the republic, state elites set out to construct the nation-state on the bases of secularism, putting in motion acts requiring the erasure of the Ottoman-Islam tradition from history. Since a new national identity was being constructed, the Ottoman past became increasingly perceived as an 'old civilization framed by a religious view', or a 'spectre preventing the

[3] Turkism is a political movement that emerged during the 1880s among Turkic intellectuals who lived in the Russian region of Kazan (Tataristan), Caucasus (modern-day Azerbaijan) and the Ottoman Empire (modern-day Turkey), with its aim being the cultural and political unification of all Turkic peoples.

maturation of Turks by suppressing their essence'. Therefore, 'Ottoman' became the 'other' of Turkish national identity (Bora, 2009, 41–42).

In accordance with the newly secular regime, a number of changes were enacted during the republic's foundation and thereafter: the removal of the sultanate and the caliphate; the repealing of the *Hıyanet-i Vataniye Kanunu* (High Treason Law), and the banning of the *Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (Progressive Republican Party) after it was accused of clandestinely supporting the sultanate, encouraging reactionarism and, by striving for the return of Islamic law and the Caliphate, plotting to destroy the established order (Zürcher, 2013, 40–50). The abolition of the Arabic calendar and alphabet and their replacement with the Gregorian calendar and Latin alphabet prevalent in the West ensured that ties were broken, both officially and socially, with Islamic daily practices and intellectual literatures (Onar, 2009, 232). The change of alphabet was a signal that the new regime had turned its face from East to West, and that it was putting cultural and historical distance between itself and the Ottoman Empire (Çınar, 2001, 370). Particularly throughout the 1930s, the Turkish Historical Society attempted to fashion a new national mythology, discounting Ottoman history and culture in favour of a narrative of the past centred on Central Asia and Anatolia. This was done through the creation of texts such as the Turkish History Thesis and the Sun Language Theory. The founders of the new regime, motivated by westernizing and civilizing discourses, wrote off the Ottoman period as a dark age that had distanced Turks from their essence (Çolak, 2006, 590). Ottomanism was explained, and its meaning fixed, as the opposite—the adversary, even—of a new national identity designed within the framework of Western ideals. According to Etienne Copeaux, Turkish historiography 'is constructed upon Turkism, as a national feeling founded on the rejection of Muslim, Arab-Iranian culture, and of an Ottoman culture that was too cosmopolitan in scope to be able to constitute the basis for nationalism' (2000, 16). Consequently, the republican project, which endeavoured to align itself with popular religious values, gave rise to a tension between the cultural field (the people) and the political field (secular, pro-Western elites) (Öğün, 2013, 537).

It is perhaps as a result of this tension that the idea of Ottomanism emerged as an ever-present spectre whose birth or death was never

explicitly announced by the new regime.[4] According to Çalış, however paradoxical it may seem, the Republic of Turkey was in fact the architect of this spectre, which was caught between two spaces and thus perpetually haunting the nation. From 1918 onwards, the founders of the new regime would not allow Ottomanism to perish or to be put to rest completely. During the War of Independence, the spirit of the Ottoman was summoned to Anatolia, and after the war, in the period leading up to the abolition of the sultanate, it was pushed to the periphery and marginalized. In the revolutionary period, meanwhile, the founders repeatedly summoned the Ottoman as the antithesis, even the adversary, of the republic, thus justifying the creation and implementation of radical changes. Oppositions such as old/new, traditional/modern and Ottoman/Turk were used to provide legitimacy to the incoming regime, distinguish the new from the old and demarcate borders. Consequently, the process of constructing a new national identity progressed through the deliberate forgetting, or rendering forgotten, of a range of components of identity related to the country's Ottoman past. This process encompassed various societal and cultural institutions—from the education system to dress codes, from sports to the alphabet and even everyday memory (Ongur, 2015, 416).

Today, particularly in conservative Islamic writing, the argument is often made that the new national identity declared alongside the republic paved the way, historically, for a deep cultural fracture. From this perspective, the 1920s saw a rupture with the past. The trauma that this rupture created in the society still manifests today, the literature underscores, in various social and political instantiations. A distinct line is thus drawn between the modernization drives of the Ottoman period and those that began with the declaration of the republican regime. For instance, Murat Belge claims that there are clear differences between republican reformism and that of the Ottoman period. He suggests that while the aim of the Ottoman period was the establishment of the new, the republican period went further, systematically doing away with a great many things coded as 'old' and 'useless'. It is at this critical point that he locates the radicalism of the republic, and it is precisely this radicalism that he sees as the cause of the cultural fracture (2013, 98). Today, too, much of the discussion

[4] The narrative of Neo-Ottomanism, in its contemporary form, has circulated through this specific spectral metaphor, which is strengthened through nostalgia.

around Neo-Ottomanism centres on a 'return of the repressed', a consequence of the republican regime having presented a clear break with its Ottoman and Islamic past.

3.2 The Spectre Haunting the Republic

Fundamentally, Ottomanism has never been a structured, conceptual, theoretically consistent and complete line of thought (Ongur, 2015, 416). Because of this, it is unable to contend with other ideologies that run counter to it, and it cannot be truly resuscitated in a manner adapted to the conditions of the republican regime. Still, throughout the early republican period, the idea of Ottomanism functioned as a port giving shelter to a generation of intellectuals from the Islamic tradition. The efforts of figures such as Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Münevver Ayaşlı, Samiha Ayverdi and Erol Güngör to lay claim to an Ottoman past allowed them to construct an Islam-heavy Ottoman narrative, and to establish Islamist identities decked in new, conservative attire. In this way, they were able to remain to some degree exempt from the state's surveillance and suppression of groups related to Islam and Islamism (Ongur, 2015, 420).

In addition to the ideological and intellectual persistence of this generation, the Ottoman spectre also lived on, if weakly, in the political and social structure of the new regime through popular culture. Particularly with the shift to a multi-party system and the rise to power of the Democrat Party (DP), the recent past, which had been suppressed for nearly twenty-five years, re-emerged. It is not possible to understand the impetus behind this invocation of the past without first touching on the DP's role on Turkey's political stage. With the slogan 'Enough! The People Have a Say!' the DP came first in the 1950 elections, securing 55.2% of the vote and overturning the single-party rule that had been in place since 1923. The DP's campaign implied that the Islamic conservative reaction to the republican revolution came fundamentally from the people. Through its slogan, the supposed tension between secularist-authoritarian powers and the people first found its verbal expression in party politics. After assuming power on the back of this populist slogan, the party set about building an alternative conception and discourse of national identity that opposed the republican definition of it (Mert, 2013, 315). Consequently, there were clear efforts throughout this period to revive both Islamic traditions and the Ottoman spirit of the recent past. For instance, history books began

to devote more space to the Ottoman Empire and its political and social systems, and portraits of Ottoman sultans by leading figures in Ottoman art were included in *La Turquie Kémaliste,* a journal that since the early 1930s had been seeking to prove Turkey's civilized nature to Western countries (Çolak, 2006, 591). Although the DP did not directly serve the goal of eroding the secular state structure, it nevertheless—through institutional and cultural initiatives—aimed at keeping alive, keeping in memory and normalizing Islamic and Ottoman social traditions, as well as circulating these traditions as part of a reconstructed national identity. Their related educational initiatives included the opening of İmam Hatip schools, the establishment of a faculty of theology at Ankara University and the introduction of optional religious lessons into the primary school curriculum, as well as the general encouragement of radio programs with religious content, and the prioritization of Islamic-Ottoman thought through conferences and the work of leading intellectual figures including Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Sezai Karakoç, Münevver Ayaşlı, Nurettin Topçu and Cemil Meriç (Ongur, 2015, 420). In this period, the Islamic call to prayer began once again to sound out in its original form, and an intellectual generation with a persistent claim to the Islamic-Ottoman past strengthened its presence in the intellectual and cultural domains through publications like *Selamet* magazine and other Islamic journals (Subaşı, 2005, 226–227). Necessarily silent throughout the single-party period, publications representing Islamist thought started to appear in the late 1940s and increased during the 1950s. In short, the era of the DP can be considered a period of intellectual ferment for all branches of the Turkish right, particularly Islamism (Bora & Ünüvar, 2015, 159).

Critiques of the single-party period by intellectuals with Islamic-Ottoman views generally stemmed from four points. Foremost was a focus on the enforced discontinuity and rupture between the Ottoman and republican periods of Turkish history. Examples of this line of criticism include Sezai Karakoç's emphasis on the need for a structure of history that assumes continuity, Peyami Safa's characterization of a nation that has departed from historical continuity as 'schizophrenic' and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's identification of the *Tanzimat* reforms, the constitutional period and the republic as the three reasons for Turkey's historical decline. Another critique held that the relation republican elites envisioned with the West or Westernization and their perception of modernity were interruptions in the history of Turkey, and resulted in a decline in power. For instance, for Kemal Tahir, the Ottoman Empire's dependency on

the West had brought about its imprisonment, while for Nurettin Topçu neither distance from religion nor an embrace of Westernization would heal the wounds of history; instead consciousness of a shared nation and history would bind Turkish citizens tightly to one another. As conservative Islamic intellectuals saw it, far from providing a remedy for the wounds of Ottoman-Turkish history, Westernization was their very cause (Ongur, 2015, 421).

Fundamentally, intellectuals in this tradition distinguished themselves from their antecedents in the Ottoman period through their adoption of Turkishness as an identity. They also distinguished themselves from the defenders of the official ideology through their recognition and adoption of the cultural roots of Turkishness (particularly Islam) in the Ottoman period. This perspective was crystallized in Kısakürek's saying, 'For us, a Turk is a Turk when a Muslim'. The final key component that characterized the ideas of this generation of intellectuals was the longing to return to an Istanbul-centric Turkey. They objected to the new official ideology that depicted the administration of Ankara and the government of Istanbul as entirely opposite. Undergirding this objection was the idea that, at the symbolic levels, the neglect of Ankara as the seat of power discounts both the victory of the Ottomans against the Byzantine Empire (with Fatih Sultan Mehmed's conquest of Istanbul in 1453), and the victory of Islam over Christianity. For instance, Yahya Kemal Beyatlı underscored the enormous importance of the conquest in terms of the culture and history of Turkey, stating that even if Turks never achieved another success like it, this victory alone would be sufficient as a source of honour and pride (Ongur, 2015, 422). Each of these critical tropes put forth by Islamic conservative thinkers during the DP period would eventually constitute the core of a Neo-Ottomanist narrative that would be extensively incorporated into political discourse in Turkey in the years to come.

As is well known, the rule of the Democrat Party came to an end with the military coup of 27 May 1960 and the execution of party leader Adnan Menderes. It would not be inaccurate to say that for the political right this era was characterized by an emotional climate of relative confidence, followed by disappointment and fear upon Menderes's execution. During this period, the emotional heritage engendered by the recalling and remembering of the Ottoman past persisted in subsequent

centre-right parties.[5] After the coup in 1960, with the adoption of an Ottomanist discourse by centre-right parties, the idea took hold that the right-wing political position—which would fight against an ascendant left-communist wave in the 1960s—could only gain strength by resuscitating the Ottoman-Islam past and its spirit, as well as the emotions accompanying them. Throughout the 1960s, institutions such as the Associations of the Struggle Against Communism, the Association of National Turkish Students, the Association of Struggle, and the Free Thought Club, as well as newspapers and journals including *Milli Düşünce*, *Milli Gençlik*, *Mücadele*, *Yeniden Milli Mücadel*e, *Diriliş* and *Büyük Doğu* effectively adopted Ottoman-Islamic thought (Ongur, 2015, 421–422). In the two decades following 1960, right-wing political parties and the army embraced the Ottoman-Islamic past as a means of dealing with communism, and developed relations with political Islam. In the years between 1971 and 1980 in particular, the military sought to find common ground with the 'old enemy' against the newly emerging enemy, communism. This tendency was characterized by the idea of a 'return to Turkish national culture' seen as the result of a synthesis between Islam and the Turkish past. Copeaux notes that this vision—known as the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which grew into a semi-official ideology in Turkey after 1980 (2000, 9)—was not limited to any specific political group, and, for this reason, presents analytical challenges (2000, 56).

The maturation of the notion of a Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which was strategically put forward in an effort to return Islam to its place within the historical narrative, made it possible for elites who had adopted an Islamist political line, and who were able to organize by the 1960s, to regroup politically and to begin asserting their presence, coming together as the National Party of Order (Milli Nizam Partisi, or MNP) (Türk, 2014, 162). Those who adopted this line, the basic political aim of which was to re-Islamify Turkish history, continued to make use of the imagination and imagery of the Ottoman Empire for Islamist aims. In this tradition, which in Turkish political history is known as the National Vision Movement, national-ness (*millilik*) was emphasized in contrast to the non-national-ness and Western mimicry that allegedly characterized other political ideologies. As such, this descriptor contains not worldly

[5] Perhaps because Ottomanism is a shifting ideology and because it has been adopted by the centre-right tradition in Turkey and has taken different forms, largely with pragmatic and emotional impetuses, it should be considered a political narrative.

or national (*ulusal*), but religious and pan-Islamist (*ümmetçi*) meanings (Çakır, 2005, 544). The leader of the movement, Necmettin Erbakan, noted: 'National Vision is four things of our people: their faith, their history, their identity, and themselves'. To him, the victory of Malazgirt, the conquest of Istanbul and the Independence War were won through the National Vision. Yet with republican modernization, the Republican People's Party (CHP) made its presence known as the 'leader of a movement rotting the spiritual roots of the people'. Erbakan would later say of secularism that it 'is a word that doesn't exist in our people's world of meaning, and has for years been deployed in our country as the enemy of Islam' (Türk, 2014, 165–195). When viewed from this perspective, it is evident that the National Vision Movement embraced the Ottoman Empire and Ottomanism in favour of Islam, and thus adopted an ideology that was openly at odds with the official one.

From the 1950s to the 1980s, the republic's strict narrative of national identity was eroded somewhat, both by intellectuals who persistently invoked an Ottoman-Islamic past and by criticism of an Islamist tradition that had for the first time found a space for expression in the political domain. These critiques were of the utmost importance in terms of (a) alternative constructions of national identity, which were put forward in the years that followed and found a counterpart in the political and social field, and (b) the Neo-Ottomanist narrative that became a component of political jargon. In short, the thirty years between the 1950s and the 1980s laid the groundwork for the Turkish-Islamic synthesis by making religion a basic part of Turkish national identity and thereby attempting to restore the place of Islam within historical discourse (Copeaux, 2000, 9).

3.3 The Neo-Ottomanist Narrative as a Remedy for a Crisis of Identity: The 1980s

In the 1980s, it became possible to speak of Ottomanism (a spectre constantly summoned for rather more pragmatic and emotional motives) as a powerful political narrative in its own right, and to put it forward as a key component of political jargon. One of the most important figures here was Turgut Özal, who would prove effective in enabling the return of the repressed—the Ottoman—in the political domain (Çalış, 2001, 394). Throughout his terms as prime minister (1983–1989) and president (1989–1993), Özal, the founder of the Homeland Party, made

use of the narrative of an Ottomanist past characterized by power and magnificence as a tool for reinvigorating collective memory and collective self-confidence after the 1980 military coup.

Neo-Ottomanism circulated at this time as a component of a new national identity interlinked with a new vision for foreign policy and the idea of a Turkish-Islamic synthesis. During the 1980s, Turkey was reshaped in many ways both domestically and in its foreign relations. Among the factors that point to this decade as a novel period in political and social history are a number of developments specific to internal politics: the adoption of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis as an official ideology following the military coup of 12 September 1980; the related rise of Islamist politics; and the emergence of a new conservative bourgeoisie with economic and political transformations in Anatolia. Domestically, the post-coup government and Özal's rise to power, together with great transformations tied to regional and international developments, paved the way for Neo-Ottomanist discourses and pursuits to emerge and become matters of discussion (Uzgel & Yaramış, 2010, 39). The need for restoration necessitated reconciliation: that of Western discourses and policies with those of Islam, of progress with conservatism, of the free market with the state, and, ultimately, of the Republic of Turkey with its Ottoman past (Ongur, 2015, 423). Consequently, Neo-Ottomanist narratives in the 1980s were a pragmatic, with ill-defined borders, yet unifying motif that resulted from the dialectical interaction of domestic and external dynamics, and brought about national belonging of a sort, as well as creating an atmosphere of self-assurance.

In the period following the military coup, Turkey was mired in a profound crisis of national identity. Internal conditions made it necessary for the country to define itself anew. The rise of political Islam and the Kurdish liberation movement were critical developments that prompted a re-evaluation and interrogation of forms of belonging at the collective level. The rediscovery of various pasts that had been hitherto marginalized in the official narrative of history was conducive to the emergence of alternative forms of social memory and their articulation within political discourse. Kemalist attempts at modernization through disregarding and denying diverse histories in favour of a simplistic narrative of national identity had been unsuccessful. This homogenizing strategy had created feelings of neglect and marginalization, and thus, after the Kemalist era people were eager to reclaim their distinct identities, leading to a resurgence of pluralism in domestic politics (Çolak, 2006, 589). Two

tendencies ran parallel: this demand for a renewed pluralism, and calls for a return to the Ottoman model (Uzgel & Yaramış, 2010, 37). According to Özal, because the country's ethnic and religious diversity were not sufficiently attended to in the Republic of Turkey's official definition of national identity, a social problem of belonging emerged. Consequently, the pursuit of a supra-identity in which different identities might find expression led Özal to follow a domestic path that culminated, once again, in Ottomanism (Çalış, 2001, 397). In this context, it seems reasonable to conclude that during the Özal period, Neo-Ottomanism was formulated on a selective reading that embraced Ottoman practices of government based on pluralism and tolerance (Yavuz, 2020, 110).

Viewed this way, the Özal period can be considered one in which Ottoman heritage, for the first time, was given significant space: there was space for the awakening of collective memory, for the redefinition of national identity and for the 'reconstruction of the present' (Onar, 2009, 233). The Ottoman past was remembered through the establishment of a grand narrative about the shared history of a people. Özal, who came to the political stage as a civilian leader following the strict post-coup military government, functioned—both through his gentle and pragmatic image and through his recalling of the grand Ottoman past—as a symbolic figure of relief for the people. More importantly, he represented the promise of a grand future. The narrative of Neo-Ottomanism found a new voice during the Özal period, particularly within the Ankara-based right-wing journal *Türkiye Günlüğü*. Journalists including Cengiz Çandar and Nur Vergin, through their suggestions that the country needed to 'make peace with its history, have recourse to what's real, and to not fear itself', attempted to substantiate the narrative of Neo-Ottomanism. Affirming the Ottoman Empire as a pluralist order based on tolerance, they criticized Kemalism, which they thought had had its day and was due a transformation (Uzgel & Yaramış, 2010, 38–40).

Unsurprisingly, Islamist elites played an effective role in the configuration of a new narrative of national identity, one that embraced the Ottoman past, during the Özal period. The rise of this group to a position where they could define a discursive vision within Turkish politics happened in tandem with their gradual inclusion in the upper ranks of the economy, the cultural sector and the bureaucracy. They now had their own capital and publications, and through these they broadcast their critique of Kemalist ideology. Just how much space was opened up for Islamist elites in the post-coup period can be seen by comparing the

power of Islamists in the media before and after 1980. While Islamist journals and newspapers accounted for 7% of the market share prior to the 1980s, by 1996 this proportion had jumped to 47%. Additionally, during this time, academics with traditional Islamist backgrounds began to settle into universities across Anatolia. Through an interrogation of the state, society, identity and history by Islamist intellectuals such as İsmet Özel and Ali Bulaç, and journalists including Fehmi Koru and Abdurrahman Dilipak, the symbolic capital that enabled the politicization of Islamist identity became more prominent (Yavuz, 1998, 31–34). Ultimately, a Neo-Ottomanist narrative found appropriate conditions for a discursive expansion in domestic politics under Özal, through right-wing politics more generally and in Islamist political factions specifically.

Still, while the Neo-Ottomanist narrative of the time was one internally laden with promise and the hope of unification, it made its presence felt internationally with an expansionist political vision. Foreign policy developments were certainly significant here. Since the 1980s, an international process that paved the way for Turkey's joining of the neoliberal global order, the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, the break-up of the Soviet Union and the flaring up of ongoing ethnic conflicts created the perception that important geopolitical opportunities were emerging for Turkey. These developments strengthened approaches that defined, criticized and re-evaluated the extant axes of Turkish foreign policy (Uzgel & Yaramış, 2010, 38). In particular, in criticizing both how the National Pact was interpreted and the principle of 'peace at home, peace in the world', right-wing elites called for the abandonment of tendencies such as status quoism and Westernism. They argued that Turkey should realize its own power and make use of its international potential, and that the way out of the historical consciousness that is squeezed between Edirne and Van lies in the rediscovery of the Ottoman heritage (Uzgel & Yaramış, 2010, 38). After all, from the late 1980s and early 1990s, countries that had once been a part of the Ottoman Empire were on the international agenda, which inevitably led to a resurgence of remembering the Ottoman past (Çalış, 2001, 400). For example, in an interview with the journal *Türkiye Günlüğü*, Özal emphasized that Turkey was the heir to the imperial civilization of the Middle East and the Balkans, and that the 'gates of necessity' standing before the country had been opened. He claimed that the twenty-first century was set to be the century of the Turk, suggesting that such an opportunity came about only once every 400 years and that therefore Turkey must create a

sphere of influence in the region spanning from the Balkans to Northern Iraq and Syria, even as far the Adriatic (Uzgel & Yaramış, 2010, 38). The foreign-policy-centred narrative of Neo-Ottomanism constructed in the Özal period was thus established with reference to an expansionist desire connected with the Ottoman imperial past.

This early Neo-Ottomanist narrative prioritized by Özal receded with his sudden death in 1993. In the period that followed, while the incendiary nature of the Kurdish issue dominated an agenda focused on armed solutions, an emphasis on secular politics again took root in political discourse (Uzgel & Yaramış, 2010, 39). The core reason why the Özal period was significant in terms of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative was its resuscitation of an image of the past that, in eighty years of state discourse, was sensed but could not find a place for itself, was known but not voiced, which existed but was concealed (Çalış, 2001, 403). This imagining brought with it a change of sorts in the emotional climate. From both a political and social perspective, after many painful years, not only the remembrance of an Ottoman past, but its resuscitation through an entirely fabular timbre (pluralism, imperial power and so on), created a climate of hope for both the present and the future. Even if it is difficult to identify any consequential effect on foreign policy, the Neo-Ottomanist narrative, expressed for the first time in the Özal period, was unique and pioneering in terms of how it sparked a reckoning with the republic. This reckoning was taking place for the first time in the political arena, and at the state level.

3.4 The Auspicious Alliance of Turkishness and Islam: The Neo-Ottomanist Wave of the 1990s

There was general interest in the domestic politics of the post-Özal period in Neo-Ottomanism as a formula for cultural pluralism. This narrative gradually gained power; its construction of a grand past, which for many years had seemed distant and lost, was, by the 1980s, able to be articulated for the first time; it was put forth as a component of national identity, something desirable. In the 1990s, Islamist elites were particularly successful in linking the narrative of Neo-Ottomanism to Islam. When the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, or RP), under Erbakan, the leader of the National Vision Movement, came first in the 1995 elections and subsequently established a coalition with the True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi,* or DYP), Turkey had a prime minister who based his political

identity on Ottoman-Islamic heritage (Çolak, 2006, 595; Yavuz, 1998, 20). Consequently, the agenda was once again marked by discussions of national identity and efforts to reconcile modern-day Turkey with the Ottoman past, as well as a desire to settle accounts with Kemalism.

Members of the RP imagined Ottomanism as a combination of Turkish and Islamic identities. In this sense, it represented a continuation of Özal's Neo-Ottomanist vision, though in more strikingly Islamist colours (Bora, 1996, 23). To be sure, a basic motif did distinguish the Neo-Ottomanism of these Islamist elites from that of the Özal period: revanchism. From the perspective of elites, their strongly Islamist-tinted Ottoman narrative was not simply about coming to terms with the republic; it was a tool for refashioning the present and future, and one with a vindictive impulse. In order to create a legitimate basis for such revanchism, it was first necessary to gather support from the people. Throughout the second half of the 1990s, the RP's ruling elites worked to integrate Ottoman arts, culinary practices and architectural forms into social life, particularly in large urban areas. At this time, official ceremonies started to be organized as alternatives to the secular ceremonies of the republic. In particular, attempts were made to symbolically rewrite the identity of Istanbul (in opposition to Ankara as the capital of the Republic) as the Ottoman-Islamic cradle of the Turks and, in a sense, their source of greatness and pride. This effort both implied a challenge to the Ankara-centric definition of national identity in official ideology, and marked Istanbul (conceived of as a symbol of Ottoman civilization and power) as a site representing the emergence of a new national identity. The then-mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, organized a series of activities meant to recall and conjure up *the* Istanbul of the Ottoman Empire. The Conquest of Istanbul was turned into a mass celebration, and activities memorializing Fatih Sultan Mehmed, the historic actor considered to have transformed Istanbul into an Islamic city, also started to draw more participants (Çolak, 2006, 595–596). Throughout Erdoğan's mayoralty, the 29 May celebrations of the Conquest took place under the slogan 'a reconquest'. In light of its implications, this slogan can be regarded as a proclamation, announcing that nearly eighty years of the absence and suppression of Islamic political identity had come to an end. Moreover, this 'good news' was marked with events intended to include not just Turkey, but all Islamic states; the 1996 ceremony accordingly featured representatives from other Muslim countries. In his opening speech, Welfare Party leader Erbakan shared with the entire Islamic world the news that, 543 years after the conquest

of Istanbul, they were on the eve of a reconquest (Çınar, 2001, 382). These celebrations during the RP period served not only to exalt and recall the glorious Ottoman past, but also to render the Conquest part of an Islamist historical narrative. The Islamic aspect of the Conquest was foregrounded to the extent that during the 1996 celebrations mass prayers were held in İnönü Stadium, led by an *imam* (Çınar, 2001, 365–376). These celebrations, institutionalized and ritualized in domestic politics by the RP government, constituted the most powerful sign of Neo-Ottomanism in this period.

Perhaps predictably, in the RP era, a symbolic war was openly initiated between the cultural expressions of Neo-Ottomanism and republicanism. In 1996, immediately after the party formed a coalition government with the DYP, there was talk of building a large mosque in Taksim, a square widely seen as symbolic of modern Turkey. The new government also announced plans to take down the Byzantine city walls, while the serving of alcoholic drinks in the Cemal Reşit Rey concert hall was banned, and suitable spaces there were converted into prayer rooms. In the same venue, religious and local groups were added to a repertoire that previously featured only Western music (Koyuncu, 2014, 54). Far more than a desire to reckon with the Kemalist regime from an Islamist perspective, such attempts by the RP, during their brief period in power in the 1990s, can be interpreted as symptoms of a desire for revenge and redress that is all too familiar today.

Such was the domestic situation. When it came to foreign policy, the Neo-Ottomanism of the RP period bore certain resemblances to that of the Özal period, in terms of the imperial vision evoked by such slogans as 'Leader Turkey' or 'Make Turkey Great Again!'. Yet its content differed from the narrative established by Özal, both in its strong emphasis on Islam and in Erbakan's anti-Western stance. Thus Erbakan, fiercely critical of Turkey's westward turn during the Republic, promoted projects including an Islamic NATO and a United Nations of Islam, and attempted to substantiate his foreign-policy vision by strengthening ties with countries like Iran, Malaysia and Libya and by establishing relations of paternalistic responsibility at the discursive level with Bosnia, Chechnya and Palestine. Unlike under Özal, the Neo-Ottomanism of Erbakan's foreign policy was a movement that was 'not a part of a global strategy, but that attempted to resist neoliberal globalization' (Uzgel & Yaramış, 2010, 40–41). The ideological-intellectual background for this approach consisted of both an emphasis on Ottoman world dominance and an

imperial desire to once again be the leader of Muslim countries by turning Turkey's face eastward.

The RP period came to an end on 28 February 1997 in what became known in Turkish history as the 'Postmodern Coup'. The coup followed a series of developments thought to pose a threat to the republican regime: Erbakan's hosting of an *iftar* meal for leaders of religious orders at the prime minister's residence, his participation in the 1997 'Jerusalem Night' in Sincan, and the organization by various radical Islamist groups (Aczmendiler, Hizbullahçılar) of demonstrations and various activities that made the news.[6] Ultimately, Erbakan was forced to resign and the party was disbanded. The Islamic conservative tradition fostered a narrative based on victimhood and the notion that the declaration of the republic had led to the silencing and suppression of their collective identity, as well as marking a break with the past. This tradition, which functionalized the Ottoman past as a lifeboat, as it were, entered a wholly new phase after the events of 1997 for the restoration of this state of mind.

3.5 Re-establishing Ottomanism as the Constituent Narrative of National Identity: The AKP Period

Having engendered a historical fracture and disjuncture within the National Vision Movement, the events of 28 February in many ways heralded a new period for Islamist elites in Turkey, and for Neo-Ottomanist pursuits and practices. A seperation had been reached between two groups within the movement, the traditionalists and the reformists. This seperation was eventually realized in 2001, when reformists established the Justice and Development Party (AKP). During the 2002 general election campaign, the party took to the political stage under the adopted label of 'conservative democrat', thereby rejecting Islamism, the constituent element of the party founders' political experience. The AKP emerged from the elections as the sole power; a milestone and a sign of a new phase in Turkish politics and in the Neo-Ottomanist narrative that would prove long-lasting. Since 2002, Turkish society has

[6] '28 Şubat'ın Üstünden 14 Yıl Geçti', *Hürriyet*, 28 Feb. 2011, See www.hurriyet.com.tr/28-subatin-ustunden-14-yil-gecti-17143455.

been involved in an experiment that, with increasing intensity, not only reminds it of its Ottoman past but also invites deep emotional investment in an Ottoman narrative. This experiment has seeped into every domain of life—from everyday practices to the media, from political discourse to policies. This period is characterized by an ethos that we might call 'banal Ottomanism' (Ongur, 2015, 417). Building on Michael Billig's work (1995), which defined banal nationalism as a form of nationalism that draws its strength and longevity from its effective visibility and reproducibility in social life, it seems useful to conceptualize the Neo-Ottomanist narrative of the AKP period as banal Ottomanism in light of its manifestations in the daily life. Here, the symbolic sites of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative are continuously reproduced through the participation and partnership of the people; they are normalized and repeated to the point where they have become banal yet also sanctified as a national habitus.

It is not surprising that the political discourse of the AKP is characterized by acts of remembering and evoking the Ottoman past, central as such elements are to this discourse. As I have noted, Neo-Ottomanism was present in various levels of centre-right political discourse in Turkey well before AKP rule. It is fairly unremarkable that the AKP adopted a domestic and foreign-policy position and discourse centred on the Ottoman Empire, both because of the continuity and analogous relationship the party established between itself and the Menderes and Özal governments, and because a large number of the party's cadre came from the National Vision tradition and an Islamist background (Ongur, 2015, 424). What is noteworthy is how much progress the AKP—relative to its predecessors—made at the symbolic and social level in remembering and recalling the country's Ottoman past. The primary reason for the party's political success is no doubt economic; additionally, it has held political power for quite some time. Yet the Neo-Ottomanist narrative resonated strongly with the society. It also seems important to acknowledge that the narrative met the emotional needs of another segment of Turkish society; people who were not part of the Islamist conservative base but who found a place for themselves within the narrative embraced it as well.

In the literature on the AKP and its Neo-Ottomanist tendencies, one finds an overwhelming focus on foreign-policy dimensions. Yet, in my view, what differentiates the AKP period from those preceding it is the extraordinary importance given to the social dimension of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative. Unlike before, this narrative is not limited

to amphibious political discourses and foreign-policy moves; it presents something earthly, as it were, to society. It sets out to correct what is framed as the 'mistake' of forgetting Turkey's 'glorious history' (Ongur, 2015, 425).

Here, before considering the various symbolic means through which the Neo-Ottomanism of Turkey in the 2000s was established, it is necessary to dwell for a moment on how this narrative developed and spread in the context of foreign policy. Since foreign policy in the AKP period is an arena in which ideological struggles that continuously emphasize the Ottoman heritage of Turkey throughout its history and efforts to recall the Ottoman past and, thereby, to construct a new national identity take shape in a powerful way. Conducting a political and sociological analysis of the AKP's Neo-Ottomanism involves looking at how this discourse has impacted international relations. For:

> […] foreign policy is not simply a field of diplomatic relations with its own codes and rules. At the same time, it comprises a social process, the contours of which are determined by a form of national identity that certain agents strive to make dominate in a country. What's more, this identity, which at base marks what is beyond or outside it, is filled with particular content. (Saraçoğlu, 2013, 56)

The AKP's foreign-policy views were articulated by Ahmet Davutoğlu, one of the party's founders, long-time advisor to the prime minister, the country's minister of foreign affairs between 2009 and 2014, and the prime minister between 2014 and 2016. Davutoğlu's term in the ministry was also a period in which the symbolic manifestations of Neo-Ottomanism were actively aired and found a receptive audience in Turkey. Davutoğlu's ideas, which would mature in the 2000s, were shaped within the political/intellectual environment of the aforementioned journal *Türkiye Günlüğü*, a platform for Neo-Ottomanist debates in the 1990s. One of the main ways in which Davutoğlu constructed 'the Ottoman' within a narrative framework is clearly seen in his 2001 book, *Strategic Depth* (*Stratejik Derinlik*). There, Davutoğlu criticizes the insufficient theorizing of Neo-Ottomanism in the 1990s, stating that such debates remained at the journalistic level and failed to reach the society (Davutoğlu, 2005, 90). He describes Ottoman heritage as the most genuine identity of Turkish society, its unchanging essence or core. This core, notes Saraçoğlu, is a 'potential power that distinguishes the

society of Turkey from other nations, that brings it to an exceptional position on the stage of history, and that rescues it from ordinariness' (2013, 59). And yet, according to Davutoğlu, this potential went untapped for years due to an understanding of foreign policy based on Kemalist principles. Davutoğlu criticizes Turkey's traditional foreign-policy approach for lacking initiative and supporting the status quo; for being passive, conflict-producing and security-focused. He proposes a clear break with the previous period (Uzgel & Yaramış, 2010, 43), and holds that a new foreign-policy vision would have to embrace the historical heritage of the Ottoman era. Further, Turkey would have to play an active role in regions once within Ottoman borders, thus becoming a regional power. Davutoğlu objects to the nation standing on the sidelines, particularly regarding developments in the Middle East (Özcan, 2010, 79–82). He underlines that Turkey can no longer simply be a passive country, a bridge between civilizations, but must become an active actor in the region, the natural successor of an Islamic civilization formerly occupied by the Ottomans (Saraçoğlu, 2013, 63).

Davutoğlu's writing on Turkey's foreign policy in the 2000s implicitly adopts a Neo-Ottomanist vision, revising and attempting to situate it within a conceptual framework in order to rescue Neo-Ottomanism from its ideologically incoherent character in previous periods (Uzgel & Yaramış, 2010, 43). His direct references to a Neo-Ottomanist narrative are ultimately motivated by its expansionist associations (Saraçoğlu, 2013, 61). The fundamental point of departure for this narrative, as before, is a critique of Kemalism. Davutoğlu's new foreign-policy vision contains three core critiques: 'To him, the republican project alienates its own society from its history (its Ottoman past) through the education system, from its geography through foreign policy (particularly the Middle East region and the Balkans), and from its religion and culture through ideology' (Uzgel & Yaramış, 2010, 42).

Throughout *Strategic Depth,* the Ottoman past—suppressed since the establishment of the republican regime—is depicted as a hidden jewel, waiting to be strategically valued. The idea of Ottomanism Davutoğlu emphasizes is not only a vision of foreign policy, but also a draft of the design for an ideal society. As Saraçoğlu shows, Davutoğlu's book makes the case for the 'need of a "human element", a society that will adopt and reflect it in its structure, if a foreign policy in line with the Ottoman past is to come to fruition' (Saraçoğlu, 2013, 60). Indeed, the text reveals the ideological sources behind Neo-Ottomanism's current social visibility

and prominence. What distinguishes the Neo-Ottomanism of the AKP from that of its predecessors is its successful implementation of this much-needed 'human element'.

Saraçoğlu argues that through its emphasis on Neo-Ottomanism, AKP foreign policy presents the conceptual basis and symbolic components for a new understanding of nationalism (2013, 52). He goes on to say that this wave, characterized as Islamic conservative nationalism, is in the process of becoming the official ideology of Turkey. Jenny White, meanwhile, terms this wave 'Muslim nationalism' and notes that its character rests on the successes of the Ottoman Empire. In this sense, she argues that it constitutes a break with the Kemalist state project (2013, 24). The nationalism of the AKP, in a manner distinct from its various Kemalist iterations or from the nationalism represented by the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party), gives substance to the concept of a people or nation (*millet*) with shared Islamic-cultural elements and an emphasis on the Ottoman past. From this perspective, it is clear that, in the way *millet* is imagined in official discourse, the emphasis on associations with 'Turkishness' has dramatically decreased in favour of associations with the Sunni Islam of the Ottoman Empire.

> In line with such a definition of the nation, another core element of nationalism, the historical national interest, is defined as regaining the political might of the Ottoman Empire, which is thought to represent the period of the nation's rise to prominence, and the recently circulated goal of a 'Greater Turkey' is shaped by references to an idealized Ottoman period. (Saraçoğlu, 2013, 55)

The attempt to make the Ottoman Empire and its power a component of a foundational national identity both remakes the identity of the Republic of Turkey in the context of a new official ideology, and signals the establishment of a new social hegemony. References to shared cultural values tied to Sunni Islam and to an Ottoman historical legacy make up this national identity (Saraçoğlu, 2013, 55). However much the contents of this 'new' identity call to mind the Turkish-Islamic synthesis in its post-1980 form, there is a basic difference between them. As the foundations of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, Turkishness and Muslimness existed in an equal relationship, allowing no sort of hierarchy. The national identity that the AKP has attempted to construct, meanwhile, rests on Islam

and Muslimness as its core components, and these elements do not necessarily need synthesis with the idea of Turkishness (Saraçoğlu & Demirkol, 2015, 307). Similarly, one is struck by a fundamental difference between AKP nationalism and the understanding of nationalism adopted by the National Vision tradition: although both political positions operated on the same level in terms of how they embrace the Ottoman past and Islam as chief elements of national identity, the nationalism of the AKP departs from the nationalism of the Islamic political tradition (and the anti-capitalist discourse adopted by Erbakan) through its engagement in neoliberal capitalist developments.

Ümit Kıvanç, analyzing the framework of meaning and mood upon which Davutoğlu's book is based, describes the work (in a way that both evokes and goes beyond Saraçoğlu's argument) as an 'Islam-Turk synthesis', 'rooted in Islam, with the emphasis on Turk withdrawn', as distinct from 'the Turkish right's concept of Ottoman that we're accustomed to'. Furthermore, according to Kıvanç, this amalgamation cannot be considered a synthesis, for Muslimness is conceived of as an essence, a fundamental material that lends it its distinct character, whereas what is Turkish appears like a 'shell' upon this amalgamation, a 'protective armour' (2015, 24–78). For Kıvanç, one of the key ideas in Davutoğlu's book is 'reconstructing social psychology through self-confidence'. At the same time, this idea also implies that something in the past has disappeared:

> You fabricate a mask for yourself from your past, you carve out something to wear from your geography, and when you wear these and head out into the neighbourhood, everyone is afraid of you. Yes, I perhaps caricatured this too much, but the orientation is correct. Just this emphasis is off: it's not the fear of others, it's basically your feeling of what you are capable of. (Kıvanç, 2015, 82)

Kıvanç's diagnosis constitutes the basic point of departure for this book, which argues that, at its core, the Neo-Ottomanist narrative today corresponds to the particular emotional needs of the Turkish society, to their desire to see themselves as 'powerful subjects'. It suggests that this desire—which has in fact been the emotional experience of the Turkish right, and in particular of Islamic conservative elites, throughout the history of the republic—was first forcefully articulated, then transmitted

to the masses as heritage and, more importantly, today has *metamorphosed*. This book discusses how the collective identity of the AKP, which rests on a rigid narrative of aggrievement (Aydın & Taşkın, 2015, 18) is characterized by feelings of victoriousness and narcissism.

3.6 The Spectre in Corporal Form in the AKP Period: Banal Ottomanism

Narratives of national history are constructed through the frequent use of historical symbols, which create a sense of shared continuity, memory and destiny among members of a nation, and thus create national identity (Koyuncu, 2014, 79). Consequently, in no historical period have the elements of national identity that define a nation been stable or unchanging in character; rather, as instruments of hegemonic struggles situated in different political contexts. Copeaux argues that the narrative of national history in Turkey represents a conflict between Kemalism, the Turkish-Islamic synthesis and Islamism, and is used as a symbolic weapon in the struggle to seize political and social control. According to him, behind contemporary conflicts and tensions lie not so much economic and strategic factors, but desires related to issues of identity. In other words, such tensions rest more on feeling than on thought (2000, 10–11).

Since 2002 (and with particular intensity since 2009), the AKP's domestic and foreign policies, both of which are characterized by the framing and circulation of a Neo-Ottomanist narrative, have fundamentally entrenched the fiction—and feeling—of a new narrative of national history and national identity. It is now clear that this narrative has become hegemonic to a very effective degree, owing to the symbols that have circulated in the social field. This new ethos could be termed 'banal Ottomanism', inspired by Michael Billig's conceptual work on banal nationalism. Banal Ottomanism has seeped into the capillaries of institutions and into political, cultural and social life: from language to architecture, from education to the media, from national rituals to the practices of everyday life. For nearly a century, an Ottoman spectre—at times rendered invisible in Turkish politics, at times surfacing—has haunted political terminology, the gaunt agent of amphibious political discourses. Now, we are witnessing for the first time that it has taken corporeal form; it has been revived as a hale and hearty element of national identity of Turkey.

One characteristic that makes the AKP period notable in the context of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative is its success in calling to mind the Ottoman past primarily through political discourse and the imagery of its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. When we look at the lexical repertoire that dominates contemporary political language, we often encounter such concepts as ancestry, civilization, conquest, resurgence, reascension, restoration and the 'new Turkey', all of which recall 'the Ottoman' and (to put it lightly) contain a critique of the republican regime. In particular, the concept of a 'new Turkey' occupies a central place in a discourse tied to the critique of the republican regime through its deeply negative emphasis on the old, and, thereby, to praise of the Ottoman period. 'New Turkey' 'desires to produce anew the absolute other of modernity (the Ottoman) and a past era of bliss; it constructs a fantasy of a sociality meant to recall an ideal, distant past' (Açıkel, 2012, 14). Açıkel's emphasis here on novelty, while pointing to the AKP's tendency to see itself as the powerful subject of history, also refers to a historiography that aims to underscore the insignificance and vacuousness of the republican period. In this sense, he calls attention to the discourse of 'new Turkey' as both a historiography related to the past and an attempt at historical construction related to the significance of contemporary practices. He diagnoses the basic characteristic of these initiatives as the need for redress and the expectation of a restoration of honour grounded in the past. He suggests that what is 'new' in the AKP period is 'neither Turk-Islam ideology's familiar melancholy for an era of bliss, nor a mood of vigorous mourning of the past, nor the precedent of unloading one's historical disappointments onto one's opponents'. What is new, rather, is the rise of 'conservative Islamist social engineering', which relies on this discursive storehouse (2012, 14–15). Indeed, under no other government that appealed to Ottomanism as a narrative of national identity was such political messaging so strongly received by the people. The AKP's promise of a 'new Turkey' implies that a link (that Ottoman and Republican modernization had allegedly severed) would be re-established between society and the state, and that it would realize the dreams of a society in search of its own state. In this light, the AKP's talk of a 'new Turkey' is received by the people as good news, heralding the end of a nearly two-hundred-year-long nightmare dating back to the days of Mahmud II (Açıkel, 2012, 16).

In addition to the political discourse constructed around the 'new Turkey', the AKP has taken steps to restore the magnificent past by

reviving discussions about the Ottoman language and by establishing the language as a foundational element of national identity. Erdoğan is, perhaps, the most fundamental agent in such endeavours, as evidenced by the Ottoman terms he has favoured during the years of his party leadership, particularly in his speeches, and by his frequent and open criticisms of the republican regime's reforms and hegemony over language. A 2012 speech Erdoğan gave at the Constitutional Symposium on Language provides a concrete example of his stance:

> Operations carried out on Turkish language did away with the most important communication between our history and today, the most important bridge, which is having the same language. They cut our jugular, so to speak. This is quite important. To remove such terms as *muhayyile, tasavvur, inkişaf, mücerret, müşahhas,* or *aklıselim* because they came to Turkish from other languages, and to substitute them with other words can never, never supply the same meaning, the same sense.[7]

Erdoğan's emphasis here on historical continuity contains a heated criticism of language policies after the declaration of the republic. The reforms, implemented during the transition to a republican regime, that modified the language (one of the main elements of national identity and culture) are presented as an instrument for separating the people from their past, even a means of destruction. Erdoğan urges redress for this historical rupture. Similarly, in a 2014 speech at the 5th Council on Religion, Erdoğan touched on the Ottoman language's links to historical consciousness; here we see him criticizing republican language policies in an even more pointed tone:

> Despite efforts to sever our ties with our books, our works of art, our letters, our archives, thank God, Turkey's men of learning are standing up. So, here, in the five-day Council on National Education, you see that today the Ottoman language is on the agenda. There are some who are upset by the children of this country learning Ottoman. In fact, this is the Turkish that doesn't age, you see. It's not something foreign; through this, we will learn the truths. They ask, 'Are we going to teach people to read gravestones?' That's precisely the problem. A history lies there on those

[7] 'Kullanılan Dil Anayasanın İstismarını Önlemeli,' See www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/kullanilan-dil-anayasanin-istismarini-onlemeli/25064#1.

> gravestones, a civilization, and can there be any greater form of ignorance than for a generation to not know who lies in its own graves?![8]

In the AKP period the desire to revive the Ottoman language was not limited to discourse. For instance, the Ministry of National Education signed an agreement in 2012 with the Hayrat Foundation, which offers free Ottoman language courses across Turkey and in a number of sites in Europe (Ongur, 2015, 426); seemingly an important step towards ensuring, through education, the central place of the Ottoman language in social and cultural life. Again, in the 19th Council on National Education, it was decided that Ottoman would be made mandatory in Anatolian Imam Hatip High Schools,[9] and an elective course in other state schools.[10]

There are many other examples of actions taken to revive Ottoman heritage through the official state education institutions. An abbreviated list of examples to integrate a reconstructed national history and a new construction of national identity into formal policies via the education system includes; the presence in state schools of portraits of Ottoman monarchs remembered for their 'successes' (e.g. Fatih Sultan Mehmed, Abdülhamid II), alongside portraits of Mustafa Kemal; generous space afforded to Ottoman history in the official curriculum; the decision to rewrite the curriculum to teach 'The Principles and Revolutions of Ataturk' in a more 'objective and realist' fashion; and the naming of an initiative to technologically update state schools, the 'Fatih Project'. One should note that efforts to revive symbolic representations of Ottoman-ness have taken place not just in primary and secondary schools, but also in universities. In particular, the naming of universities (Fatih Sultan Mehmed University, Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Kanuni University, Bezmialem University) opened since 2006—part of a project to instate a university in every province—not only gives a sense of the current

[8] Haber Güncesi. (2014, Dec. 8). *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 5. Din Şurası Konuşması* [Video]. YouTube. www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6ijVRf1h9g.

[9] Anatolian Imam Hatip Schools are state schools that follow a religious curriculum. They long predate the rise of the AKP (as noted above in the discussion of the Democrat Party era), yet their dramatic expansion under the party's watch has made them synonymous, in the eyes of many, with AKP rule.

[10] For the full document (in Turkish) of the decision of the 19th Council on National Education, see www.memurlar.net/haber/492505/.

interest in the Ottoman past; it also shows how the education system has been mobilized to render this interest an ordinary part of society (Ongur, 2015, 427).

Moreover, some of the most powerful symbolic representations of Neo-Ottomanism in the AKP era manifest spatially and architecturally. Alongside the many buildings that have been constructed or restored in a manner consonant with Ottoman-Seljuq architecture (and that have been praised on such grounds), new buildings that suffuse the spaces of everyday life are now among the chief instruments of a policy of remembering the Ottoman past. Such initiatives include the construction or restoration of mosques (Çamlıca, Mimar Sinan, Süleymaniye, Fatih and Bayezıt), as well as the restoration of old Ottoman palaces (Topkapı, Dolmabahçe, Beylerbeyi), public buildings (Çağlayan Courthouse) and museums and parks (Ongur, 2015, 426). These projects, examples of a nostalgic urban architecture, should be read as part of an attempt at the 'restoration of a glorious past' through contemporary cultural codes. Yet to critics, these contemporary representatives of some distant past appear 'at best as real as an amusement park' due to 'their baseless historicity, collage style of architecture, construction techniques, and materials' (Adanalı, 2015, 121). The preponderance of buildings in everyday life that have supposedly been constructed or restored based on Ottoman/Seljuq architecture offers the most concrete example of Neo-Ottomanism being translated from the political to the social field. And yet in such initiatives the narrative of Ottomanism 'is reduced and displayed as a rootless, decorative material' (İnal et al., 2015, 17). Experts have criticized this architectural approach accordingly:

> From the sheathing of extant school buildings to the construction of new schools; from facade work on buildings on the main street of old squatter neighbourhoods to courthouses; from police stations to buildings of the office of mufti; from the meaningless gates built at the entrance of Ankara to Erdoğan's AKSaray; from convention centres to the Istanbul International Finance Center – it's an amorphous aesthetic, preferred for buildings and spatial interventions made across very wide spaces, described as Ottoman-Seljuq or sometimes Ottoman-Turkish architecture, yet not constituting a meaningful whole. (Adanalı, 2015, 122)

Neo-Ottomanist architecture, on display in a range of everyday spaces, demonstrates how culture has been weaponized by the AKP and lays

bare the symbolic importance of space in the construction of national history and national identity. These buildings are spatial expressions of an attempt to reckon with the republic, affirming claims that architectural practices in the AKP period have revanchist motives. One of the most concrete indications of this motivation is the construction of AKSaray (architecturally one of the AKP's largest and most controversial acts) on the lands of the Atatürk Forest Farm. Whereas the Saray (Palace) was initially used as the prime minister's headquarters, it has since been given to the president, and while it was originally known as AKSaray, today it is referred to by the media, elites and people more broadly as the *Külliye*[11] of the Presidency or of Beştepe. Because it was constructed in a high-priority protected zone, it remains in a legal grey area, and symbolizes the ideological tension between the AKP and the party's opponents.

The AKP offers further compelling examples of the invention of national rituals, both through their reckoning with the republic and their drive to establish a new national identity and national mood. In this sense, the Conquest Festivities stand out, both symbolically and in terms of their organization. Erdoğan's effort to make the celebrations a mass phenomenon during his time as the mayor of Istanbul—while part of the Refah Party—were successful; under the AKP's reign, the Conquest began to be celebrated like an official holiday. Behind the transformation of these celebrations into a mass phenomenon lies not simply the enthusiasm shown by AKP's base, but a process that began with Kenan Doğulu's (a Turkish pop singer) free concert in 2005 at the Yedikule fortress. This move seems to have effectively turned the anniversary of the Conquest (which had previously chiefly appealed to Islamic conservatives and remained somewhat peripheral as a result) into something widely enjoyed: a major public event. Since 2005, the Conquest Festivities have become an ostentatious symbol of a narrative of national history, with the aesthetic assistance of resplendent light and sound shows, big budgets and performances by popular artists (Koyuncu, 2014, 95–101). Sibel Özbudun notes that with the Conquest Festivities the AKP has attempted to substitute the secular, Westernist republican imaginary with

[11] Külliye is an Ottoman-Turkish word for a complex of buildings associated with Turkish architecture centred on a mosque and managed within a single institution, often based on a charitable foundation and composed of a madrasa, a Dar al-Shifa (clinic), kitchens, bakery, Turkish bath, other buildings for various charitable services for the community and further annexes.

a new image—religious/Islamist, Ottomanist and heavily market-oriented (2015, 226). Further, the extraordinary significance attributed to them by those in power and the profound interest shown by the people grows by the day. The celebrations also imply that this new historical narrative of the nation was set in motion not with the declaration of the republic, but with the conquest of Christian Istanbul by the Muslim Ottomans. Furthermore, the fact that the celebrations take place on 29 May every year demonstrates the AKP's intention to reckon with the republic at the symbolic level, because the date overshadows ceremonies on 19 May that mark the day Mustafa Kemal set out for Samsun, triggering the War of Independence. As a type of social engineering mean to dismantle the official republican narrative of history (Özbudun, 2015, 224–227), the Conquest celebrations seem to have already taken the latter's place within the social field.

Relatedly, Istanbul (esteemed for its place in Ottoman-Islamic history by Islamic elites) has been heartily embraced throughout AKP rule as a constituent site of nostalgic interest in the Ottoman past. In this new period, we witness the reclaiming not of the Ankara of the republic, but of the Istanbul of the Ottoman Empire. Among the steps taken to turn Istanbul into a magnificent showcase, as the heritage and representative of a magnificent Ottoman past, one can list such spectacular initiatives as the construction of Marmaray, the Canal Istanbul Project, the third bridge across the Bosporous, and the third airport in the city (Ongur, 2015, 427). It is noteworthy that in the AKP period this hierarchy of value, which, between Ankara and Istanbul, prioritizes and advances the latter, is filled with loaded implications concerning settling scores with the republic. In short, Istanbul possesses great symbolic value as one of the major constituent spaces for a new national identity.

Other moves the AKP has made to further a Neo-Ottomanist narrative are the regular hosting of and widespread participation in conferences commemorating major Islamic thinkers such as Mehmed Akif and Necip Fazıl, and the creation of free courses in municipal public education centres to revive Ottoman-era arts like calligraphy and marbling. Efforts to make Neo-Ottomanism visible in society are driven not only by the government, but by the market too. Naming luxurious housing projects

OttomanLife[12] or *Cihannüma Villaları* (Pinnacle Villa),[13] so as to evoke the Ottoman Empire or give a sense of Ottoman grandeur and lifestyle; the rise of an Ottoman trend in the fashion sector and the staging of runway shows accompanied by Janissary marches—such is the speed with which the market has attached itself to the ethos of the 'new Turkey'.

At this point, it is worth noting the vital role of the media in facilitating the mass adoption of the AKP's Neo-Ottomanist wave. Indeed, particularly since 2010, when the party began pushing this narrative in earnest through popular culture, the media has functioned as a channel for circulating motifs and symbols that evoke the Ottoman Empire, whether through advertisements or the news, television dramas or entertainment shows. Three indications of how a Neo-Ottomanist narrative has been established and spread via the media are (a) the success of the 2012 film *Fetih 1453*, which holds the distinction of being the biggest budget and most watched Turkish film; (b) Erdoğan's visit to the set of *Diriliş Ertuğrul,* a series broadcast on TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation); and (c) the reception of Prime Minister Aliyev at AKSaray, accompanied by music from the same television series. Nevertheless, and thankfully, one can also cite instances where the media was not bound to the styles of remembering the Ottoman past that the AKP configure: the series *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (*Magnificent Century*), which began airing on Star TV in 2011 and for three years enjoyed high ratings and received dozens of awards, angered conservative nationalist groups, who complained to the media regulatory body RTÜK[14] about the emphasis on Kanuni Sultan Suleyman's *harem* experiences and on sexuality. The then-vice-Prime Minister Bülent Arınç initiated legal proceedings against the series and ensured that its creators received a warning from RTÜK. The criticism of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* also caught the attention of then Prime Minister Erdoğan:

> We have no such ancestor. We know no such Kanuni. We knew/recognized no such Sultan Suleyman. He spent thirty years of his life on horseback. In the palace, things didn't happen like you see in those series. We need to know and understand this well. And I publicly condemn the directors of

[12] See www.ottomanlife.net/index.php.

[13] See www.cihannuma.com.tr/. Cihannüma is a room with glass on each side in the form of a tower, usually in Ottoman architecture.

[14] Radio and Television Supreme Council.

> those series and those owners of television. And though we have warned the relevant parties about this matter, we are waiting on the courts to deliver the necessary decision.[15]

In this new period, the Ottoman Empire as the foundational component of national identity and a national mood is clearly depicted and glorified as a 'golden age'. Consequently, all symbolic representations that fall outside the selective readings of those in power that highlight the Ottoman sultans' loyalty to Islam, their heroism and morality, are prone to conservative reactions. Public discussions during *Muhteşem Yüzyıl's* time on air offer the most concrete example of this. Ironically, this series in fact increased people's interest in the Ottoman Empire (Aydos, 2013, 8–14).[16]

Here, it is crucial to note that social media is among the most visible and most powerful channels through which the Neo-Ottomanist wave is articulated. On Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages set up by AKP supporters such as *Osmanlı torunları, AK Gençlik, Osmanlı 1453* or *Ecdat Osmanlı,* young people's interest in the Ottoman past is on full display. Particularly noteworthy is imagery depicting President Erdoğan alongside Fatih Sultan Mehmed or Abdülhamid II, or portraying him as the saviour of a people. For instance, text on an image combining the portraits of Sultan Abdülhamid and Erdoğan declares, 'The 90-year-long advertising break of a 600-year-long film is over, we're coming!', heralding the return of the Ottomans in 2023. Erdoğan is described as the last Ottoman sultan, accompanied by the phrase 'My [founding] father, we follow in your footsteps' ('*Atam İzindeyiz!*').[17] In these images, derogatory, spiteful and revanchist language is directed towards the republican regime and towards Mustafa Kemal. On YouTube, there

[15] 'Başbakan Erdoğan'dan Muhteşem Yüzyıl'a Ağır Eleştiri', *Hürriyet*, 25 Nov. 2012. See http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/basbakan-erdogandan-muhtesem-yuz-yila-agir-elestiri-22009998.

[16] Since 2010 TRT has played a major role in spreading and naturalizing the narrative of a grand past and a new Neo-Ottomanist construction and feeling of national identity through tele-dramas that bring to the screen the splendid periods of the Ottoman Empire. TRT continues to showcase big-budget dramas in this vein, including *Bir Zamanlar Osmanlı, Osmanlı Tokadı, Filinta* and *Payitaht Abdülhamid*.

[17] Anyone encountering this phrase in Turkey would immediately associate it with Ataturk and the slogans of Republican history—thus it is an interesting symbolic redeployment.

are several videos which create myths about otherworldly connections between Fatih Sultan Mehmed and Erdoğan.[18] On the same platform, alternative music groups like Osmanlı-Rap Tim or Ayyıldız Tim release songs loaded with Ottoman references.[19] In short, social media, as a mechanism that allows narratives to be expressed through different technical means and in a particularly affecting manner, is a crucial tool in creating emotional responses to Neo-Ottomanism.

The adoption and glorification of Neo-Ottomanism by society has, to an unprecedented degree in the past decade especially, made it possible for this narrative to be bolstered by various supposedly independent political organizations. Since the election of 7 June 2015, an organization named the Ottoman Hearths, which has been found responsible for attacks on the offices of the People's Democratic Party (HDP) and the newspaper *Hürriyet,* have been perhaps the most visible of these. Yet this group has a rather short history. They began by putting out a journal of the same name in 2005 and in 2009 set up an organization 'with the aim of researching, recognizing, and publicizing Ottoman culture, manners, and customs'. Through youth organizations, women's groups, university and provincial chairs, they function as a civil initiative that calls to mind the structure of the Idealist Hearths (Ülkü Ocakları, or Grey Wolves). The number of Ottoman Hearths agencies opened in provinces in Turkey and in Europe grows by the day. Although following the acts of 7 June the AKP has denied any ties, organic or formal, with the Ottoman Hearths, announcements on the latter's website speak often and openly of owing their existence to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and a number of AKP politicians have paid visits to this group's branches, adding weight to interpretations that the Ottoman Hearths act as the 'palace's paramilitary power'.

What I call the spectre of Ottomanism has been reincarnated in social and cultural life in Turkey since the 2000s. Examples of its re-emergence are not limited to those mentioned above. Today, through symbols and discourses gathered from selective readings and superficial characterizations of the Ottoman past, Neo-Ottomanism has, for the first time in the

[18] See for instance, Ferdi Yılmaz. (2012, June 21). *29.MUCİZESİ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan ve Fatih Sultan Mehmet'in inanılmaz kader bağı* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7z3dA4duGx0.

[19] See for instance, FP Cesur. (2010, Dec.11). *Osmanlı Tim Rep Müziği* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUiwRAktPpo.

history of the Republic of Turkey, transcended the narrow confines of political debates and taken hold at the very heart of everyday life. Both by the elites and by the people, it has been transformed into a powerful instrument for a particular kind of ideological and emotional performance. A counter-hegemonic memory of national belonging, one that glorifies the Ottoman past and activates the emotions of collective pride and *jouissance*, has taken the place of the republican legacy that was hegemonic for nearly a century. During the AKP rule, Neo-Ottomanism has functioned as an engine for the transition to a new collective and national emotional phase. Furthermore, it finds a receptive audience far beyond the AKP and its supporters. Its spread, and its contagion, necessitates an emotional snapshot of this very moment.

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CHAPTER 4

From Victimization to Omnipotence: The Pathos of Erdoğan as a Constituent Symbol of the Neo-Ottomanist Narrative

In order to analyse the emotions that constitute the Neo-Ottomanist narrative—that stick to it, spill from it and spread to the people—I will begin with the leader. Erdoğan has played a key role in the transformation of Neo-Ottomanism into a national habitus through his biography, the tradition from which he emerged and the symbolic language and actions he has enacted as a leader throughout the AKP's reign. The key to his success lies in his activation of the emotions of the people. Through speeches and symbolic acts, he appeals to the desires, ambitions and needs of his supporters. This chapter aims to reveal through which symbolic sites Erdoğan has become a constituent symbolic figure of Neo-Ottomanism. It takes as its starting assumption that Neo-Ottomanism is, before all else, an alternative narrative of national identity which emerged in opposition to republican history and the narrative of collective identity and history it preached. I will propose that Neo-Ottomanism hails the emotions of a collective Islamic conservative subject, with ontological *ressentiment* as the basis of this group's sense of identity. My basic claim is that, throughout the history of the Republic of Turkey, Neo-Ottomanism has appealed to collective subjects on the political right. It addresses their emotions, passions and desires; it *enchants* them. All of the emotions I will traverse while examining Erdoğan's exploits correspond to the emotions of a broader base. *Ressentiment* is a crucial element in the identity formation of not only Islamic conservatives, but of all who have

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historically adopted, felt or experienced the binary of elites/the people, whose very identities have been constructed upon the loss and forgetting of the imperial past in the republic's history. In this chapter, I will trace the emotional sources of the remarkable rise of Neo-Ottomanism and Erdoğan and the historical-emotional needs of the people whose size and ideological borders have gradually expanded.

* * *

Leadership is generally taken to be a status shaped by a person's exceptional intelligence, knowledge, capability and character traits. In fact, what primarily counts is whether there is a collective willing to recognize a leader as such. The support of the people makes a leader the symbol of a certain tradition, group or collective; for this reason, leaders summon emotions and try to mobilize them wherever possible, using the biographical details, personality traits, actions and discursive strategies that make up their public persona (Edelman, 1967, 73–74). In order for a symbolic figure to become a collective's point of recognition and identification, they must meet the particular psychological and emotional needs of that collective. In order for a leader to become a symbol, a sizable group must be able to see their past, present and future in the leader's personality, speeches and actions. A sense of collective identity is garnered, and the emotions that are the key components of this identity are fostered by the leader's presence. Consequently, a leader's power comes from his ability to respond to particular emotional needs of the people, and the extent to which he is able to ensure their identification with him. Murray Edelman asks, 'what symbol can be more reassuring than the incumbent of a high position who knows what to do and is willing to act, especially when others are bewildered and alone?' (1967, 76), underscoring the psychological and emotional needs that a leader addresses.

This brief prologue on how a leader can become a symbol of an idea, a stance, a tradition and an emotional climate paves the way of our enquiry into how Erdoğan was able to secure and build on his popular support by addressing certain emotions. The answer to this question will reveal much about the narratives of the past upon which Neo-Ottomanism has been built.

4.1 Wounds of the Past: The Legacy of Victimization Conveyed Through the Cult of the Leader

Enquiring how Neo-Ottomanism has become an alternative narrative of national identity and a new form of 'nationalist-conservatism' (Bora, 2017, 408) first requires us to ask, to what does this narrative represent an alternative? This necessitates, in turn, an analysis of Turkey's multi-layered political and emotional history. Neo-Ottomanism has been constructed through a transfer to the people, under Erdoğan's leadership, of (a) a narrative of victimization claimed for nearly a century by the Turkish right more generally and by Islamic conservatives in particular and (b) the emotional sites that accompany this narrative. Erdoğan adopts the narrative of past victimization through his language and actions, which constantly urge the people to remember this past.

Açıkel argues that the narrative of victimization functions in Turkey as an ideological discourse that extends to almost all branches of the Turkish right. This story of the aggrieved is the 'most important ideological system', developed as a 'strategy of defence, resistance, and articulation' by people who 'met with social, cultural, and imaginary rootlessness in the face of the violence of late capitalization and rapid modernization' (1996, 155). The narrative of victimization harbours many varied discursive components, 'from Turkish nationalism to Islamic motifs, from the glorification of pre-capitalist values to a semi-communitarian social understanding, from anti-cosmopolitan tendencies to an idealized, nostalgic understanding of history, from a skeptical sense of the world to the individual manifestations of oppression' (Açıkel, 1996, 155). And indeed, the discourse of victimization played a vital role in the establishment of an Islamist narrative and identity. What the AKP did was to revitalize this narrative. Furthermore, as I shall detail below, it is the shared language of the ruling elites with subjugated, traditional, conservative or rural roots, as well as the people who support them (Yılmaz, 2017, 2–4). The logic of pain in this language persists by calling on an archive of oppression, which is flexibly called to service as needed.

The power of the victimization discourse derives from its continuous transmission and dissemination via societal channels of communication and societal institutions (Bar-Tal et al., 2009, 247). By creating emotionally laden narratives around key situations and by repeating these narratives, a leader can 'set the tone for groups' to make sense of what has

occurred (Matsumoto et al., 2012, 2). Although Erdoğan's political life appears to be a 'success' story, at nearly every step he has turned to a narrative of victimization. The tradition from which he emerged is characterized by a pathos that produces a political and social identity based on the 'ideology of relentless aggrievement' (Parlak & Uz, 2016, 69). Erdoğan's fundamental success has been to use his position of power to spread this mood to the people, like a 'thickness in the air' (Ahmed, 2004, 10), thereby creating an ever-expanding source of legitimacy and support. Viewed in a historical light, this narrative appears multi-partite, multi-focal and multi-referential, but rather monolithic in terms of its emotional references. Rather than a paradox, this should be interpreted as a quality, even a prowess, that endows the narrative of victimization with strength and continuity.

When he relays the legacy of the past to people in the present, Erdoğan constructs an 'us': an 'us' that is foremost recalled as a subject who has been scorned, punished and suppressed because of their religious and cultural identity. The agents of these victimizations constitute the foci of malice, as they are considered tyrants who injure (yet constitute) us. In Erdoğan's political discourse, this focus has never been singular but is always open to new articulations.[1] In the context of narratives of the past, victimization claims consist of two fundamental and interrelated, yet slippery, transitive and overlapping targets: the experience of encountering the West after the loss of the empire, and the Republican People's Party (CHP) and its mentality.[2]

4.2 Distant Past, Chosen Trauma: Humiliation, Envy and Disgust in the Encounter with the West

'The past is a place of a multiplicity, waiting always to be discovered and rewritten' (Özmen, 2017, 19). To one who selectively remembers his past as a poetics of oppression, history is viewed 'from a perspective of dissipation, loss, and painful defeat'. When the oppressed looks

[1] On the moments of victimization that permeate Erdoğan's contemporary political discourse and the multi-referentiality of experiences of victimization, see Parlak and Uz (2016). 'Mağdur/Mazlumdan Mağrur/Muktedire 30 Mart Seçimleri'. *Düşünen Siyaset*, 30.

[2] CHP mentality is a term Erdoğan often uses in a derogatory/negative sense, to refer to an oppressive, militaristic and elitist worldview.

back, he sees his own 'tragic destruction; the decline of imperial ambitions one by one' (Açıkel, 1996, 165). The feeling of loss is manifold: loss of security, loss of self-confidence, loss of a sense of community and belonging, loss of power, loss of hope (Hoggett et al., 2013, 573). Any experience of loss is embraced, sanctified and symbolized at present: transformed into rigid cultural narratives and the identity assumes a constitutive role. The concept of trauma can serve as a salutary starting point in revealing how this experience of loss has influenced identity construction among Erdoğan's supporters. Trauma—which in clinical terms refers to 'an extremely intense and devastating event leading to certain symptoms in the patient' (Cvetkovich, 2003, 19)—entered social sciences through the experience of the Holocaust. For Maruska Svašek, trauma is not only a medical or psychiatric phenomenon but a social and political one too: the interpretation of culturally and historically specific suffering. Beyond simple recollection, it is a mental representation of an event that has occurred in the past. It contains facts, but also imagined memories, intense emotions and a defence instinct (2005, 195–196). Collective traumas 'cannot be truly experienced unless situated within a narrative framework' (Bora, 2010, 224). The remembering and narrating of trauma play a key role in turning experiences of collective victimization into stories and translating these narratives into political discourse. In this way, people who have not experienced trauma directly, can also be traumatized. Moreover, traumatic wounds constitute an emotional mode, ethos and group culture. This is something different from, and greater than, the sum of individual wounds. As a specific form of memory, trauma is also productive of emotion (Yıldız, 2021, 15). A narrative of the traumatic past not only establishes collective identity, it strengthens it (Svašek, 2005, 205). It creates an imaginary sense of togetherness between those who have experienced the same pain, or those who see themselves as heirs to that pain, and those who relive it by remembering it. The language of collective victimization is established and nourished by the transformation of chosen traumas into narratives and always harbours a demand for compensation (Svašek, 2005, 196).

This understanding of chosen trauma can be as misleading as it is salutary. It may prevent us from seeing that the historical sites of Erdoğan's narrative of victimization are structured in a multi-faceted and at times variable way, and are always open to new articulations. Therefore, in addition to chosen trauma, the idea put forward by Ann Cvetkovich of an archive of emotion (2003, 17) may also prove useful. Central to the

story that I will focus on is not so much the fixity, singularity or veracity of traumatic experiences, but the emotions that are evoked when traumatic experiences are narrated and remembered. Rather than drawing on individual traumas, Erdoğan's politics is about bringing together stories that will feed, strengthen and fill the existing emotional archive and meet contextual needs. Approaching Erdoğan's narrative of the past in light of this concept of trauma, I will be able to consider the poetics he has relayed as the sum of stories selected from an archive of oppression, as well as to appreciate that the more crowded the archive is, the larger his audience becomes.

* * *

In Erdoğan's language, the narrative of aggrievement (which began with moves towards modernization and westernization during the Tanzimat period) is based on a historical experience of loss: the loss of the empire. This loss enables Erdoğan to set up an oppressed 'us':

> *My dear brothers and sisters, since the Tanzimat Reform Era, that is, for the last 200 years, it has not been possible for some matters in this country to be handled freely, confidently and courageously. The subject of religion, which is the subject of almost every issue in Turkey in one way or another, the focal point in some way, could not be put on the agenda in a way that was objective, impartial, free from fear and from social pressure. Far from discussing matters of religion freely, religion and religious people have been systematically subjected to all manner of criticism, insults and contempt for nearly 200 years.*[3]

Here, Erdoğan is complaining that, moves towards Westernization, which were set in motion before the establishment of the republic, were transformed into an attack on Muslimness and on Islam as a religion. By stressing that Westernization opened the door to the expulsion of religion and religious people from the public sphere and to their humiliation, he cites a historical and emotional experience. The turning point of the chosen and perhaps founding trauma of the cultural and political tradition from which he himself comes, lies at this historical juncture. In this

[3] Haber Güncesi. (2014, December 8). *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 5. Din Şurası Konuşması* [Video]. YouTube. www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6ijVRf1h9g.

sense, the encounter with the West constitutes the first experience of the emotional archive of the oppressed.

However, the experience of Westernization in Turkey is framed not only in terms of attempts to exclude religion from the public sphere—that is, as a trauma experienced by Islamic conservatives—but as a deep wound at the very foundation of Turkish national identity. The Westernization process was, for everyone, 'wounded from the very beginning', because the Ottoman elites have historically and to this day 'compared themselves with the West only when they were already defeated' (Koçak, 1996, 99). Orhan Koçak is quite right in his objection to how thinkers who have focused on the East–West issue have assumed that it concerns primarily intellectuals. After all, ideas about the experience of Westernization have been processed and received mainly through the emotions that accompany the encounter with the West. It is no coincidence that Peyami Safa regarded the East–West issue as the 'greatest torture of the Turkish spirit'. Westernization is essentially an acceptance of the modern Turkish subject's 'backwardness'; any such attempt towards it was therefore fraught from the outset. This traumatic modal shift manifested itself as a sense of helplessness and inadequacy, and a tendency towards immaturity for both Tanzimat elites who advocated Westernization and the agents of Kemalist modernization processes (Koçak, 1996, 95–100).

The manifestation of the wound of Westernization in a collective that has essentially built its identity upon religion is much deep.[4] In Erdoğan's discourse, religion is a superior element that Westernization has excluded from history, though, he argues, religion gives history its meaning (Baştürk, 2014, 130). Religiosity also holds within it a power that reinforces the oppressed subject's sense of rightfulness in the face of injustice (Parlak & Uz, 2016, 75). This experience, which Erdoğan

[4] Of course, it is impossible to establish a continuous link between Erdoğan's narrative of the two-hundred-year long experience of Westernization as one of pain and suffering, and his de facto attitude towards the West and Westernization during his time in power. This point exemplifies the framework that I conceptualize here as the 'archive of emotion' (Cvetkovich 2003), as well as its pragmatic nature, which makes it open to articulation and change. After all, as soon as the AKP came to power, Erdoğan underscored that he had removed his 'National Vision garb', so to speak, declaring full EU membership his goal (Bora, 2017, 479). However, the arrogance that emerged particularly after the 2010 constitutional referendum, when he spoke of raising religious generations to create the perception that 'the nationalist "essence" has given way' (Bora, 2017, 480–481), as well as the idea of returning to the roots, brought with it a re-articulation of anti-Western discourses.

resorts to as a kind of founding trauma, sets the tone of his discourse. It also reveals a feeling of humiliation that has arisen due to a much broader experience of encounter (Mendible, 2005, 1) and exposure. Erdoğan claims that, for two centuries, political actors have treated religion and religious people with contempt and accused them of ignorance. As a result, the dominant emotion in Erdoğan's discourse is related to a sense of sociability inclusive of religiosity. Erdoğan does not name being insulted and despised as an experience specific only to clergy or elites. In his discourse, the *millet* (nation) that was subject to Westernization was also treated the same way, detached from its cultural essence and denigrated as ignorant. This sense of humiliation creates a loss of self-confidence and a sense of inferiority in a collective subject already wounded and defeated by the loss of empire.

Humiliation is among the most difficult emotions to define. It appears when a person or group claiming superiority dehumanizes others or suppresses, excludes and weakens various components of their identity. As such, the emergence of a sense of humiliation depends, first and foremost, on an experience or encounter (Mendible, 2005, 1). Citing dehumanization as the most powerful tool of humiliation, Avishai Margalit argues that one of its effects is the creation of a rift in the self-perception and self-esteem of humiliated people or groups. Those who feel humiliated have to cope with a form of rejection or disregard on the symbolic and social level (1996, 144–146). Humiliation is therefore an act of disempowerment; it renders those exposed to it passive but conscious recipients of the attitude (Frevert, 2020, 3). Humiliation can also be collectively experienced, especially in cases of colonization, cultural imperialism or discrimination.

In his study exploring Muslim societies' experiences with Westernization, Daryush Shayegan analyses how humiliating encounters splinter the self-perception of the Muslim subject. He thus analytically shifts the framing away from a concern with how such encounters generate a Western outlook in people exposed to the West. The equivalent of this experience—which he terms cultural schizophrenia—in the Islamic world is an obsessive refusal that the subject, aware of his own backwardness develops to protect his essence from the effects of the West, all the while with great astonishment and a sense of admiration that he cannot hide. In both emotional states, the West is an earthly source of evil that will seize us from ourselves, refute the deep-rooted values our history has bestowed upon us and imprison us in a perpetual cultural and political slavery (1992, 3–4). A feeling of alienation, triggered by the appeal of

the new and the unknown that radically impacts one's life, creates a split in the Muslim subject:

> *It's something foreign and strange to me, but something I can't avoid, something that disrupts my habits and holds me back in such a way that I can't escape. But at the same time, it seems as if there is something hidden inside that seduces me, attracts me, that I think I can't be without no matter what I do.* (Shayegan, 1992, 5)

Behind Erdoğan's recollection and reminder of the encounter with the West as an experience of humiliation lays a concern with the dignity of autochthony, which has allegedly been humiliated by the 'grandeur' of the West. This is a concern that one sees quite clearly in the words of writer Cemil Meriç: 'Tanzimat is not the conquest of a civilization, it is the surrender of honour (*ırz*)' (Gürbilek, 2007, 87). It would be reductive to claim that the humiliation engendered by the encounter with the West is solely reserved for Islamic conservatives; it is a feeling that a broader subject who makes up the remnants of empire, from the elites to the people, experiences to varying degrees. At the same time, Meriç's emphasis on honour implies that the feeling of inferiority experienced in the encounter with the West leads to a 'loss of masculinity and dignity' (Gürbilek, 2016, 78), or, to put it more bluntly, to 'feminization'. Indeed, humiliation is directly related to a particular gender regime. Especially in cultures where femininity is naturalized as inferior, the feeling of powerlessness that arises from being humiliated is associated with femininity (Mendible, 2005, 10). Meyda Yeğenoğlu is quite right to point out that sexuality has always been an important symbolic tool in encounters between the West and the East: 'Sexual difference is vital in the establishment of the colonial subject position' (2003, 10). In Erdoğan's language, one can certainly sense that he associates Westernization with a kind of castration and loss of masculinity especially in the minds of those who resist it. This 'narcissistic wound' (Gürbilek, 2016, 81–82)—which was caused by an encounter with the West, and the feeling of having to define and reconstruct one's identity in relation to it while simultaneously feeling inadequate before it—seems to be both a motif that Erdoğan never ceases to remember and a spark to the memory of others. In the remnants of the Great Ottoman Empire, dreams of conquering the West have been replaced with the reality of 'exposure to the cultural colonization of the West' (Ahıska, 2009, 1049). While the disintegration of the

empire was in itself a traumatic experience, the powerlessness, oppression and fear of feminization wrought by the spectre of the West seem to have compounded the trauma of the loss.

The feeling of humiliation is among the most potent and productive emotional sites of both Erdoğan's personal history and the collective subject he addresses. As I will discuss later, the phrase 'He can't even be a *muhtar*' (the smallest administrative unit in Turkey), which made headlines after Erdoğan was handed a prison sentence for reading a poem on 28 February,[5] is a motif of humiliation (and revenge) frequently articulated by his supporters. Indeed, Erdoğan's periodic hosting of *muhtar*s at the Presidential Palace can be read as a revenge-driven manifestation of this motif.[6] As the smallest administrative unit, the institution of the *muhtar* is a potent reference point for the emotions Erdoğan wants to arouse. Erdoğan reflects a particular mood of both the members of the tradition he came from and a *millet* who feels devalued and humiliated by the West and Westernization. In the speech quoted above, he goes on to say: '[…] we have struggled to instil self-confidence in this nation, and we have self-confidence now. We have struggled to instil courage in this nation, and we have courage now. We want to instil self-confidence and courage not only in our nation, but also in our neighbours, our region, and all humanity'.

This mission, which he considers holy, involves re-establishing the honour of a nation that has been trampled, its dignity destroyed and its power lost. The redemptive mission is Erdoğan's hallmark. Indeed, with the foreign-policy realignment brought about by his Neo-Ottomanist vision, Erdoğan's frequent 'defiance' in the face of the West reveals how feelings of humiliation can be transformed into a desire for compensation and redress. This has ensured Erdoğan a growing cult status among his supporters in Turkey and in the eyes of Muslim countries.

Of course, humiliation is not the only emotional site in this narrative of oppression. I have said that the encounter between Muslim societies and the West creates a schizophrenic Muslim subject, who simultaneously

[5] 'Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Sustum Sustum Şimdi Açıklıyorum', *Milliyet*, 5 April 2017, see. http://www.milliyet.com.tr/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-sus-tum-siyaset-2426970/.

[6] In the next subsection, I will discuss in detail how, through a range of symbolic actions and discourses, Erdoğan reminds the people of the rift that purportedly formed between Westernizing/secularist elites and the public during the Westernization process.

admires and devotedly rejects it's Western 'other'. In *Wounded Consciousness*, Shayegan describes this as an oscillation between fascination and disgust (2002, 27). Thus, another key emotional site in the transformation of the experience of Westernization into a deep wound for both elites and the people is envy—with all its attendant fascination and admiration, anxiety and disgust. Martha Nussbaum defines envy as a painful emotion in which a person focuses on the good fortune and privileges of others and continuously compares one's own situation to theirs. The envious adopt a hostile attitude towards the envied person or group, because they do not have (or have lost) what they possess. Envy is thus a feeling associated with the lack of a desired status (2013, 339–340). Of course, this deprivation brings with it an irresistible desire to possess. The envious become unable to take their eyes off what they do not have. For this reason, the intensity of their hostility grows over time.

To understand what envy does to us, or what we do out of envy, let me compare it with jealousy, which would seem to be quite similar to envy, but in many respects possesses differences. Both emotions are characterized by hostility, but jealousy is more often described in terms of a fear of possible loss. It is therefore a feeling that functions through an impulse to preserve what already exists, what one already has. The jealous person perceives their opponent as a threat to their own existence or possessions. The jealous subject's main desire is thus self-protection from the harm an opponent may inflict. Jealousy is a satisfying emotion, whereas envy can hardly ever be satisfied, for the object of envy is superiority itself. The envious person thinks and knows that they will never fully achieve what they envy, and they feel hopeless and helpless in the face of this knowledge (Nussbaum 2013, 340). In terms of the subject identity stoked by Erdoğan's articulation of Neo-Ottomanism, the envious are fed by the feeling that they have already lost what they once had (the empire); they experience this loss as irreparable.

The first condition for envy to emerge is a lack of self-confidence. The (collective) subject, having already suffered a loss, no longer believes in their own worth, nor that they can achieve anything worthwhile. In such circumstances, the envious person does not think that salvation from the situation they are in will produce any constructive alternative other than pure hostility (Nussbaum 2013, 343).

A predominantly negative image of the West and Westernization echoes in the story Erdoğan tells, particularly when it comes to foreign

policy. He expresses a feeling of envy born from the experience of encountering the West and adopts the hostile attitude this emotion has created in the Turkish subject. Envy is accompanied by a defensive impulse, because the intense desire for what is foreign and superior to us is accompanied by the wish to demonstrate our difference from it, to avoid it, in order to preserve our essence, our soul. In the tradition in which Erdoğan was raised, the West exists as a kind of object of disgust, if not because of its advancement but because of its spirit and culture, as it threatens to permeate our essence, our quintessence and destroy it.

Disgust stems from experiences of acquaintance and unfamiliarity and is an emotion accompanied by a fear of invasion. We attribute a sort of natural 'wickedness' to the object of our disgust (Ahmed, 2014, 107–108). The precondition for its emergence is the physical imminence of the object of disgust. The remote and unfamiliar are rarely objects of disgust; only when the invading objects approach us and threaten to touch and contaminate us do feelings of disgust arise (Ahmed, 2014, 108). Disgust is therefore mainly associated with contact and the uneasiness that this contact might lead to contamination and the loss of our 'selves'. The fear of being captured, even metaphorically, by the object of our disgust also elicits our anger towards it (Ahmed, 2014, 116). However, like envy, disgust can be accompanied by interest and desire. Even while sickening us, objects of disgust attract our attention. We constantly want a reaffirming second look and often cannot take our eyes off the offending object (Ahmed, 2014, 109).

Sara Ahmed proposes that we think of disgust alongside the notion of abjection, as introduced by Kristeva—a concept that describes the inferior, miserable, excluded and expelled. Quoting Kristeva (1982, 1), Ahmed notes that disgust is the most severe response to a 'threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable' (2014, 86). More intriguing still is Kristeva's idea that anything that threatens us must already be within us. This sense of interiority poses a threat to us precisely because it may eliminate our difference from the other (2014, 112). Indeed, in the Islamic conservative tradition, the nation is constantly assigned the duty of preserving its tradition and roots. According to Tanıl Bora and Necmi Erdoğan (2013), the assumption (on the part of conservative elites) underlying this honourable mission is that the nation is childlike and naive in character, open to outside influence and the contamination of foreign contact. The nation is always perceived by Islamic conservatives

as a threat in itself, inherently untrustworthy because of its vulnerability to contamination and corruption. Accordingly, the disgust of Islamic conservative elites towards that which comes from the West and does not belong to 'us' has turned into a kind of self-disgust. Conjuring an image of the West as the primordial polluting evil goes hand in hand with the threat of contamination. What makes this threat so close and unbearable to us is its familiarity, its presence and its interiority. Indeed, Erdoğan's emphasis on the nation and the will of the nation in almost all of his speeches is related to his motivation to eliminate this perpetual threat, and to protect 'us' from ourselves.

Of course, one should keep in mind the fictional quality of the West in Erdoğan's imagination. In the ideological discourse of the AKP, the gap between 'us' and 'the West' is constantly growing and closing, oscillating between the fear that the West may spoil our essence by encroaching even on our inner worlds, and, at times, the desire echoed in the words 'we are actually more Western than the West'. Both the scale of this gap and the meanings attributed to the West are constructed entirely within an ideological narrative, to the point where it is scarcely clear whether the trauma in Erdoğan's retelling is due to the loss of empire, or the experience of encountering the West. The ambiguity regarding the source of the trauma that led to the establishment of an emotional archive of humiliation, envy and disgust, meanwhile, leads Erdoğan to underscore the fundamental source of the apparent historical persecution, the immemorial perpetrator, the real locus of evil that made us who we are, the concrete and ever-present enemy that poses the greatest threat to existence since the Republic of Turkey was founded: the CHP.

4.3 The West Within: The CHP as Eternal Victimizer and an Object of Hatred, Anxiety and Anger

The birth of modern Turkey saw a series of moves to eliminate and suppress Islamic groups. In embracing the West and Westernization, ruling elites abandoned the Ottoman-Islamic past to a kind of collective forgetting. The construction of national identity upon the establishment of the Republic can be read as a 'war of emplacement' waged 'against the Islamic discourse, the building block of Ottoman consciousness'. The loser in this war was 'a Kemalist unconscious consisting of Tradition/

East/Islam/Ottoman' (Yörük, 2009, 309–315). However much of the primary effort of the Kemalist Westernization process was to address and overcome 'a feeling of collective oppression and inferiority, a founding trauma experienced as an injury and crush' by both the elite and the nation during the disintegration of the empire (Yörük, 2009, 314). In Erdoğan's discourse, the most identifiable source of victimization is the CHP, the political actors of the founding years of the Republic.

> *During the 1940s, an open war was waged in Turkey against the millet, its values and what the millet held to be sacred. The doors of mosques in the country were locked, or they were converted into barns, warehouses and museums. Learning, teaching and reading the Qur'an were forbidden. The call to prayer was translated in a way that departed from the original. All manner of personal freedoms were restricted. The construction of a standard citizen type was sought, a standard structure of mind, from beards and moustaches to clothing. Some citizens were seen as acceptable, while others were labelled as threats.*[7]

In Erdoğan's discourse, the most identifiable source of feelings of humiliation and disgust is the CHP. In his imagination and language, the CHP, which he calls the West 'within' us, is the locus of evil; it purportedly attacked the essence of the *millet*, suppressed its styles of worship and ways of dress and tried to bring it into line. In many of his speeches, Erdoğan mentions that mosques were turned into barns and warehouses. This claim reveals the extent of the humiliation of the *millet*'s values and what it holds sacred by using one of the most extreme and hurtful examples to conjure a past oppression. At the same time, Erdoğan's narrative of victimization stems from a cultural basis. Religion as a component of daily life is mentioned as a part of this culture. It is thus no coincidence that when describing the establishment of the Republic and the construction of national identity, Erdoğan talks about the suppression of forms of dress, the cultural and quotidian equivalent of the suppression of religion and its exclusion from the public sphere. The constant repetition of these examples creates another strong emotional reaction against the agent who alienates, excludes and humiliates the oppressed subject: hatred.

[7] Subaşı 94. (2013, April 18). *Başbakan Erdoğan. AK Parti 4. Olağan Büyük Kongresi Konuşması* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lBYT4PrpyA.

Hatred is an intense emotion, always directed against something or someone. In this sense, hatred has been described as a rather economic emotion; it never resides in a single thing or person, but wanders between objects (Ahmed, 2014, 59–68). Erdoğan's emphasis on the mentality of the CHP, which has become a buzzword, fits into this economic structure of hatred. According to him, the cause of past and present grievances is not the CHP alone, but all social actors—from elites to bureaucrats, capitalists to ordinary people—who embody the perceptions, thoughts and actions preached by the CHP.

> *In this country, the elites, those who hold political, military and state power have always taken from the millet, they did not hold the millet in esteem, they never believed in the foresight, prudence, breadth and depth of the millet, they never respected it. But we come from the millet, we are the millet itself.*[8]

Elites—to whom Erdoğan has referred as an object of hatred throughout virtually his entire leadership, and whom he blames for humiliating the nation and castigates as 'foreign' to its essence—play a crucial role both in drawing the boundaries between us/them[9] and in determining the direction and prevalence of the hatred. This rhetoric has been described by Tanıl Bora as 'national will-ist populism' and is based on the dichotomy of the elites and *millet* is (Bora, 2017, 479). It derives its strength and staying power from the feeling of hatred that it nurtures and reproduces. After all, the endurance of hatred depends on the fact that there is always someone out there to threaten our existence. Even though hatred wants to destroy its object, it also wants to touch it, to be in contact with it. The dichotomy the elites and *millet* is, from this perspective, a highly functional device. Elites who have adopted the mentality of the CHP exist both in the past and the present, and therefore pose a threat to the future.

Ahmed notes that the opposite of hatred might not be love but indifference: indifference implies that we do not need that which we are indifferent to, whereas hatred needs its object in order to be sustained.

[8] 'AK Parti Grup Toplantısı', *Milliyet*, 8 July 2014, see https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/ankara/ak-parti-grup-toplantisi-10283665.

[9] For a discussion of the central role that binary oppositions play in Erdoğan's rhetoric, see Biliç, E.E. 2015, 'Kötü Eski, İyi Yeni Retoriğinde İkili Karşıtlıklar', in *Marka Takva Tuğra*, pp. 192–198. Evrensel Press.

Hatred is caused by the presence of another, but then becomes a feeling that belongs to us and yet, its existence is subject to the constant presence of another person. That is why hatred always appears as an emotion with the capacity to produce its own object as a defense against hurt (2014, 59–70).

Hatred arises during the negotiation of boundaries between us and others. This feeling—which develops when others act in a way that poses a threat to our existence—accordingly contains within it a certain defence instinct. Erdoğan's frequent self-identification with the *millet* crucially enables the drawing of a sharp boundary between the *millet* and those who despise and oppress it, and creates the sense that it needs protection from being 'occupied' or 'contaminated' (Ahmed, 2014, 70–73).[10]

Hatred is most present in Erdoğan's language when he speaks of Adnan Menderes and his execution, which occurred at a moment when the existential threat of invasion was at its peak. He recalls this memory as an ossified trauma in the minds of the *millet*. Erdoğan mentions Menderes in every speech wherein he talks about the pains of the past, casting him as a 'man of the *millet*' like himself—though their fates differ—and his service to and the feeling he aroused in the *millet*.

> *The late Adnan Menderes ruled this country for ten years, put an end to oppression, put an end to persecution. He put an end to insults, discrimination, and an arrogant state. It is the CHP who banned the original call to prayer, and Menderes restored it to its original. The late Menderes lifted pressures on teachers of the Qur'an. He called for industry and he paved the way for investments; agriculture, he said, and he gave life to agriculture across Turkey. He built cities. He built bridges, dams, roads, schools.*[11]

Menderes's execution after the 27 May military coup occupies a unique place in Erdoğan's speeches. It is a burning memory, meant to mobilize hatred and expose the perpetrators: 'Who looked on, and encouraged the

[10] These determinations evoke the feeling of disgust towards the West and Westernization mentioned in the previous section. Recalling Cemil Meriç's description of Westernization as a relinquishing of honour, one can see how the moments of victimization mentioned correspond to emotional reactions that are intertwined and in constant dialogue.

[11] Parti Mitingleri. (2014, March 3). *Başbakan Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Ak Parti Muğla Mitingi* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6Z4k5GHLEs.

execution of the deceased Menderes and his friends? CHP, that's you!'[12] The CHP plays a remarkably functional role here, because in this equation, Menderes is identified with the *millet* and the *millet* with Erdoğan. Erdoğan's ongoing identification with Menderes, especially during the first years of his rule, generates an extremely strong emotional response in his audience. Menderes has been turned into the most potent symbol of oppression, humiliation, suppression and the fear of destruction in Erdoğan's discourse. He has become a device to transmit and sustain hatred towards those considered the perpetrators of his ill-treatment and execution.

Before 2010, it was no coincidence that the historical figure with whom Erdoğan most identified was Menderes. The memory of Menderes and his tragic end functioned as a threat that shadowed Erdoğan and his supporters as he attempted to establish and consolidate his power. Thus, the object of hatred he named at every opportunity was also the object of threat. Remembering Menderes kept alive the fear that the past could be repeated in the present. This traumatic experience took root as an insurmountable threat.

As Brian Massumi has noted, the future holds more potential than the past and the present. He claims that the perception of a threat stems from just this excess—the possibility of what may come. A threat always calls to mind uncertainty, because it contains the unprocessed remnants of danger. In this respect, the perception of threat has a unique existence, an ontology unlike any other emotion: it is 'fear as foreshadowing', the fear of a non-existent but felt reality (Massumi, 2010, 53–54).

Anxiety, essentially an objectless fear, is inherent in Erdoğan's every mention of Menderes. Unlike fear itself, which is an emotional response to an identifiable threat, anxiety implies the nervous anticipation of a 'threatening but uncertain' event (Ahmed, 2014, 86). What we see or hear here and now, evokes a sense of fear in us. Anxiety, on the other hand, is primarily connected to the expectation of danger (Salecl, 2013, 26–27), and so functions in the body much more insidiously than fear in terms of a possible threat to existence.

In Erdoğan's discourse, the single-party period (1923–1945) represented a particularly intense legitimacy crisis in Turkish history; introversion and anxiety have prevailed in the Islamic conservative subject

[12] Parti Mitingleri. (2014, March 10). *Başbakan Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Ak Parti Ağrı Mitingi* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sty8RS_Qwuw.

ever since. If pain is one outcome of the loss of power, the loss of identity and the loss of an imperial past in the emotional world of the collective subject, another is the ambiguous danger that such losses bring. Philosopher Renata Salecl (2013) defines anxiety as an emotional response to an ambigious danger. The partial self-confidence that developed following the single-party period was replaced by a renewed anxiety following Menderes's execution. The CHP and its mentality, which occupies such a prominent position as the source and cause of an inherent anxiety in Erdoğan's narrative of victimization, is also cited as the perpetrator of another persecution of Islamic conservatives: the coup of 28 February. This incident—which ended in 1997 with the forced resignation of Erbakan, the founder of the National Vision tradition and then-prime minister—can be interpreted as a Kemalist restoration of the state (Bora, 2017, 477). For Erdoğan and his supporters, 28 February was important in two ways for transferring the legacy of victimization: unlike other instances of victimization, it occurred in the recent past, so his supporters were personally exposed to it, and it was a milestone in Erdoğan's journey to power.

The AKP emerged from the 3 November 2002 elections with the authority to form a government on its own. However, because of a political ban, Erdoğan only assumed the office of prime minister after a four-month delay, on 14 March 2003. This fact constitutes the most familiar of the historical grievances Erdoğan embodies and transmits to the people. The well-known reason behind Erdoğan's ban is a poem he recited at a rally in Siirt in 1997. This act developed into an emotionally intense symbolic political device to which he often resorted during his leadership. Erdoğan frequently recited poetry at rallies,[13] party congresses, in election propaganda, during awards and opening ceremonies and even in the parliament.[14] The poets whose work he recited were chiefly from the

[13] Erdoğan re-read the poem that led to his imprisonment on 12 June 2011, during negotiations in parliament about the government's policy program. This act was both a symbolic sign of Erdoğan's power and a clue to the nature of his vengefulness. KirpiTV. (2011, July 12). *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Ceza Aldığı Şiiri Meclis'te Okudu* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IlamDRAeCA.

[14] Erdoğan recited so many poems that in 1999, on the day he was imprisoned, an album of poems read by him was released. İskender Ulus produced the album, which was released on the label Ulus Music. Tarih Kanalı. (2016, May 15). *Bu Şarkı Burada Bitmez: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Şiir Albümü* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka0TzHOHDEo.

Islamic conservative tradition. The common feature of these poems is a strong sense of victimization and oppression:

> *We are hoarse voices/Do not leave the minarets without the call to prayer, my God!/Call out to those who make honey there/Do not leave [them] without a hive, my God! […] My God, this homeland kneaded by Islam/do not leave it without Muslims! […] The masses waiting for heroes/Do not leave them without a hero, my God! […] Let us know how to resist the enemy/Don't leave us dead, my God! […] Without love, without water, without air/And without a homeland, do not leave us, my God!*[15]

One of Erdoğan's favorite poems, *Dua*, is dominated by a clear emphasis on 'us'. This 'us' symbolizes a religious and nationalist collective subject whose voice is muted, left without prayer and without a homeland. At the same time, Erdoğan emerges from the past as a saviour, endeavours to instil hope and self-confidence by relaying the good news that the persecution is over:

> *Don't forget!/Every dark night has a morning/Every winter has a spring/ There is a supreme hand, a supreme power that turns darkness into light/ transforms sadness into relief! [...] When I see a bleeding wound, it burns me inside/To relieve it, I'll take a whipping, I'll take it twice/I can't say, let it go, forget it, I'll take it up/I trample, I am trampled, I hold up the right!/I'm the enemy of the oppressor, but I love the oppressed.*[16]

I have said that the vividness of 28 February in the collective memory stems from its unfolding in such a way that it was not only remembered, but experienced—by Erdoğan and by his supporters. Indeed, Erdoğan talks about his own subjective experience and suffering in most of his speeches that reference the events of that process. Parlak and Uz describe this tendency as 'incorporating personal pain into society'. According to them, the events that led to 28 February constitute the most meaningful, painful experience that enables voters to identify with their leader (2016, 91). Perhaps for this very reason, 28 February is addressed at length by Erdoğan:

[15] Arif Nihat Asya: 'Dua'.

[16] Mehmet Akif Ersoy: 'Uysal Koyun'.

I too saw those who were turned away from the doors of our universities just because they wore headscarves, and those who tried to study at imam hatip schools lived in the persecution of 28 February.[17] *Hundreds of people have been victimized in this process because of their beliefs, opinions and appearances. A witch hunt was undertaken in the bureaucracy, unlawful dismissals, suspensions, exiles were experienced, profiling and blacklisting took place, and the feelings of believers were exposed to a heavy attack on television screens and the pages of newspapers. [...] The children of the nation were disdained at the gates of the university. [...] This has been done in this country! Will their sighs, their woes go unnoticed? [...] Neither history nor society will ever forgive those who violate the will of the nation for their own personal interests!*[18]

As a father, I went through this ordeal, too, because my daughters were turned away from the school gate, too. [...] We went through all this, they didn't go to university in Turkey, I had to send them to America, they studied there wearing a headscarf. Can you imagine? You are a stranger in your country, a pariah in your homeland![19]

What were you concerned with, all this time, with a headscarf? Why did you bother with my covered and uncovered girls? Why did you divide our girls like this? Why did you deprive them of the freedom of education? You take away these rights, yes? Oh CHP, this is what you are, this is you![20]

Erdoğan describes 28 February as a moment of victimization among a series of atrocities committed in the recent past. The primary emotion here is anger. Anger has taken on an increasingly dominant role in the political scene, as Erdoğan has consolidated his power over the years while becoming increasingly fragile.[21] Moreover, anger often manifests not only in his language but also in his gestures and facial expressions, in his performance of power and masculinity.

[17] Speech at the event, '28 Şubatlar Bin Yıl Sürmez', 28 February 2015, see www.iha.com.tr/haber-erdogan-28-subat-surecinde-basindan-gecenleri-anlatti-442883/.

[18] Subaşı 94. (2012, February 28). *Başbakan Erdoğan TBMM Grup Toplantısı Konuşması* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPiWLPxORUY.

[19] AK Parti İcraatları. (2014, March 7). *Başbakan Erdoğan AK Parti Eskişehir Mitingi* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UqdCGPtqrgE.

[20] Gelincik 4089. (2014, March 4). *Başbakan Erdoğan. 3 Mart 2014 / Niğde Mitingi Konuşması* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZaCyD0PfYmU.

[21] Zafer Yılmaz (2017) claims that this mood led to an increase in the reactionary mobilization of both the AKP and its supporters, especially after the Gezi Park uprising. A strict Turkish Islamic ideological inheritance was reactivated in full after the uprising, and spread on social media with remarkable efficacy.

Anger is a reaction to perceived injustice; it is a sense of being wronged (Lyman, 2004). As with other emotions, it is clearly relational, not internal. It is characterized by the seeking of compensation for perceived injustices, the expectation of restitution and an urge for revenge (Henderson, 2008, 30). The anger arising due to the loss of social recognition is directed towards specific actions or events (Ben-Zeev, 1992, 94). It is triggered by direct or indirect slights such as humiliation, suppression and defamation, which threaten the self-perception, identity or public image of the subject (Schieman, 2006, 495). Anger exists as an emotion that calls, motivates and ignites political action, because it demands the perceived injustice to be compensated (Holmes, 2004, 210).

Mary Holmes notes that while all manner of emotional responses are attributed to oppressed and socially disadvantaged groups including women, anger seems to be the exception (2004, 215). Indeed, anger as an emotion is associated with masculinity; it finds expression either in the demand for or the occupation of a position of power. Thus, anger is key to the passage from victimization to power in Erdoğan's journey. It allows a previously inaccessible reaction to injustices and oppression to be articulated in the present, and it serves as the impetus for account-settling and reparations.

The desire for compensation and reparation that accompanies anger (with the comfort that comes from occupying a position of power) is, in Erdoğan's language, primarily deployed as a discourse of resistance, even of war. Indeed, his oft-repeated phrase 'we will stand up, we will not bow down' finds its response in crowd chants of 'Stand up, do not bow down, this *millet* is with you'. This pledge can be heard at nearly every AKP rally. In this way, Erdoğan's anger has become the language of the majority (Dindar, 2014, 147). Thus, as much as it is a language of resistance and war driven by anger, the line 'We set out on this road wearing our shrouds'—a reference to the atrocities suffered during the coup attempt—should be seen as an expression of power, strength and masculinity, a hatred that no longer needs to be suppressed, and an almost insatiable urge for revenge.

> *[…] In the eyes of the oppressed, who now have become conscious of 'injustices and grievances', the conditions for transitioning to the discourse of justice or revenge/compensation are near completion. The subject's passivity and ill fortune will come to an end once injustices are compensated. The oppressed prepares himself for the day of justice against the oppressor/fate/*

> *history/modern state/imperialist invaders and so on. The desire to show the others their place and to make the oppressor pay the price of the past matures. Now he realizes the persecution to which he has been subjected. He is about to reach an important threshold in the way he perceives the world; the time has come to change the discourse, inevitably. He will do so either through the righteous anger of an omnipotent God, or by his own hands.* (Açıkel, 1996, 187)

4.4 From Victimization to Omnipotence: Erdoğan Storming Out of Davos and Turkish Self-Identity

Erdoğan's journey as a leader on the political stage had witnessed one local and two general election victories by January 2009. Erdoğan and his party were successful in the 2007 referendum, when a constitutional amendment to elect the president was put to a vote and 69% voted in favour. Because of the tension stemming from the referendum, 2007 was an intense year in the archive of oppression and victimization for Erdoğan and the AKP. The party's nomination of Abdullah Gül—deemed by many to be excessively 'Islamist'—as its presidential candidate, led to a public backlash, dubbed the 'Republic Protests', which primarily targeted the government's anti-secularism. The same year, a warning text (called an e-memorandum) was published on the website of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces, expressing dissatisfaction with the 'anti-secular' actions of the government. All of this resulted in an early general election, from which Erdoğan and his party emerged victorious, receiving 46% of the vote. Gül was again nominated for the presidency, this time successfully. In 2008, a lawsuit protesting its anti-secular policies was filed against the AKP, though the Constitutional Court ultimately decided to merely cut state funding to the party (Koyuncu, 2014, 63–64).

This process, part of the emotional archive of Erdoğan's personal story and political journey (though not as a narrative of oppression or defeat but as a claim to victory), marked something of a turning point for the Islamic conservative tradition. Indeed, in an address after the referendum debacle, known as the 'speech that makes one cry', Erdoğan called to mind the legacy of past oppression while also evoking a sense of victory:

> *As poet Ece Ayhan said, they shot, we grew up. We talked, they wanted to silence us, we read poetry, they sentenced us. We thought, they excluded. They wanted to close the roads of politics to us, they made headlines saying he can't*

even be a muhtar. They said you cannot elect a president, you cannot change the constitution. They threatened us with the closure of the party. […] May my people not forget how their national will was mortgaged for decades.[22]

Here it is not difficult to feel that the predominant tone of Erdoğan's speech is triumphant, and that this was a cathartic moment for the Islamic conservatives. Notice that at the end of the speech, Erdoğan extols his supporters to retain their decades-long 'consciousness of suffering' (Bora and Erdoğan 2013, 633) and to 'not forget' the wounds inflicted on the collective body. This way, he directs the mood of the oppressed towards a collective desire for compensation and revenge.

Indeed, in 2009, an international incident arose that occasioned this new emotional climate. Erdoğan attended the 39th World Economic Forum, held in the Swiss town of Davos and attended by leaders from countries all around the world. These meetings, described by some reporters as a 'fair of the rich',[23] provide an insight into the economic and political direction of the world, and accordingly attract the attention of the global press. On 30 January 2009, Erdoğan left a session on Gaza[24] after a tense exchange with Israeli President Shimon Peres and a moderator, which was broadcast live before the eyes of the world. During his speech, Erdoğan stated that Israel was using disproportionate force in Gaza while the international community looked on. He demanded a lifting of the blockade. When it was the Israeli president's turn to speak, Peres said, 'What would you do if a rocket was fired at your head?' The moderator of the session, David Ignatius, tried to silence Erdoğan by touching his shoulder. Raising his index finger in anger, Erdoğan argued

[22] 'Onlar vurdu biz çarpışarak büyüdük', *Milliyet*, 5 May 2010, see https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/onlar-vurdu-biz-carpisarak-buyuduk-1233846.

[23] Güngör Aras, a columnist for the newspaper *Milliyet*, describes the yearly forum as such: 'Dr. Klaus Schwab, who started the Davos meetings in 1971, was a smart man. He selected as his target group the rich. More accurately, he specified his target group as the richest of the rich. Davos developed into a social fair of sorts, where the rich go to be seen and the poor go to see them. Can a politician who doesn't like the rich be a statesman? When politicians and statesmen began coming to the fair of the rich, Davos really made a name for itself'. 'Porto Alegre Öldü, Yaşasın Davos', *Milliyet*, 26 January 2011, see http://milliyet.com.tr/gungor-uras/porto-alegre-oldu-yasasin-davos-1344571/.

[24] 'Davos'ta Yüksek Gerilim', *Milliyet*, 31 January 2009, see http://milliyet.com.tr/davos-ta-yuksek-gerilim-siyaset-1053371/.

several times in a row for 'one minute', removed his earphones and, turning to Peres, his legs crossed and his finger waving, said the following:

> *Mr. Peres, you are older than me. Your voice is too loud. I know that it is a necessity of a psychology of guilt that one's voice is so loud. My voice will not be that loud, so you should know it. When it comes to killing, you know how to kill. I know very well how you shoot and kill children on the beaches. Two people who served as prime minister in your country have important words for me. You have prime ministers who say, 'When I enter Palestine on tanks, I become a different kind of happy.'…I'll give you a name too. Maybe you are wondering. I also condemn those who applaud this persecution. Because I think that standing up and applauding those who killed these children, those who killed these people, is a crime against humanity. […] I'm just going to say two words to you here. Don't interrupt me! One, in the sixth article of the Torah, it says that you will not kill, there is killing here. Two, look, this is also very interesting...*

At this point, the moderator tapped Erdoğan on the shoulder once more, asked him not to further stoke the discussion and prevented him from continuing his speech. Trying to lower Ignatus's hand, Erdoğan said, 'Thank you very much, thank you very much, Davos is over for me from now on, I will not come to Davos again', as he angrily got up from his seat and left the session. In a video collage later posted to YouTube by his supporters,[25] a slowed down version of the *mehter* anthem begins to play at the very moment Erdoğan leaves the session: 'Your ancestor is your grandfather, your generation is your father/Ever heroic Turkish nation/ Your armies have given many times/Glory to the world/Turkish nation, Turkish nation/Love with tenderness the nation/Damn the enemy of the homeland/Away with that cursed debased one'.

The *mehter* anthem which was later added to this video demonstrates why Erdoğan's Davos outburst was so crucial. Davos represented a moment of compensation and redress for the humiliation, contempt and oppression that the oppressed subject has suffered for almost two hundred years. Indeed, the emotional climate that emerged in Turkey after Davos reveals the significance the event had on the emotional needs

[25] Ercan Erdoğdu. (2009, February 2). *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Davos 2009 Original Video* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTQU1Q2lm1A.

of the people: upon his return from Davos, Erdoğan was greeted by thousands of people at the airport.[26] To the enthusiastic crowd, he said: 'This noble stance of yours has made us the voice of the silent people and some of the orphans. I believe that this voice is the voice of all the oppressed in the world. […] It is the voice of the just, not the strong'.[27] Erdoğan, who was termed the 'Conqueror of Davos' after the incident, is no longer using the language of the oppressed here, but of the powerful. Note his statement to the press at the airport after his historic stand, which caused an international diplomatic crisis and was perceived as a show of self-confidence and gesture of defiance:

> *I do not speak the language some retired diplomats understand. I am an educated person in politics. I do not know the customs of diplomats, nor do I want to know. I'm not a chieftain! I am the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey. I do whatever I have to do. I may be nonchalant, but it does not mean I'm submissive. I also told Peres in my speech. I said I don't speak loudly because of your age. Whatever Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey is there, my millet would expect such an attitude. Sluggishness does not suit our nation. […] It was about the dignity and reputation of my country. My stance had to be clear and unambiguous. I could not let anyone tarnish the honour of my country.*[28]

In newspaper headlines the next day, the mood created by the statements that Erdoğan made to the press is evident: 'Ottoman Slap to Israel' (*Vakit*), 'Historical Slap' (*Yeni Şafak*), 'Historical Lesson from Erdoğan to Peres' (*Türkiye*), 'Slap to Arrogant Peres' (*Bugün*), 'Kasımpaşa Feel in Davos' (*Radikal*), 'Someone Should Have Said This' (*Posta*), 'The Spirit of Davos Is Dead' (*Hürriyet*), 'Shock in Davos' (*Milliyet*), 'Stake from Erdoğan, Apology from Peres' (*Akşam*).[29] These sentiments were held not only by Erdoğan's supporters but by Turkish people in general; even

[26] 'Dönüşte Binlerce Kişi Karşıladı', *Milliyet*, 31 January 2009, see http://milliyet.com.tr/donuste-binlerce-kisi-karsiladi-siyaset-1053825/.

[27] Rukal 7. (2009, March 19). *Erdoğan'ın Davos Dönüşü Havaalanı Konuşması* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FH4MGcW-6A.

[28] 'Ben Kabile Reisi Değilim', *Milliyet*, 31 January 2009, see http://milliyet.com.tr/binlerce-kisi-geceyarisi--font-color--red--havaalanina--font--kostu-siyaset-1053410/.

[29] 'Son Anda Manşetler Değişti', *Milliyet*, 31 January 2009, see http://milliyet.com.tr/son-anda-mansetler-degisti-siyaset-1053814/.

Ece Temelkuran, an oppositional columnist at the time, began her column right after the Davos crisis with this blend of irony and truth:

> *'I wish it was someone else who did this.' Those who liked Prime Minister Erdoğan's Davos stance but do not like Prime Minister Erdoğan said this often yesterday: 'It was great, but I wish someone else had done it.' Some people did not have the language to appreciate it. Or they were 'confessing' that they appreciated it. I did too. Appreciation and confession. After all, just like our Prime Minister, I have all the pathologies of being an underdeveloped country child. I have the right to experience an interstate incident with the taste of 'Anyhow, we did that well', albeit for at least a few hours. After all, we were not born in Zurich!*[30]

This collective fascination, which made even those who feel distant from Erdoğan, was further reinforced by the shower of praise for Erdoğan beyond the country's borders, from the media and leaders of the Middle Eastern and Muslim-majority countries. Erdoğan was admired for acting like a 'knight' and revealing his 'noble' Islamic essence.[31] During the Friday sermon, Celal bin Yusuf Şerifi praised him for making 'the Islamic world hold its head high'.[32] Hamas leader Khalil al-Haya even described Erdoğan as 'the continuation of the Ottoman sultans', and compared him to 'Mehmed the Conqueror who took Istanbul from the Byzantines' and to 'Sultan Abdülhamid II'.[33]

* * *

Erdoğan's outburst at Davos and the collective euphoria that ensued was a milestone in the creation of a new 'us', a new Neo-Ottomanist national identity in Turkey. The Davos incident as a historical moment is innately connected with the pathos of Neo-Ottomanism, and the shared

[30] Ece Temelkuran. 'Bize De Davos Yiğidi Gerek', *Milliyet*, 31 January 2009, see https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/ece-temelkuran/bize-de-davos-yigidi-gerek-1054043.

[31] 'Erdoğan'a Ortadoğu Medyasından Övgü', *Milliyet*, 31 January 2009, see http://www.milliyet.com.tr/erdogan-a-ortadogu-medyasindan-ovgu-siyaset-1053812/.

[32] 'Gazze'de Erdoğan'a Sevgi Gösterisi', *Milliyet*, 31 January 2009, https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/gazze-de-erdogan-a-sevgi-gosterisi-1053815.

[33] 'Gazze'de Erdoğan'a Sevgi Gösterisi', *Milliyet*, 31 January 2009, see https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/gazze-de-erdogan-a-sevgi-gosterisi-1053815.

sense of identity between Islamic conservatives and Erdoğan grew after Davos to include a much larger collectivity.

As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, Neo-Ottomanism speaks to the needs and ambitions of the Islamic conservative subject in Turkey, but it also arouses the feelings of people almost from all socio-political backgrounds who adopt oppression and victimization as major aspects of their identity. Seen from this perspective, the Davos incident introduced a wholly new mood to the emotional archive of a very broad audience, encompassing Islamists, conservatives and those of various nationalist stripes, from moderate to radical. Erdoğan's 'defiant' attitude towards the prime minister of Israel—at a meeting of great global political and economic significance, held in one of the richest countries in the world among the leaders of many developed countries—had multiple historical and emotional implications as well.

Let me start with the then-Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, one of the parties to the antagonism in Davos. Erdoğan's harsh attitude towards Peres should be read in the context of the historical hatred towards Jews in Turkey on the part of Islamic conservatives, nationalist conservatives and even ordinary people. The antisemitism that still exists in Turkey today stems, in particular, from the UN decision to divide Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state, and the subsequent establishment of the State of Israel following the World War II. Islamist thinkers especially, those who adhere to the notion of *ummah*, perceive the conflict as a war between Muslims and Jews. Nationalists have added another dimension to this antisemitism, as they interpret the abdication of Abdülhamid II and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire as the result of a Jewish conspiracy. The reason for this is that Abdülhamid II was dethroned by members of the Committee of Union and Progress, which emerged in Thessaloniki. According to rumours, Abdülhamid was dethroned because he did not cede the land requested from him for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and this instigated the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. One member of the Committee of Union and Progress, which notified the sultan about this decision, was Emmanuel Karaso, a deputy in Thessaloniki of Jewish origin (Bali, 2013, 405–406).

Antisemitism in Turkey thus manifests in the marking of Jewish people as perpetrators of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and in the defence of Muslims/Islam in the context of the Israel-Palestine war (Bora, 2017). The image of Jewish people in Turkey is one of an 'essential source of mischief'—at times the secret agent behind communist conspiracies

(for Marx was also a Jew), at times the scapegoat for all the evils attributed to capitalism (talk of Jewish wealth) and, connected to this, the image of finance capital suffocating the 'honourable and faithful' small trader (Bora, 2017, 384). Jewishness, in the various ways it is perceived in Turkey, constitutes a threat, an object of hatred, disgust and envy conditioned to destroy Turkey from inside and out. I have previously mentioned the ontology of the feeling of anxiety created by the perception of threat: the hatred and disgust towards perpetrators who are seen as the crux of evil, and the feelings of envy towards the object of desire. The perception of Jewishness by those who identify as Turkish and Muslim must be examined in relation to these emotions: to the anxiety that arises from the uncertainty posed by the perceived threat; to the intensity and bitterness inherent in the feeling of hatred; to the feeling of contact/interiority that triggers disgust and to the desperate will to power that provokes the feeling of envy. Judaism in Turkey evokes at times the image of an anti-Muslim oppressor embodied by Peres, at others the 'convert' who inherited the legacy of the Union and Progress, at others still the traitor associated with the latent Judaism/Zionism of the Republican elites with their Balkan origins, yet it always evokes a deep threat, and as such, inspires religious and racial hatred. At the same time, the Jew is also the object of the Turk's envy and desire, as he is seen as a locus of power, a model of self-confidence, someone capable of attempting domination over 'us'.

Antisemitism in Turkey also functions as a fixed and favoured element in the narrative of cultural corruption and 'de-identification' in nationalist conservative discourse. In the imagination of the Islamic conservative, the Jew exists as a figure capable of penetrating us, destroying our essence and polluting us. Indeed, they believe that the aim of Israel or Zionists is to make Turkey think of itself as Western, to alienate it from itself and from the Islamic world. The Westernization process itself is seen by some antisemitic writers as a Jewish conspiracy (Bora, 2017, 386). Of course, this conspiratorial mentality is not unique to Islamic conservatives. It is a hallmark of the Turkish right. Bora, who suggests focusing on the structuring effect of antisemitism on mentality and patterns of perception in Turkey rather than on its concrete content, has noted that the image created by the notion of the powerful, widespread, secret and covert influence of 'the Jews' inspires a certain tension of desire/resentment in 'us'

(2017, 389). Özman and Dede, meanwhile, have argued that the perception of the growing power of Jewish people leads to a serious crisis of self-confidence in the Turkish subject (2014, 180).

Erdoğan's Davos outburst carried the weight of these historical-emotional perceptions. After all, the enthusiasm and growth in support of Erdoğan generated by rejecting a nearly two-century-long narrative of oppression along with his cathartic display of self-confidence, met the emotional needs noted above. In Turkey, one can encounter hatred of Jewish people in citizens of varying socio-economic status, across many sects and races, whether in a village coffee house or an academic meeting. Furthermore, no one is surprised by such attitudes. Viewed with this context, the emotional basis of the enthusiastic reception Erdoğan received from people in Turkey after Davos becomes more apparent.

However, the Davos incident is too multi-layered to be seen simply as a manifestation of historical antisemitic feelings. What I am interested in specifically is how the contextual and spatial dimensions of the event created a near-perfect integration of the emotional world of nationalist and Islamic conservative bases. The attitude that Erdoğan presented as the prime minister of Turkey in Davos symbolized the resurrection, revolt and rise of the East against the West, underdeveloped against developed countries, the colony against the exploiter, the poor against the rich, the weak against the strong, the oppressed against the oppressor. The traumatic mood that has haunted the Turkish subject in various ways for almost two centuries was produced by a relationship with the West that left it a 'shackled self' (Bora and Erdoğan 2013, 634). For this reason, Erdoğan's Davos display has been interpreted and embraced as the resurrection of an oppressed subject who feels the West has subjected him to an 'imaginary castration'.

In a social media caption that went viral at the time, a powerful image of Erdoğan is juxtaposed with photos of Western leaders, the Pope and Shimon Peres. Behind Erdoğan's defiant body, we see crowds of people carrying a giant Turkish flag. The text added to the caption reads: 'The war of the crescent against the cross! Resistance is not having the world behind you and challenging Anatolia. Resistance is having Anatolia behind you and challenging the world'. The caption implies that the experience of humiliation in the encounter with the West has been reversed under Erdoğan's leadership. Here, the relationship with the West and the locus of evil that it represents is conceived of as a 'war of the Cross and the Crescent'. If we recall, Erdoğan narrated the encounter with the West

as an experience of victimization and humiliation for Turkish Muslims. The people behind him and the image of the Turkish flag represent a collective subject, one who has had its national identity wounded through this humiliation but will no longer hold its tongue against the West and all evil that it represents. This collective now appears to be resisting, fuelled by self-confidence. Another implication is hidden in the Anatolian emphasis in the text within the image. After all, the consciousness of the conservative subject has always been characterized by an anti-elitism, because the 'elites who are alienated from the essence of the nation' have cast 'the children of Anatolia' as 'ignorant and backward' (Bora & Erdoğan, 2013, 636). From the outset of the Westernization process, and especially during the single-party period following the establishment of the Republic, the main perpetrators of the humiliation suffered by the conservative subject were 'the people who challenged Anatolia with the backing of the world', Kemalist elites (the 'public enemy'), Westernized intellectuals and '*monşerler*' or 'white Turks'.

Immediately after the Davos incident, Erdoğan responded to former ambassadors who found his diplomatic stance unacceptable and criticized him for 'playing the protectorate of Hamas': 'the old *monşer* could not understand what we did. They came as *monşers*, they will go as *monşers*', he snapped.[34] Among the diplomats who reacted in this way was Onur Öymen, the then-deputy chairman of the CHP. After Davos, Öymen sent Erdoğan some books he had authored, so that he could 'learn' about diplomacy and made the following statement to the press: 'It is not a shame not to know, it is a shame not to learn'.[35] These jabs are far from isolated events but rather are manifestations of the historical and emotional experiences this book discusses. One could argue that the 'white Turkish ressentiment' of the Islamic conservative subject gave way to 'white Turkish cynicism' as Erdoğan gained the upper hand (Bora & Erdoğan, 2013).

Another social media caption that went viral at the time featured a photo of Erdoğan and Peres at the Davos summit. The text attached to the image reads as follows: 'It doesn't matter whether you can speak

[34] 'Erdoğan: Monşer Geldiler Monşer Gidiyorlar', *Milliyet*, 13 February 2009, see http://www.milliyet.com.tr/erdogan--monser-geldiler--monser-gidiyorlar-si-yaset-1059445/.

[35] 'Erdoğan'a Monşer Cevabı', *Vatan*, 5 February 2009, see https://www.gazetevatan.com/siyaset/erdogana-monser-cevabi-221680.

five languages, if you can't say "one minute"'. In this image, qualities attributed to the Republican elites—receiving a good education, speaking multiple languages and understanding diplomacy—are mocked. When merely saying 'one minute' denotes a show of strength and masculinity, it is not difficult to glean the implication that those who speak five languages are 'impotent', 'cowardly' and even 'feminine'. Behind rendering multilingualism a subject of ridicule and humiliation, lies a sense of victory created by the weakening and defeat of the White Turk.

'The psycho-political conflict surrounding White Turkishness is also a struggle around the definition of national identity' (Bora, 2016). Seen in this way, it is clear that mocking White Turks is not only a manifestation of resentment, but also an expression of a wish for compensation by a subject with self-confidence, power, and superiority, qualities imparted by a new narrative of national identity. Indeed, after Davos, as the distinctions between old and new, past and present and 'us' and 'them' became clearer, the emotional investment in the new, in the present and in *us* increased dramatically.

Let me repeat my claim: Erdoğan's conduct in Davos in 2009 was crucial in the transition to a new definition of national identity. The multi-layeredness of the incident made it possible for people to transition to an entirely new emotional phase in terms of relations with both the West abroad and the 'West within us'. In short, the Davos incident enabled Islamic conservatives, nationalists of all stripes, the children of rural Anatolia and the Turkish subject who tries to emulate the Westerner but always feels incomplete or lost before the West, to identify with Erdoğan in some way. It was a symbolic event that prompted the question, *who the Turks really are*, and provided a new answer. The legacy of Davos has carried Erdoğan, who had set out identifying with Menderes, towards another identification. With the rise of Neo-Ottomanism, Sultan Abdülhamid II would come to be reborn in Erdoğan's body.

4.5 Rising from the Ashes, Straddling the Urge for Revenge and the Perception of Threat: Erdoğan as Sultan Abdülhamid II

2009 was a historical moment, one consonant with the AKP's discourse of resurrection and resurgence, both because of the Davos incident and the appointment of Ahmet Davutoğlu as minister of foreign affairs, who

advanced Neo-Ottomanism as a foreign policy. Beginning in this year, prevails a political climate that gradually turns its foreign-policy focus away from the West and to the Middle East, setting in motion a domestic political mood of absolute self-confidence.

Of course, Erdoğan was the strongest symbol and the most critical actor in this shift. He initially made his presence felt on the political stage as the bearer of an ossified discourse of victimization by identifying with Menderes. Yet in and after 2010, when his power was to a large extent consolidated, he began to summon the spirit of Abdülhamid II. Identifying with Abdülhamid II would turn out to be very useful, as it suited the emotional needs of the Islamic conservative tradition from which Erdoğan emerged, becoming a powerful tool for the establishment, reproduction and expansion of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative and a source of legitimacy in internal politics.

Abdülhamid II ascended to the throne in 1876. At the end of his thirty-three-year rule, he was deposed by 'secular forces'. His rule was so severe and so ideologically loaded that he is known by some as the 'Great Hakan' and the 'Red Sultan'. In fact, while the incoming republican regime characterized him as 'despotic' and a 'failure', in the eyes of those who view the Kemalist legacy critically, he is a hero who was able to 'stave off the decline and collapse of the state for 33 years'.[36]

With the introduction of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative, strong connections and analogies began to be established between Erdoğan and Abdülhamid II, both in terms of the dynamics of the periods and as leaders.[37] It should be noted that this tendency exists not only among Erdoğan's supporters but also his opponents, due to the two different perceptions I mentioned above. However, for our purposes, focusing on the 'positive' components of the identification established between Erdoğan and Abdülhamid II facilitates a discussion about the urge for an act of revenge—the dominant emotion underpinning this identification.

In the imagination of Erdoğan and his supporters, Abdülhamid II is a figure worthy of admiration because of his cultural and economic

[36] Hilal Kaplan. 'Abdülhamit ve Erdoğan', *Sabah*, 3 June 2016, see www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/hilalkaplan/2016/06/03/abdulhamit-ve-erdogan.

[37] For instance, İhsan Süreyya Sırma reports that he intended to write a book about Erdoğan called *Abdülhamid III*, but gave up the project after reservations that this might be seen as an act of subservience. See *İhsan Süreyya Sırma Kitabı* (Interview: Adnan Demircan), Beyan Publishing, İstanbul, 2018, p. 241.

achievements, his reintroduction of Islamic identity as a glue to prevent the collapse of the empire and his way of Westernization while simultaneously rejecting its yoke. The period of his rule is perceived as the empire's 'restoration' era, though it was described by the West as 'sick'. Abdülhamid II is foremost praised for his efforts to re-establish Sunni Muslim-Turkish identity in the form of *milleti hakime* (the dominant nation). On account of the political moves he was induced to make, which might be considered 'progressive', such as declaring the first Ottoman Constitution and convening the first parliament, commentators draw parallels between Abdülhamid II and Erdoğan's promise to create a 'civic constitution'. Similarly, Abdülhamid's breakthroughs in education—efforts to build a school in every village, create teacher training institutions and Islamize the curriculum in the process—have been compared to education policies spearheaded by Erdoğan. The fact that today, almost all secondary education institutions have been given the status of *imam hatip* (religious vocational schools) is demonstrative of this similarity. Again, 'giant projects' (railways, highways), with their attendant advances in economic development, facilitate comparisons of Abdülhamid and Erdoğan, in the spirit of 'taking the technology of the West and rejecting its morality'.[38]

Zafer Yörük argues that, in presenting themselves as the 'final closure of the parenthesis of Kemalism', Erdoğan and the AKP government rely on a discourse of 'restoration' similar to Abdülhamid's, particularly in his later era, especially in their shared 'passion for symbolism'. Indeed, the similarities become even more apparent considering Abdülhamid's attempt to 'reinvent tradition' through symbolic political devices such as monuments, architecture, insignia and state ceremonies alongside Erdoğan's war on the symbols of the Republican regime. During 2010s, Neo-Ottoman interventions were made to any political and social element that symbolized the Republican regime, from ceremonies and monuments to spaces and institutions. For Erdoğan, the most successful manifestation of this war on symbols came in three parts: with his election to president in 2014 by direct popular vote for the first time in history; with the transition to the presidential system as a result of a constitutional amendment referendum in 2017 and finally, with his acquisition of the title of first president of the new regime after winning the June 2018 elections.

[38] Zafer Yörük. 'Bir Erdoğan-Abdülhamid Analojisi', *Gazete Karınca*, 20 April 2017, see http://gazetekarinca.com/2017/04/bir-erdogan-abdulhamid-analojisi/.

However, identifying the similarities between Abdülhamid and Erdoğan's activities and confining the discussion to them is both reductionist and fruitless. After all, Erdoğan's decision to identify with Abdülhamid at a certain stage of his rule, summoning his spirit, gives us the opportunity for a productive discussion about emotional responses: the identification with Abdülhamid is, foremost, an indication that the time has come for Erdoğan and his supporters to take revenge on the West, on foreign militaries, on the Westerners among 'us', on the perpetrators who persecuted 'us' and overthrown all the values that make 'us' who we are.

The urge for revenge is first and foremost an emotion associated with the past. It is a result of feeling injured and wronged by a past experience of humiliation (Lapsley, 1998, 257). The main motivation for revenge is to inflict suffering on those seen as the perpetrators of the humiliation; seeing them suffer creates a sense of pleasure and satisfaction in the avenger, easing the pain caused by the original humiliation. Even if the origin of the urge for revenge has passed, the time for revenge will (still) come. The main motive of revenge is to demonstrate cruelty to those who have made the avenger suffer in the past and to convey a clear message that they cannot do it again, thereby preventing future suffering. The main motivation of the avenger is to rehabilitate in the present the feelings they have experienced in the past. The recipient of the revenge is therefore of secondary importance to the avenger. The issue is rather the avenger's own feelings, their own identity and their own existence (Löwenheim & Heimann, 2008, 691–96). From this point of view, the root of the urge for revenge lies primarily in the aim of restoring and ameliorating a damaged self-perception (Crombag et al., 2010, 342).

Let me consider the urge for revenge alongside the concept of narcissistic rage. The sense of humiliation that comes after a defeat or loss brings with it a narcissistic rage that drives retaliation and payback. This rage is strong enough to evolve into symbolic and real irredentism, expansionism and invasion if the possibility of compensation for loss of dignity or land arises. Since those who experience narcissistic rage '[S]how total lack of empathy towards the defender', their personalities are characterized by aggression, anger and destructiveness (Harkavy, 2000, 350–357). On the other hand, transforming an urge for revenge into action is primarily reliant on power (Bakken, 2008, 169). 'The desire to repay injuries by inflicting hurt in return' is only activated in a meaningful sense when one holds power. There is thus a gap between the urge and action (Connolly,

2007, 93). When the urge for revenge is able to be put into action, the actor first suppresses the enemy to show them that they are not respected. For this reason, act of revenge deliberately includes excess. Those who resort to revenge often turn to symbolic targets and will go to extraordinary lengths to harm them. Monuments, national or political icons, signs of military and economic superiority and political leaders are the most vulnerable of such symbols.

An act of revenge is legitimized by constantly recalling the suffering of the past and by consecrating the vengeful act by dedicating it to heroes or martyrs. Avengers are proud of their actions, and they want the people or groups they target to witness the revenge, because the visibility increases the pain of the target. The avenger must keep their wounds alive, because forgetting them would mean curing their thirst for vengeance. The urge for revenge may therefore never be satisfied and may become a key trait of a person's very existence (Löwenheim & Heimann, 2008, 692–693).

William E. Connolly's distinction between episodic and generic revenge is very apt in this case. While the episodic urge for revenge is satisfied when the revenge is taken, a generic urge for revenge is permanent. Those with a generic urge for revenge constantly seek legitimate objects to attack, creating a culture of revenge; they are aided in this by moral codes, religion, doctrines, legal punishment and economic sanctions. 'The bell of revenge now sounds twice, in the acts that express it and in the doctrines that vindicate it' (2007, 93).

Erdoğan's Abdülhamid-ization should be interpreted in connection with the transition of the aforementioned urge for revenge to the action phase. The revenge I am discussing here is, first and foremost, in the name of Abdülhamid. After all, his dethronement appears as another traumatic moment in the Neo-Ottomanist narrative; summoning the spirit of Abdülhamid is primarily a means of restoring the destroyed pride of an empire. During Erdoğan's rule, marches have been held in Abdülhamid's name, in addition to commemorations orchestrated, exhibitions organized and hospitals, universities, airports and bridges named after him.[39] At an international symposium commemorating Abdülhamid, held at Dolmabahçe Palace in 2016, the act of revenge took the form of spatial 'capture' and invasion; the lost pride of the Ottoman Empire was

[39] 'Turkey: The Return of the Sultan', *New York Review*, see https://www.nybooks.com/online/2017/03/09/turkey-the-return-of-the-sultan/.

compensated by the revival of Abdülhamid through the symbolic use of the state's official institutions and places.

Erdoğan's identification with Abdülhamid allows for the reinforcement of another emotion: the perception of threat. The motif of 'foreign militias' and 'collaborator traitors' who were rumoured to have played a role in the dethronement of Abdülhamid was quickly incorporated into political discourse through such events as the Gezi Park Resistance, which took place during Erdoğan's term of office, the 17–25 December operation,[40] and the 15 July coup attempt. While Erdoğan skilfully equates his own power with the survival of the state, he turns all manner of opposition to him into a conspiracy against Turkey. In this respect, by identifying with Abdülhamid, Erdoğan not only offers a project of survival for the new state elites, but also a new project of survival to the *millet*. Tying his own political future to the dichotomy of the *millet*'s existence or demise, he fosters a collective paranoia. The collective paranoia that emerged with the loss of the Balkans and the military weakness that emerged during Abdülhamid's reign is thereby triggered anew by this identification in the present.[41]

At this point, I want to look at how Erdoğan's identification with Abdülhamid, the urge for revenge and the perception of threat that underlies this identification relate to the grassroots. In daily life, one often comes across wristwatches, prayer beads, rings, royal cyphers and necklaces bearing Abdülhamid's image. The royal cyphers of him are stuck

[40] On 17 December 2013, public prosecutor Celal Kara was charged with bribery alongside another 71 people, including four ministers of the AKP government at the time, as well as three children of ministers, businessmen, bureaucrats, a bank general manager and various public officials, and was further alleged to have committed crimes of misconduct, bid rigging and smuggling. On 17 December, raids were carried out at the homes and workplaces of those mentioned within the scope of the investigation. Images of belongings and money seized during the searches and audio recordings of the alleged suspects were widely covered in the press, and the name of the man at the centre of the bribery and corruption allegations, Rıza Sarraf, was leaked to the media. On 26 December, prosecutor Muammer Akkaş made an attempt to summon Bilal Erdoğan, son of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to testify as a suspect, but was prevented from doing so by police authorities. The operation was considered by government officials to be politically motivated, stemming from the Gülen movement's desire to seize control through the 'parallel structure' it established within the state. Many dismissals and relocations followed the investigation, especially within the police force and judiciary. The arrested suspects were released on 28 February 2014.

[41] Zafer Yörük, 'Bir Erdoğan-Abdülhamid Analojisi', *Gazete Karınca*, 20 April 2017, see http://gazetekarinca.com/2017/04/bir-erdogan-abdulhamid-analojisi/.

on car windows. The removal of the portrait of Atatürk and the hanging instead of the portraits of Erdoğan and Abdülhamid in a state-owned university dormitory is yet another example of the revenge-motivated actions I have been discussing.[42] The admiration of ancestors and the revival of the Ottoman Empire are manifested in daily life primarily through the symbolic recollection of Abdülhamid. The smallest action that could be perceived as devaluing him, provokes a violent reaction at the grassroots. For example, when the image of Abdülhamid in a swimsuit on the statue of a naked woman was exhibited in a show held at Contemporary Istanbul in 2016, Turkey's most important contemporary art fair, a group of twenty men who defined themselves as nationalist conservatives shouted the name of God and raiding the exhibition, declared: 'There is a picture of our grandfather and ancestor on a swimsuit, and we are offended by it'. They said they would not leave until the statue was removed. Eventually, the artwork was placed in storage.[43]

To summarize, as the preeminent symbol of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative, Erdoğan has successfully called upon emotions including humiliation, envy, disgust, hatred, anxiety, anger, the urge for revenge and the perception of threat. He channelled these emotions by identifying with the past through historical figures, acts and grievances, which not only fuelled his spirit but also strengthened the political journey of both the AKP and Erdoğan himself.

In his march to power, which he initially set out on as a victim, Erdoğan stoked his desire for revenge after consolidating his power using emotions he summoned by linking himself—at first—to Menderes. He then invoked the spirit of Abdülhamid to legitimate the policies he implemented, a move that enabled the urge for revenge to turn into an act of revenge. In this way, Erdoğan showed both the West and the 'West within us' that Abdülhamid had been resurrected, and that the Ottoman Empire was resurgent, restoring prestige, pride and self-confidence in the national

[42] 'Öğrenci Yurdunda Atatürk Fotoğrafını İndirip II. Abdülhamid'in Fotoğrafını Astılar', *Cumhuriyet*, 26 April 2017, see http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/ha-ber/turkiye/728650/Ogrenci_yurdunda_Ataturk_fotografini_indirip_2._Ab-dulhamid_in_fotografini_astilar.html.

[43] 'Contemporary İstanbul'a Abdülhamit Baskını', *Hürriyet*, 4 November 2016, see http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/contemporary-istanbula-abdulhamit-baskini-40267866.

identity. The Neo-Ottomanist narrative and the spirit that accompanies it were nurtured by such an archive of emotions.

4.6 Ontological *Ressentiment* as the Founding Emotion of the Neo-Ottomanist Narrative

What founding emotion can help us to interpret Erdoğan's leadership journey, from the entire narrative of victimization he conveyed as a legacy of the past to the emotional climate of oppression and humiliation which he made his hallmark, and which gradually gave way to an urge for revenge and a cry for victory? How can one identify both the dominant emotional site of the poetics of oppression, whose perpetrators are, in Erdoğan's discourse, so obvious, whose memories are so intense, so vivid and alive? In this section, I will argue that *ressentiment* is the most powerful of all the emotions upon which the new narrative of national identity known as Neo-Ottomanism has been built. Properly putting forward this claim first requires a description of *ressentiment*.

Ressentiment, a founding emotion of collective identities based on victimization, comes from French. Its Latin origin is the verb *re-sentire*, to feel again (Ure, 2015, 603). Although the concept is more or less synonymous with the English word resentment (discontent, offence, anger), *ressentiment* differs from resentment both in terms of the meanings it contains and its uses in the nineteenth century (namely, by Nietzsche). *Resentment* is a feeling of displeasure, anger and offence that results from humiliation and deprivation. It functions both as a reaction against perceived injustice and humiliation, and as a defence mechanism against attacks on one's self-perception (Meltzer & Musolf, 2002, 241). On the other hand, Adam Smith, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, treats resentment as an emotion with positive social consequences. For him, resentment seeks for the restoration of the wounded dignity of a person or a group, and it demands recognition and respect. Therefore, it is the guardian of justice, the heart of democracy. This feeling, which is essentially characterized by the demand for restitution, is linked to morality in that the victims of injustice call on others to take responsibility, which does not necessarily open the door to an urge for revenge (Ure, 2015, 601). Thus, resentment is a temporary emotion as it disappears once the demand for reparation is met.

At the end of the nineteenth century, in *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche set about interrogating the worth of moral values, and conceptualized *ressentiment* as something negative, even pathological (1967). He described *ressentiment* as an emotion characteristic of modern Western European culture and focused on the particularities of this culture's dominant moral values (Christian ethics), which, he argued, created *ressentiment* and resentment. According to Nietzsche, with the rise of these values, which he terms 'slave morality', the notions of good and bad were redefined. What was now considered good were not Aristocratic values ('good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of God'), but rather the wretched, the poor, impotent, lowly, the suffering' (1967, 34):

> *The slave revolt in morality begins when ressentiment itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the ressentiment of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge. While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is 'outside,' what is 'different,' what is 'not itself'; and this No is its creative deed.* (1967, 369)

Nietzsche thinks that turning outwards rather than looking inwards and affirming oneself is intrinsic to *ressentiment*. This is because the person experiencing *ressentiment* always needs an opposite, the external world, for the slave morality he possesses to emerge. The actions of such people are therefore fundamentally a reaction. In Nietzsche's view, people with a slave morality suffer and instinctively seek a cause, an agent for their suffering:

> *[…] they scour the entrails of their past and present for obscure and questionable occurrences that offer them the opportunity to revel in tormenting suspicions and to intoxicate themselves with the poison of their own malice: they tear open their oldest wounds, they bleed from long-healed scars, they make evildoers out of their friends, wives, children, and whoever else stands closest to them.* (1967, 127–128)

In Nietzsche's polemical and incisive language, *ressentiment* is contextualized as a symptom of the modern self: the feeling of the powerless and the impotent, of the slave against the master. It is completely detached from the positive aspects of resentment. He perceives it as a form of self-expression among individuals or groups who transform their inner pain

into a revenge plot (Fantini et al., 2013, 7–8). *Ressentiment*, which Nietzsche describes as a widespread disease or poison, is a constant need to relieve the pain of the past, to cling to old wounds; there is a kind of pleasure in this. Contrary to Smith's conception of resentment, according to Nietzsche, *ressentiment* persists even after social recognition, as it does not arise from a lack of recognition, but is a symptom of an incurable biological weakness (Ure 2015, 603).

The most comprehensive discussion on the sociological dimensions of *ressentiment* can be found in Max Scheler's work. Scheler rejects Nietzsche's conclusions about religious morality (2004, 32) and proposes to proceed by ignoring the relationship of the concept to Christian values (2004, 7). He thus disagrees with Nietzsche about the genealogical origins of *ressentiment* (Christian morality), arguing that it is a typical modern phenomenon, rooted in the unequal structure of society and should therefore be considered a consequence of the disparities in modern democratic societies in power, property, right to education and so forth (Minkkinen, 2007, 522).

Scheler states that the French equivalent of the concept of *ressentiment* essentially implies two characteristics: one occurs when a particular emotional reaction to another person, experienced over and over again, moves beyond the sphere of action and expression and settles into one's personality, and the other is the hostility contained in the term itself (2004, 2–3). To Scheler, *ressentiment* is the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects which, as such, are normal components of human nature. The main emotional manifestations of *ressentiment* are the urge for revenge, hatred, maliciousness, envy, the urge to slander and a devaluing enmity. Beneath all of these feelings, according to Scheler, lies the experience of being attacked or injured (2004, 7).

Vengefulness, which Scheler considers one of the most important sources of *ressentiment*, arises from experiences of anger and resentment. The most important characteristic of these emotional reactions, however, is that they are momentary, temporary and controllable. Anger is an emotion that can be blocked and suppressed. Behind this inhibition is the idea that an immediate reaction may lead to defeat and the sense of helplessness and impotence this would bring. Therefore, vangefulness is based on an experience of impotence; its emergence is related to weakness.

The urge for revenge, the most potent source for the formation of *ressentiment*, is accompanied by envy. Envy arises from the feeling of powerlessness we experience when someone else possesses something we

covet. 'This tension between desire and nonfulfillment does not lead to envy until it flares up into hatred against the owner, until the latter is falsely considered to be the cause of our privation' (Scheler 2004, 13). Revenge and envy both have their own objects, they arise in specific situations and are directed at specific objects. But neither of these feelings 'overstep their intentions'. When revenge is taken, the urge for revenge disappears; when the object of envy is ours, the feeling of envy disappears (Scheler 2004, 7). However, if the urge for revenge persists even after revenge has been sought, and is accompanied by a strong sense of 'righteousness', it will never be satisfied and will turn instead to other objects, thus transforming into *ressentiment*. Similarly, envy weakens rather than stimulates the will to acquire: if the unattainability of something envied is proven (in other words, if the power of the desire to obtain it comes with a feeling of impotence), envy turns into *ressentiment*. The transformation of envy into *ressentiment* brings with it a hostile attitude towards the coveted thing, since its mere presence is felt as a pressure, a condemnation, an intolerable humiliation (Scheler 2004, 9–14).

The urge to slander and vilify, which is another emotional site on the way to *ressentiment*, is not directed at particular objects and does not arise for particular reasons, unlike vengeance and envy. As a result, it does not disappear easily. On the contrary, the subject who wishes to release internal tension or to experience a sense of equality satisfies this longing by devaluing the qualities of other subjects. When these impulses turn into *ressentiment*, the subject will deny themselves all the values that lend the possible object of comparison superiority (Scheler 2004, 8–19).

Scheler warns us that none of these feelings that predispose one to *ressentiment* corresponds to *ressentiment*, but merely to a stage in its development. Only when these feelings are especially strong and yet cannot be expressed due to weakness, impotence or fear, do they become insurmountable, and *ressentiment* arises. Therefore, *ressentiment* is predominantly the feeling of the oppressed (2004, 9–10). When the expression or discharge of the emotions that create the conditions for *ressentiment* is hindered by repressive forces or authorities, anxiety emerges. The subject who is constantly suppressed arrives at such a state that they do not know why they are afraid or what they are lacking; their feelings remain objectless. However, their effects remain (Scheler 2004, 24).

Below is one of Scheler's important remarks regarding the desire for revenge and *ressentiment*:

> *A slave who has a slavish nature and accepts his status does not desire revenge when he is injured by his master; nor does a servile servant who is reprimanded or a child that is slapped. Conversely, feelings of revenge are favored by strong pretensions which remain concealed, or by great pride coupled with an inadequate social position. There follows the important sociological law that this psychological dynamite will spread with the discrepancy between the political, constitutional, or traditional status of a group and its factual power. It is the difference between these two factors which is decisive, not one of them alone.* (2004, 11)

Scheler's emphasis on arrogance and the gap between social power and political and social status as a key motif in the formation of *ressentiment* is striking: it reveals the possibility that this gap itself may open the door to an inherent wound. When wounds are experienced, perceived and felt as if they were destiny, it is only a matter of time before the desire for revenge turns into *ressentiment*. He claims that a lack of social recognition inversely proportional to an 'arrogant' self-perception causes serious damage to the self-confidence of individuals and collectives (2004, 12).

In sum, *ressentiment* in the Schelerian sense is an emotion that occurs when the expression of emotions such as humiliation, envy, hatred, anxiety and anger is prevented. For this reason, *ressentiment* can neither be acted upon nor forgotten. Moreover, the suppression of all the emotions that cause *ressentiment* changes even the person's perception of time, imprisoning him in an eternal/permanent past. The subject's sole vision of the future, which relies on the obsessive repetition of negative memories, is fixated on a desire for revenge on all potential enemies (Fantini et al., 2013, 2–5). The time period between the initial perception of the wound and the inability to respond not only reinforces the desire for revenge, but also increases the feeling of *ressentiment*.

Ressentiment is such a contagious emotion that it sometimes spreads collectively, determining the characteristics and actions of a group (Meltzer & Musolf, 2002, 244); the possessor of the wound that creates the basis of *ressentiment* may, then, also be a social group. In this case, collective *ressentiment* emerges (Stockdale, 2013, 507), which is greater than the *ressentiment* of individual injured subjects.

Both Nietzsche and Scheler are criticized for seeing *ressentiment* as a form of passivity or resignation, when in fact, the expression of *ressentiment* is closely related to power. Fantini et al. claim that *ressentiment* is not unique to 'poor victims'; those in power can also partake in it

(2013, 4). Indeed, Scheler also referred to this feature of *ressentiment*, claiming that it is a contagious and sticky feeling and that once it is in the body, it can persist even after it has been expressed or externalized. If suppressed for too long, this emotion can be activated and 'sour' and 'poison' the personality, even when the conditions that created it disappear (2004, 9–10). As a result, the feeling of *ressentiment* has strong political consequences. It can become the main thrust of collective political movements, especially ideological, reactionary forms of populism such as extreme nationalism (Hoggett, 2013, 571).

Michael Ure notes three basic forms of resentment, as it is used today. The first is moral resentment. It is positively defined, a sentiment that can be used to ensure justice. The second is socio-political resentment, which is, again, developed in the face of perceived injustices. It emerges with the demand to correct the mistakes of the past, and is, in this respect, a legitimate demand for reparation. Socio-political resentment is directed not only at the perpetrators of past victimization, but it also invites actors to take responsibility and meet demands for reparation in the present. Ultimately, at the core of both moral and socio-political resentment is the demand for justice. However, socio-political resentment always risks turning into ontological *ressentiment*, which Ure describes as the third form. Ontological *ressentiment* is defined as a deep hatred of existence itself: it is the feeling of transitioning from *amor fati* (love your destiny) to *odium fati* (hate your destiny). Ontological *ressentiment*, which marks the mood of the subject who clings to the feeling of *ressentiment* even when all demands for compensation have been met, can usher in various kinds of totalitarian politics. Ure claims that this form of *ressentiment* sticks to identity struggles and to the agents of contemporary social movements because collective political agents, who craft their identities with reference to stories of victimization and powerlessness, almost attribute virtue to this weakness (2015, 608). Wendy Brown offers a similar critique, suggesting that in subaltern politics, where grievances are recognized and verified, and where attempts at compensation are made, pain experienced in the past may not always be externalized and may turn into an eternal reality—then the wounds are fetishized. This is problematic because it reduces the subject's existence to these wounds (Bora, 2010, 228; Brown, 1995, 72).

So what do these characteristics of *ressentiment* tell us about the example at hand? Might the emotions that cling to the language that Erdoğan employs as a leader to convey a legacy of past victimization

to the people—emotions that spread and contaminate, and become enduring—be manifestations of an ontological *ressentiment* particular to the wounded Turkish subject? Or does the ontologizing element derive from Erdoğan transmitting—through a range of symbolic discourses and actions—a moral and socio-political resentment long present in the collective identity? Examining the emotional journey of both Islamic conservatives and the Turkish subject whose identity was born of a wound inflicted by the loss of empire, it is clear that ontological *ressentiment* has played a key role in the rise of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative.

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CHAPTER 5

Istanbul as the Symbolic Space of the Neo-Ottomanist Narrative: Nostalgia, Romanticism and Domestic Imperial Greed

The previous chapter examined the emotional motives behind the AKP's circulation of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative through the leader figure in the 2000s. This provided a useful emotional framework to extend the analysis, the most expansive aspect of which is *ressentiment*. It is possible to argue that *ressentiment* has always been an undercurrent in the symbolic politics of the AKP. In this chapter, I aim to reveal the symbolic and emotional manifestations of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative through an examination of space; more concretely, I will focus on Istanbul as one of the key symbolic sites of the AKP's politics of emotions.

Istanbul carries symbolic value as the space where the Neo-Ottomanist narrative is most intensely embodied and actualized. Being the capital of the Ottoman Empire, Istanbul is claimed to be purportedly neglected and erased from history, its glory forgotten in the process of nation-state formation. The 'bridge between two continents and two civilizations', the city has long been the battleground of dichotomies such as East and West, Islam and Christianity and local and global (Keyder, 2006, 17).

Upon the Republic's founding, the ruling elites conceived of Istanbul as a focal point that embodied 'all imaginary obstacles to be eliminated' (Keyder, 2006, 18). For the republicans, Istanbul was a symbol of the corrupt Ottoman Empire and its Islamic foundations (Bartu, 2006, 46). The city represented 'a sin that the Republican elites seemed to find it very difficult to stay away from' (Keyder, 2006, 19). This part of the story is

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all too familiar: the transition from empire to nation-state, a forgetting or forced forgetting of the past during the process of top-down modernization, a deliberate erasure. Far more striking, though, are the meanings and emotional freight of Istanbul as a space in the Islamic conservative imagination where a particular politics of memory operates. According to this imagery, Istanbul is the cradle of a glorious past that needs revival and resurrection. During the AKP's rule, it has become a symbol of Islamic conservative ideology and a political tool to challenge Republican values (Bartu, 2006, 52).

The emotional and real investment in Istanbul by the AKP is not characterized solely by a sense of *ressentiment*; Istanbul is also a nostalgic home because it was once the capital of Islam, of splendour, of triumph. It is the *trace* of an imperial and mighty past that is longed for. On account of its Ottoman past, Istanbul is a promised land that whets the Turkish nationalist appetite. It is a blessed city, the apple of the eye of the world and the Islamic universe, both because its conquest was heralded by the prophet Muhammed and because it is the centre and symbol of the imperial hegemony of Ottoman Islamic civilization. Indeed, the image of Fatih's Istanbul is one of the most fundamental nexuses between Islamism and nationalism, and a bonding motif of nationalist conservative identity (Bora, 2006, 61–66). The symbolic loss of the city when the Republic was founded and Ankara named the new capital, brought with it a popular wave of nostalgia for Istanbul. In the symbolic politics of the AKP, this nostalgia has at times functioned as a veil of ontological *ressentiment*, but it has always been kept alive through a 'promise of homecoming.' Therefore, alongside *ressentiment*, nostalgia will be the main emotional site discussed in this chapter.

Istanbul functions as a 'home' for those who see themselves as exiles expelled from 'the garden of Eden' (Boym, 2009, 122). Narratives about cities' pasts are multiple, which makes them ripe for previously neglected or repressed narratives to be enacted to challenge dominant historical narratives (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, 928). Although a city's identity is of great importance in terms of material and symbolic capital, it is not fixed but constantly influenced by history, culture and political power (Keyder, 2006, 57). In the Islamic conservative and nationalist world of meanings, the multiple narratives about Istanbul's past oscillate between dream (in the sense that it is a sign of might, victory and superiority torn away from Byzantium, the West and the Christian world) and nightmare (in the sense that it is perceived as the chief location of conspiracies,

threats and plots against Turkey). This huge city is therefore a space of both dazzling promise and the cruel confusion and anxiety of survival (Bora, 2006, 66). Especially for those who build their collective political identity on a sense of humiliation and define it through feelings of abandonment and loss, Istanbul is a very conducive space through which to romanticize dreams of victory. Indeed, in the case of Istanbul specifically, romanticism has become a key emotion together with nostalgia. Just as the invention of a national culture oriented around a specific language, history and geography served the construction of national identity in the founding period of the Republic, so too did the image of Istanbul and the golden age it evokes come about due to an intense but superficial romanticization of the Neo-Ottomanist national identity.

In fact, across the period of AKP rule, the symbolic value of Istanbul as the carrier of a spectrum of emotions born out of *ressentiment* and dressed in nostalgia and romanticism, is not at all separate from the material values that enable what I call a conqueror mode of feeling-thinking-acting. These revolve around such values as imperial appetite, the will to power, fantasies of superiority, delusions of grandeur and the desire for prosperity and wealth. More simply, Istanbul—with its symbolic and, perhaps more significantly, financial promise—is an oasis in which the AKP government and the crowd amassed around it can satisfy their hunger for enrichment and power. Among the many emotional investments in Istanbul, the desire to gain symbolic as well as material supremacy is paramount. As with the power gained by acquiring territory abroad during the Ottoman Empire, the AKP has not only satisfied the desire to reconquer Istanbul on a symbolic plane, but it has also materially facilitated a kind of internal plunder[1] (Aydın, 2017, 31) and insatiable forms of acquisition, expansion, sharing and distribution of profit. The AKP, by constantly discovering, creating, collecting and establishing new and untouched areas to plunder on the golden streets of Istanbul, has succeeded in addressing—and, at points, satisfying—an appetite for growth, power and material superiority, among the ruling elites and capitalists, as well as among slum dwellers sitting in neighbourhood coffeehouses and calculating their share from urban transformation projects.

[1] Aydın applies this concept in an article detailing urban policies carried out in Ankara after the founding of the Republic.

By focusing on symbolic spaces in Istanbul, this chapter aims to analyse how the Neo-Ottomanist narrative has set the stage for the production of a politics of emotions through the city. Further, it argues that Istanbul is the main symbolic site of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative and the emotions that stick to it. The chapter aims to reveal how this locale works as the cradle of a metaphorical and real/material resurrection and resurgence, the purview of which covers too broad a base to attribute only to the AKP. To do so, it focuses on: sites of an Islamic desire for homecoming (the Hagia Sophia and Çamlıca Mosque); sites of war between two cultures (the Atatürk Cultural Centre and the Ottoman Military Barracks); sites of imperial greed and symbolic superiority over the West (gigantomanic fantasies); sites of appetite for material superiority and enrichment (construction sites); and, finally, popularized, publicized debates revolving around the venues of *conquest for everyone* (the Panorama 1453 Conquest Museum and the Yenikapı Square Conquest Festivities).

5.1 Sites of an Islamic Desire for Homecoming: The Hagia Sophia and Çamlıca Mosque

For proponents of a Neo-Ottomanist national identity, Istanbul is, above all, an Islamic city. The symbolic significance of Fatih the Conqueror's conquest of Istanbul, is interpreted primarily as the victory of the Crescent (Islam) over the Cross (Christianity), and thus over the West. In this sense, as a symbolic site, it is a fundamental reminder of self-confidence. As one of the symbols of Istanbul, the Hagia Sophia has often been at the centre of debates on Neo-Ottomanist practices in the AKP era. Thus, it is important to take a closer look at the emotions that stick to and emanate from this historical artefact.

In the Islamic conservative narrative, when Fatih conquered Istanbul in 1453, his first act was to pray in the Hagia Sophia. Already of symbolic value before the conquest as the largest church built by the Byzantine Empire in Istanbul, today it is the city's most important place of worship and a site of world cultural heritage. That Fatih's first act was to pray in Hagia Sophia symbolizes the victory of Islam over Christianity. Fatih then granted Hagia Sophia the status of a mosque, an expression of imperial defiance. However, the status of Hagia Sophia as a place of worship changed in the early Republican period, when it was turned into a museum. For the bearers of the right-wing tradition, this was interpreted

as a victory of the Christian West over 'us'. From the 1950s onwards, in particular, reopening Hagia Sophia to Muslim worship became their flagship cause (Bora, 2006, 64).

The feeling of humiliation and accompanying anger over modernization and the West, discussed at length in the previous chapter, intersect with a narrative of sadness and nostalgia surrounding one of Istanbul's most historically significant buildings. In fact, it is both correct and incomplete to read the desire to reconquer the Hagia Sophia as a manifestation of a 'local and national inferiority complex' (Öney, 2016) against the West. Correct in the sense that the opening of the Hagia Sophia for Muslim worship is a matter of historical reckoning. And incomplete, because the fact that Hagia Sophia has been discussed and debated throughout AKP rule, both by ruling elites and other ideologues, makes the issue too multi-layered and multi-motivated to be explained solely within the framework of *ressentiment*. Istanbul in general, and the Hagia Sophia in particular, symbolize the longing for an Ottoman order, a golden age, an age of bliss, a desire to return to a 'home' that was lost or never existed—or else, a fantasy of bringing 'home' into the present. This is why the story of Hagia Sophia should be read as a nostalgic means of recalling the power and self-confidence evoked by the Ottoman Empire, and summoning it into the present.

The word 'nostalgia' derives from the Greek *nostos* (homecoming) and *algia* (longing). At heart, nostalgia expresses a longing for a home that no longer exists, or that never existed in the first place. It is therefore essentially a feeling of loss and displacement. It is a longing for a 'golden age of stability, strength, and "normalcy"' (Boym, 2009, 14). The Hagia Sophia is, I argue, the nostalgic site of a fantasy of Ottoman glory, imperial power and world domination and therefore a place of utmost symbolic importance in the Neo-Ottomanist narrative.

The longing for a golden age is particularly characteristic of romanticism. One must therefore interpret the story of the Hagia Sophia through romanticism as a form of feeling that includes but is not limited to nostalgia. Romanticism is, at its core, the expression of a desire to return to an original. In the case of Turkey under the AKP, this tendency should be interpreted as a means of coping with modernity, the encounter with the West and with a sense of defeat and loss, and as an impulse to recall and regenerate core values, national spirit and roots (or to seek refuge in them). In addition, in Ottoman-Turkish romantic thinking, there are elements of the desire to prove oneself to the West and to be

accepted by it. Romanticism is 'sometimes consoling, curing and compensating, sometimes provoking, coercing and fortifying social consciousness' (Aksakal, 2015, 15–16); perhaps this is why the romantic way of feeling and thinking has always nurtured conservative and nationalist tendencies in Turkish political culture.

Meanwhile, nostalgia should be understood not only as a longing for the old regime or the fallen empire, but also as a feeling of unrealized dreams and a vision of the future. In this sense, nostalgia is seductive rather than persuasive. It operates through a sense of being out of place and as a romantic fantasy (Boym, 2007, 7). It is my contention that the desire to convert the Hagia Sophia into a mosque is underpinned by a fantasy of resurrection, of being reborn from the ashes, of majestically rebuilding the past rather than mourning it. The romanticization of the Hagia Sophia has been prevalent among the ruling elites in the AKP era. For instance, at the 2013 opening of a carpet museum next to the building, Bülent Arınç, then deputy prime minister, expressed the fantasy of resurrection in romantic terms:

> We are now right next to the Hagia Sophia Mosque. I believe there is something in your heart, even if your ears don't hear it. Hagia Sophia is telling us something. What is Hagia Sophia telling us? [...] We look at this sad Hagia Sophia, and we wish from Allah that the days when it will smile are near.[2]

Far from a frozen image suspended in a faded past, the Hagia Sophia, whispering to *us*, is imagined as an entity that has feelings, that has been persecuted, that has suffered oppression, that has been grieved, that asks for accountability, that imposes a responsibility, that demands reparation and compensation. In this rhetoric it has a soul, one that is waiting for a new conqueror who will hear its silent cries and conquer it anew.

Noting that nostalgia has generally been conceived of as looking back, scholars argue that the feeling in fact includes the intention to integrate the past into the present and the future. In other words, while nostalgia is in part the desire to return to an ideal past, it is also an attempt to find in the past the possibility of renewal and future victories, and to realize these in the present (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, 920–921). Therefore,

[2] 'Ayasofya Açıklaması', *Hürriyet*, 15 November 2013, see https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/ayasofya-aciklamasi-25125751.

for AKP elites, the battle over Hagia Sophia is not a means of escaping from the present to the past, but an attempt to rebuild the future from a position of power, grandeur and superiority. Thus, nostalgia should be understood not just as a static, melancholic or sad feeling, but an active, future-oriented one (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, 937). From a similar perspective, Fred Davis (1977) argues that nostalgia tells us more about the mood of the present than about the realities of the past. Reminding us who we are, it also enables us to determine where we are heading. During AKP rule, elites have occasionally proposed laws to grant Hagia Sophia the status of a mosque; in 2016, the first Friday prayer was held in the Hünkâr Pavilion in the Hagia Sophia and news reports emphasized the ardent interest of the congregation.[3] Similarly, as part of the Conquest of Istanbul Festivities in 2014, the Conquest Prayer was held in the building's garden, again with a large congregation. In an article on this symbolically and emotionally potent act, Sanem Avcı explains, in very clear terms, what the articulation of the Conquest Prayer at Hagia Sophia means for the Islamic conservative collective subject:

> On the night of 30 May to 31 May, at dawn, thousands of people laid their prayer rugs in front of the Hagia Sophia. "Break the chains, open Hagia Sophia", men and women chanted and gathered under the rain. They were the descendants of the ancestors who marched ships over land and trains under the sea, they were the generation of conquest. Now they were in the Hagia Sophia to reconquer it, to revitalize the Ummah. Because the Hagia Sophia was a lock and this lock had to be unlocked so that the fortune of the nation could be unlocked. […] With the reconquest of the Hagia Sophia, the golden age of Turkish-Islam will begin again. The time has come. Persecution has lasted a very, very long time. Islam has been abandoned, the state was taken away from the Ummah, the country was exploited and religion was made to be forgotten.
>
> But thank God, all this has come to an end, the state is in the hands of Muslims again, no matter what internal and external factors do. The golden age of Islam will now begin anew under the wings of the revived Ottoman Empire. (Avcı, 2014)

Interpreting the opening of the Hagia Sophia for Muslim worship as a kind of symbolic conquest was not only confined to the AKP elites.

[3] 'Ayasofya'da 80 Yıl Sonra İlk Cuma Namazı', *Sözcü*, 21 October 2016, see http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2016/gundem/ayasofyada-80-yil-sonra-ilk-cuma-namazi-1461762/.

The issue began to resonate among nationalist conservative elites and the grassroots alike. The sensitivity around the Hagia Sophia became a symbol not only of Islam but also of Turkishness, of the *millet*, of the revival of Ottoman roots and of taking action and proving its strength to the world. The nostalgia that permeated the story of the Hagia Sophia not only evoked pain and sadness but also motivated both the ruling elites and the people to mobilize and reconstruct the present and the future of this historic site. In 2020, Erdoğan as the president of Turkey thus announced his decision to ascribe the status of a mosque to the Hagia Sophia:

> Today, the Hagia Sophia is experiencing one of its resurrections, which it has witnessed many times since its construction. The resurrection of the Hagia Sophia is a harbinger of the liberation of Masjid Al-Aqsa. The resurrection of the Hagia Sophia is the footsteps of the will of Muslims around the world to emerge from the age of retreat. The resurrection of the Hagia Sophia is not only the resurrection of Muslims, but also of all the oppressed, the victims, the exploited and it is the rekindling of the fire of hope. The resurrection of the Hagia Sophia is the sign that as the Turkish nation, Muslims and all humanity, we have new words to say to the world [...] The resurrection of the Hagia Sophia is a symbol of our rising sun of civilization, the basis of which is justice, conscience, morality, unity and brotherhood, which humanity has longed for. The resurrection of the Hagia Sophia is the breaking and throwing away of the chains in the doors of this temple, as well as the shackles on the hearts and feet. [...] Hagia Sophia, the heritage of Fatih the conqueror, is now put into service as a mosque which is long overdue. This is the best response to the vulgar attacks on our symbolic values all over Islamic geography.[4]

For Erdoğan, the reconquest of the Hagia Sophia and its change in status conveyed not only a message of resurrection to the whole world and especially to the West, but reflected a victorious position in domestic political conflicts. Soon after the decision to change its status, the Hagia Sophia was opened for Muslim worship with a grand ceremony on 24 July 2020, in front of a large crowd and in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. The ceremony was planned as a sensational one. One of

[4] 'Millete Sesleniş Konuşması', 10 July 2020, see https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/120589/millete-seslenis-konusmasi-#.

its most notable moments was when Ali Erbaş, the head of the Religious Affairs Directorate, came to the pulpit, sword in hand, to deliver a sermon. The sword resonated with the public as a sign of imperial Neo-Ottoman power and a symbol of reconquest. Erbaş later said, 'Khutbahs [Friday sermons] have been delivered with a sword, without interruption, for 481 years during the Ottoman times. If Allah permits, we will resume this tradition from today on'.[5]

At this point, I return to Boym's argument that there are two basic forms of nostalgia: reflective and restorative. For her, reflective nostalgia emphasizes the *algia*, that is, the longing itself. Such nostalgia, she argues, does not mobilize those who feel it. Restorative nostalgia, on the other hand, emphasizes *nostos*, which calls for a reconstruction of the lost home. Restorative nostalgia presents itself as truth and tradition (2009, 20). The Neo-Ottomanist dream of opening the Hagia Sophia to Muslim prayer was framed as a truth and realized as the extension of a past victory. This restorative move was a strong symbolic manifestation of the AKP's power and was expected to find support among the people. Yet, it did not resonate as strongly with the Turkish public as AKP elites desired.[6] The political climate of the country in 2020 was such that even AKP supporters did not feel themselves safe and sound 'at home'. Intense political polarization, the destructive effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and an economic crisis had pushed the AKP regime to the edge. Symbolic political attempts to mobilize and motivate the nation thus fell short at this time.

[5] 'Sermons with swords part of Turkey's tradition, head of Diyanet says', *Daily Sabah*, 24 July 2020, see https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/sermons-with-swords-part-of-turkeys-tradition-head-of-diyanet-says/news.

[6] According to a survey conducted by MetroPoll, 44% of Turkish people believe that the conversion of the iconic Hagia Sophia into a mosque is primarily intended to shift attention away from the economic crisis. MetroPoll chairman Özer Sencar shared the survey results on his Twitter account, writing: 'It is in vain to expect a political gain from the conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a mosque, if there is such an expectation. In this period in which the economic crisis is affecting the whole society in a very deep way, it is not possible for it to give the expected benefit, for whichever purpose it is done […] What really matters is that the problems of financial hardship and unemployment are tackled'. '44 pct of Turks believe conversion of Hagia Sophia an attempt to divert attention from economic crisis', *Duvar English*, 10 July 2020, see https://www.duvarenglish.com/domestic/2020/07/10/44-pct-of-turks-believe-conversion-of-hagia-sophia-an-attempt-to-divert-public-attention-away-from-economic-crisis.

The emotional and concrete manifestations of Neo-Ottomanist restorative nostalgia were not confined to the Hagia Sophia. Especially in the 2010s, as Neo-Ottomanist discourses were on the rise, Istanbul was frequently used as a symbolic space to resurrect the country's Islamic aspects. Among the invasive actions which were legitimized in the name of restorative nostalgia was the construction of a huge mosque on the hilltop of Çamlıca, the Anatolian side of Istanbul. As a manifestation of *ressentiment* and revanchism dressed in nostalgia, the plan to build Çamlıca Mosque was first mentioned by then-Prime Minister Erdoğan in May 2012. Speaking at an inauguration ceremony that coincided with celebrations of the conquest of Istanbul, Erdoğan underscored that, as one of the oldest cities in the world, Istanbul has been home to many ancient cultures and civilizations but that 'our' culture and civilization have left the most lasting and deep traces on the city:

> In the 559 years since the conquest of Istanbul, our architects, poets and artists have worked day and night, have produced and created works to make this city truly 'ours'. Of course it is difficult to build a civilization, but a civilization is not built by lazing about. You will think, you will implement it and then you will engrave it so that civilization will continue, as a stamp, for centuries. But at least as important is to preserve this civilization and culture, to keep it alive, and to develop the passed-down heritage as much as possible. The cultural heritage filtered through history is enriched and gains continuity by generations.
>
> One of our thinkers gives a clear definition when asked, 'What is culture?' He says, 'It is all the material and spiritual heritage inherited from ancestors'. That's the point. Carrying the legacy inherited from ancestors to the future. Therefore, we have to connect today to ancient culture and tradition and reproduce it at present. As Turkey, unfortunately, we have not been sensitive enough on this issue in the past. We have not paid enough attention to the values we have in the past. We will build a mosque on 15 thousand square metres next to the television tower in Çamlıca. This giant mosque in Çamlıca was designed to be seen from anywhere in Istanbul. Thanks to Allah, Üsküdar's windows will now have different reflections.[7]

[7] 'Çamlıca Tepesine Cami Yapılacak, İstanbul'un Her Yerinden Görülecek', *Hürriyet*, 30 May 2012, see http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/camlica-tepesinecami-yapilacak-istanbulun-her-yerinden-gorulecek-20654499.

Carrying the heritage inherited from the ancestors into the present and the future paves the way for the symbolic reconstruction of Ottoman grandeur and might. The fact that this grand project is a mosque to be built on the Anatolian side of the city additionally implies a note of revenge, as Erdoğan contrasts it to Hagia Sophia, which cannot be fully captured and conquered due to its international significance. Mehmet Atlı states that mosque architecture in the Republican period, with the exception of a few examples, lacks care, from physical characteristics such as site selection, dimensions, proportions, material selection, workmanship and usage. According to Atlı, Neo-Ottomanism also functions as a motif, directing public opinion towards the issue of mosques. To be sure, mosques are political symbols. Their symbolic meaning renders their location the subject of fierce debates on topics such as political symbolism and Republican values (2017, 57–64). The Çamlıca Mosque project sparked vehement political debate almost immediately following Erdoğan's nostalgic announcement. In Turkey, the dome and the minaret have always held symbolic meaning, both in the imagination of the average Muslim and in the eyes of those who feel threatened by Islam (Atlı, 2017, 65). When Erdoğan announced that this 'giant'[8] mosque would be designed so that it would be visible from anywhere in Istanbul, he implied his own power and might, as well as that of the tradition he represents. Indeed, immediately after Erdoğan's announcement that the mosque would feature 'a dome larger than the one built by ancestors' and six minarets, the tallest in the world, the Chamber of Architects took action. Representatives of the Chamber of Architects filed a lawsuit, claiming that the construction on the hilltop of Çamlıca, which has under protection status, was unlawful. The Chamber further declared the act a show of power and authority on Erdoğan's part; they noted that it would be nothing but a bad copy of the Blue Mosque, and that it should be seen as a revenue generating project.[9]

Indeed, starting with the Çamlıca Mosque, and particularly after 2011—the AKP's 'period of mastery'—there has been a rapid and intense circulation of expansionist spatial practices directed at Istanbul which are

[8] In a later section, I will analyse in detail the phenomenon and significance of a passion for giant projects evidenced by Neo-Ottomanist spatial practices.

[9] 'Çamlıca'ya Camiye Mimarlardan Sert Tepki', *NTV*, 5 July 2012, see https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/camlicaya-camiye-mimarlardan-serttepki,a2q39OGew020qOPngd750g.

cloaked in nostalgia and heavily emphasize Islamic symbolism. This wave can thus be explained not just by restorative nostalgia, but also in terms of revanchism. The concept of the 'revanchist city' was first introduced by Neil Smith in the 1990s in the context of urban policies, and reflects the motivation of the bourgeois elites to 'reconquer' historically lost places by acting out of revenge against those who are not considered one of 'us'. In the case of Turkey, this tendency has exhibited itself most prominently first in public architecture, then at the popular level, in private enterprises. Seen in this light, the Çamlıca Mosque is clearly one of the most tangible and invasive symbols of the reconquest of Istanbul. It has created a grand sense of victory for the 'conqueror' and a source of great unease for the 'conquered'.

What else do we learn about the expansionist, ostentatious Neo-Ottomanist emotions that are attached to and emanate from the Çamlıca Mosque—a huge structure located in present-day Istanbul, built on top of other buildings so that anyone who sets foot in Istanbul can see it in all its majesty and splendour? Could the desire to reconstruct an Islamic home and carry it into the future also be the manifestation of a 'culture war' against Turkey's republican heritage? It is true that the AKP's attempts to reconquer Istanbul and reconstruct an Islamic Neo-Ottomanist national identity have predominantly been conducted by instrumentalizing nostalgia. Yet, in so doing, its hostile discourses and practices have led to a culture of revanchism which has spread to the society as a whole. In the next section, I will elaborate on how the Neo-Ottomanist discourse of reconquest has exposed a culture war centred on Istanbul.

5.2 Sites of War Between Two Cultures: The Atatürk Cultural Centre and the Ottoman Military Barracks

In *Fatih-Harbiye*, written in 1931, Peyami Safa interpreted the newly established Republic as 'two different continents, two different conceptions of life, two different metaphysics'. On one side were the rich, noble, modern districts of Istanbul like Beyoğlu/Harbiye, and on the other side was Fatih, a poor, traditional, religious district. The novel was based on the binary oppositions implied by these two sides: Fatih was an

oud, Beyoğlu a violin; Fatih was the call to prayer, Beyoğlu the glamorous ball. Fatih was a *peşrev* played on the *saz*,[10] Beyoğlu was jazz; Fatih was wooden, Beyoğlu was stone. Fatih was the smell of *hacıyağı*,[11] Beyoğlu was the perfume (Gürbilek, 2015, 85). Beyoğlu has been coded as a symbol of distorted modernity in the imagination of the AKP and in terms of Islamic conservative cultural codes, it was interpreted as a place where the old order was disrupted and corruption was laid bare. And indeed, Beyoğlu was the main vessel through which Istanbul's cultural fashions flowed as a centre of entertainment; it was the birthplace of the ball and waltz culture associated with the Republic (Demirağ, 2009). Thus, in the eyes of Islamic conservatives, Taksim, the main square in Beyoğlu, has always been the space of a privileged minority and the secular bourgeoisie (Gürbilek, 2015, 86).

Today in Turkey, the culture-oriented conflicts between the two different worlds have grown more visible and are echoed by 'statesmen, government spokespersons, media commentators' rather than solely literary figures (Gürbilek, 2015, 86). For example, Erdoğan's 2013 statement, 'There is Kazlıçeşme, bigger than Taksim', can be read as a reinterpretation of the Fatih-Harbiye rift. In the eyes of the oppressed, Taksim (Beyoğlu) has always existed as the square of the privileged, while for nearly a century, Kazlıçeşme has been the neighbourhood of the poor and the religious.

The culture war over Istanbul can in fact be traced back to 1994, when Erdoğan was nominated as a candidate for the Welfare Party and won the mayoralty of Istanbul. Indeed, Istanbul was the most important stronghold for the Welfare Party in the struggle for political power, a city where 'the energy to conquer' would be unleashed in full force (Bora, 2006, 60). It is also a place of culture (and class) war where the unapproved cultural heritage and distorted modernization of the Kemalist Republic could be challenged and century-old ontological *ressentiment* could be expressed. Thus, in its 1994 local election campaign, the Welfare Party called on those whom it referred to as the real owners of the city to conquer it a second time (Bartu, 2006, 53).

[10] The saz is a stringed musical instrument commonly played in Turkey and other cultures in the eastern Mediterranean.

[11] Hacıyağı is a heavy perfume made from the attar of roses used by those who go on the Hajj pilgrimage.

As soon as he became a mayor, Erdoğan succeeded in addressing the emotional needs of the poor on the outskirts of the metropolis by proposing projects that would reproduce the dichotomy between the people and the elites in favour of the former. He commanded building a mosque and an Islamic Cultural Centre in Taksim Square built that would emphasize Istanbul's Islamic identity (Bartu, 2006, 55). He closed brothels, banned the sale of alcohol in municipally owned locales, and instead of cultural activities such as ballet, which he deemed immoral and 'bawdy' (Bora, 2006, 67), emphasized activities that appealed to 'our' roots and essence. By the 2000s, Erdoğan had set out to turn his 'dream' of the 1990s into reality. Especially in Taksim, he engaged in practices of producing space that, at heart, implied absolute dominance.

The Atatürk Cultural Centre (AKM) in Taksim Square has become a significant spatial symbol of the cultural war and emotional investment under the AKP. The AKM, the foundation of which was laid on 29 October 1946 and which was originally designed as an opera house, was a national identity project that the early Republican elites created to prove the city's Westernization in the cultural sphere. The building's highly charged symbolic history requires us to take a closer look at its past. Although the foundation was laid in 1946, the construction was only partially completed by 1969. At the time, it was called the Istanbul Palace of Culture. Giving such a name to a building that was to be the cultural symbol of the Republic and Westernization incited debates among intellectuals at the time. Muhsin Ertuğrul criticized the name:

> Why the Palace? What age are we living in? Why a new palace when the padishah's palace, the sultan's palace, the vizier's palace, the tekfur's palace have all gone down in history? The name of such places should not frighten my patched pants and half-empty stomach. We should have looked for a more appropriate, humble name for ourselves! (Uluşahin, 2016)

Ertuğrul's words are striking for their ideological and emotional implications. Immediately after suggesting that the word 'palace' directly evokes the Ottoman order, he mentions poverty, noting that such a structure should invite humility, not boasting or splendour. Indeed, he speaks in stark contrast to the emotions that stick to the Neo-Ottomanist national identity constructed today. At the same time, Ertuğrul was also opposed to featuring the opera 'Aida' at the building's inauguration, and

favoured instead a more 'local' performance. This can be read as a criticism of the function of cultural and national identity construction in the early Republican period, which reinforced a dichotomy between the elites and the people, though it may also signal a more modest conception of national identity. In 1970, a fire broke out in the building, an incident which remains unexplained to this day. In 1971, the then-Minister of Culture, Talat Sait Halman announced that the building would be repaired and reopened: 'No palace is built in the Republican era; that was in the imperial era. Accordingly, the building has been named the "Atatürk Cultural Centre"'. It was reopened in 1978 under the new name. At its opening, events such as the Yunus Emre Oratorio, a staging of Othello, a screening of the movie 'Al Yazmalım', an İdil Biret recital, a concert by Ruhi Su and various exhibitions, from sculpture to cartoons, were held (Uluşahin, 2016). The nature of these events sheds light on the mood of the encounter with the West during the founding period of the Republic: the emphasis is on both the essence of national culture and on Western cultural values, yet is stuck somewhere between the two.

In 1999, the AKM was declared a 'Registered Cultural Asset' and thus made part of a specially protected urban area. However, in 2005, the Minister of Culture and Tourism suggested that the building be demolished on the grounds that it had outlived its usefulness. In 2008, the AKM was closed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and all activities there were terminated. A compromise was sought between parties regarding the 'restoration and reopening' of the building. In May 2013, however, the restoration of the building was halted by a decision from the Ministry of Culture (Uluşahin, 2016). In 2017, President Erdoğan announced the decision to demolish the building.[12] This took place in 2018; the construction of a new centre in the Ottoman architectural style is now underway.

In terms of both its historical past and the symbolic meanings attributed to it, the AKM is a key ideological and cultural battleground coveted by the AKP government. For AKP elites, it is a symbol of Western mimicry and Republican elitism. During a speech in June 2017, President Erdoğan stated that art is a value that keeps societies together. After noting that this field had been 'in the hands of a certain segment of the society' in the old Turkey, he said the following:

[12] With regard to revanchism, it is notable that the AKM became a canvas for many slogans and banners during the Gezi Park protests in 2013.

> I want to express something that many of you may not know. The real opera house in Turkey, which is rare in Western countries, is the Beştepe National Congress and Culture Centre of the Presidential Complex in Ankara. While making this, I showed it to all my architect friends. There was actually no opera house in Turkey. Now we have made a magnificent one. We have an opera house that can hold 2,000 people at the same time. For many years, the understanding that brought such a work (Beştepe Congress and Culture Centre) to our country was vilified for wanting to demolish that unhealthy and certainly ugly building in Taksim and replace it with a more beautiful work. We have no enmity towards artists, no disrespect for art. On the contrary, we worked to bring a work worthy of both Istanbul and our world of culture and arts to our country. Harbiye Congress Centre is an example of this. How was Muhsin Ertuğrul Stage there, and what have we turned it into now? Now, thanks to God, we had the Atatürk Cultural Centre in Taksim built by the same architectural group, and the project design is now finished. We will demolish it by including the spaces on the side and the back, and we will give a very, very beautiful building to our Istanbul.[13]

Considering the date, Erdoğan's statement can be read as a declaration of reconquest that contains a hint of *ressentiment*. At the same time, it implies that a century-long cultural war has been won, and can be seen as a declaration of his success in monopolizing Beyoğlu culture by translating it into his own codes. In November 2017, at the launch of the new AKM, Erdoğan presented the building still under reconstruction as a 'civilizational project'. On the cultural level, he criticized Western mimicry. Considering the battle over the AKM at the time, one could argue that the AKP's new construction of national identity, which is irreducible to Islam and Islamism, has Ottoman heritage at its core, and reveals an imperial appetite and a claim to superiority and civilization.

Not surprisingly, the announcement of the new AKM project incited a public debate. The two expert architects (Korhan Gümüş and Eyüp Muhcu) interpreted the new AKM project as 'an attempt to overcome the tension between the Box and the Dome'. For them, it was 'as if [the project] symbolized a compromise between the two main currents within the state'. The main hall was designed in a box shape reminiscent of the old AKM, with a dome placed inside it. In this way, the box,

[13] 'Erdoğan: Taksim'deki AKM Projesi Bitti', *Mynet*, 12 June 2017, see http://www.mynet.com/haber/guncel/erdogan-taksimdeki-akm-projesi-bitti-3090141-1.

a symbol of Republican modernism, and the dome, a symbol of Neo-Ottomanism, were brought together. Indeed, the fact that the dome was enclosed in the box was seen as an act of taming.[14] Yet from my perspective, the new AKM symbolizes not a reconciliation of the Neo-Ottomanist national identity with the Republican one but its victory over it. Yet, this victory, like all victories, was extremely fragile, for it was not easily won. Throughout AKP rule, Taksim Square has become the site of the mobilization of golden-age nostalgia and of the revenge of the oppressed, and a symbol in the war of hegemony waged over the national culture. That said, Taksim Square was recently witness to one of Turkey's most popular, spectacular, visible and, for this reason, most potent opposition movements in its history.

In 2013, Erdoğan announced that a replica of the Ottoman Military Barracks, a historical structure laden with symbolic meaning and emotion, would be built in the area where Gezi Park stands. The park is a symbol of Taksim, a space that carries the historical weight of Republican-era modernization. This project undoubtedly emerged as a means of symbolic domination over and revenge against urban culture. Indeed, the history of the Military Barracks reveals a cultural *ressentiment* and desire for dominance dressed in nostalgia.

With the declaration of the Second Constitutional Monarchy (II. Meşrutiyet) in 1908, an attempt at modernizing and westernizing the Ottoman Empire, the Sultan was forced to share governing power with the parliament. In opposition, military and religious figures at the Barracks set in motion the 31 March Incident. This uprising was put down by the Army of Action from modern-day Thessaloniki; Sultan Abdülhamid II was dethroned and exiled to the city.[15] In this respect, for the AKP, the events of 31 March symbolize the betrayal to Abdülhamid II. According to them, 'the Ittihadists[16] who collaborated with Armenian, Bulgarian and Macedonian gangs within the army committed

[14] 'İstanbul'un En Büyük Tartışması: İki Uzman Yeni AKM'yi Yorumladı', *Hürriyet*, 11 November 2017, see http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/istanbulun-en-buyuktartismasi-iki-uzman-yeni-akmyi-yorumladi-40641781.

[15] 'Topçu Kıslası'nın Tarihi Anlamı', *DW*, 13 June 2013, see https://www.dw.com/tr/top%C3%A7u-k%C4%B1%C5%9Flas%C4%B1n%C4%B1n-tarih%C3%AE-anlam%C4%B1/a-16879025.

[16] The Committee for Union and Progress. It was the driving force behind the 1908 Constitutional Monarchy.

treason'.[17] Therefore, the plan to reconstruct the Barracks performs a dual mission of both avenging Abdülhamid II, with whom Erdoğan identifies, and recalling and reviving the Ottoman Empire in the present day. Various statements by AKP elites that the building would be designed as a shopping centre, then as a hotel and residence and finally as a city museum (Aksoy, 2014, 42) reveal an emotional investment in the symbolic presence of the building, rather than in its function.

From the AKP's point of view, Taksim–Beyoğlu is a 'nest of germs' (Bora, 2006, 70). Even a promotional video for the Metropolitan Municipality of Istanbul describes Beyoğlu as a 'poisoned princess' (Çavuşoğlu, 2017, 88–89). Conceived of as a woman's body, it is a place that needs to be wholly possessed and conquered. Clearing Istanbul's most emblematic square of 'germs' and replacing it with the Military Barracks, the symbol of betrayal to the Ottoman Empire, is undoubtedly intended to portray the might and cultural magnificence of Neo-Ottoman national identity, and declare the victory of the oppressed over the oppressor. When construction equipment entered the square on 27 May 2013 to cut down trees in Gezi Park for building the Military Barracks, however, it sparked a nationwide resistance movement. Approximately 2.5 million people participated in the protests against the AKP's culture war (in particular against its post-2011 manifestations), its neoliberal practices of urban development and its expansionist appetite. Meanwhile, Erdoğan continued to insist on the construction of the barracks, his demeanour indicative of the ontological *ressentiment* embodied in his character.[18] Depicting the protests as a coup attempt and a plot by external powers, he labelled protesters marginal groups and marauders. Twisting the whole issue into a culture war, he provocatively stated: 'They say "Erdoğan will not let us drink alcohol, gamble or fornicate freely." What they care about is not the trees'.[19]

Svetlana Boym argues that restorative nostalgia has two fundamental aspects: a desire to return to particular origins and the circulation of conspiracy theories. For Boym, nostalgics project their anger and hatred

[17] 'Topçu Kışlası Direnişin Simgesi', *memurlar.net*, 21 June 2016, see https://www.memurlar.net/haber/591907/topcu-kislasi-direnisin-simgesi.html.

[18] 'Erdoğan: Topçu Kışlası Yapılacak', *Al Jazeera*, 1 June 2013, see www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/erdogan-topcu-kislasi-yapilacak.

[19] 'Üsküdar'dan Taksim'e Bakış: Dış Güçlerin Oyunu', *T24*, 8 June 2013, see https://t24.com.tr/haber/uskudardan-taksime-bakis-dis-guclerin-oyunu,231556.

onto those they render scapegoats, believing that their 'enemies' are trying to prevent a 'homecoming' or even aiming to destroy them (2009, 78–79). In the case of the Gezi Park Resistance, both the motif of a return to origins and conspiracy theories were on full display in the AKP's statements. Their conspiratorial worldview rested, above all, on an imagined battle between good and evil. This inevitably led to the scapegoating of a mythic enemy. The basic feeling of those who resorted to conspiracy theories during the Gezi Park Resistance was a sense of perpetual threat which suggested that home was forever under siege and in need of defence against the plotting enemy.[20]

The dream-nightmare dichotomy in the AKP's relationship with Istanbul came out in full force during the Gezi Park protests, unleashing the AKP's ontological *ressentiment*, which is based on a century-old emotional legacy of anger and hatred, a perception of threat and an urge for revenge. The AKP emerged from this war relatively unscathed, and although it had to postpone the construction of the barracks, the project was not abandoned. Even in 2016, Erdoğan's statement that the barracks would be built in Taksim 'whether they want it or not' revealed his determination to avenge Abdülhamid and to realize the reconquest of Istanbul not only by taking land but by seizing cultural power as well.[21] Of course, the full satisfaction of this expansionist appetite also depends on proving through Istanbul that one could become 'more Western than the West', thereby overcoming the inferiority complex and rebuilding self-confidence in the face of Westernization. In the next section, I will focus

[20] At the AKP's Istanbul Provincial Congress held on 24 February 2021, President Erdoğan described the relationship the party had established with Istanbul using the metaphor of 'love'. In his speech, he talked about the Hagia Sophia and the suppression of Gezi Park 'events' as their victories against the Republic, the West and the distorted Westernization of the country. However, by this time, Istanbul, which Islamic conservatives had ruled for 25 years, was already lost. The opposition bloc's victory in the 2019 local elections had marked the greatest defeat in the AKP's political history. The main opposition party candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu won the elections. Following objections by the AKP provincial organization, the Supreme Electoral Council decided to conduct the election again on 23 June, and the opposition bloc's candidate again won with a much more overwhelming result than the first: 54.1% of the vote compared to 44.99% for the ruling bloc's candidate. 'Erdogan's party suffers blow after Istanbul re-run poll defeat', *BBCNews*, 24 June 2019, see https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48739256.

[21] 'Erdoğan: Gezi Parkı'na Topçu Kışlası Yapacağız', *Bianet*, 18 June 2016, see https://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/176000-erdogan-gezi-parki-na-topcukislasi-yapacagiz.

on the emotional manifestations of spatial projects wherein domestic and foreign imperial appetites were most visible.

5.3 Sites of Gigantomanic Fantasies: Symbols of Supremacy over the West and Imperial Greed

In this section, I will consider the emotional underpinnings of particular 'civilization projects' put forward by the AKP in Istanbul. In doing so, my main claim will be that the appeal of the new national identity characterized by Neo-Ottomanism not only allures the AKP and the members of this tradition but also an ever-broadening supporter base, who embrace it as a balm for the Turkish (and Muslim) wounds inflicted by Westernization. This section will focus on a broader fantasy of symbolic supremacy that exceeds the framework of the Islamic conservative motives.

In his book focusing on traces of romanticism in Turkish political culture, Hasan Aksakal argues that Occidentalist anger at the West is characteristic of almost all groups across the political spectrum in Turkey. For Aksakal, the inculcation of this anger, especially in the nationalist conservative side, is achieved by claiming a position of superiority. According to them, the West learned civilization from Muslims and the untouched essence of Muslim Turks contains all the seeds of civilization. Indeed, Turks are purportedly 'the original founders of modern Western civilization' (2015, 76–77). The AKP's emphasis on ancestors and civilization has its roots in an effort to overcome a one-hundred-year-old envy of the West. This is why regaining the sense of grandeur lost with the fall of the Ottoman Empire has become one of the AKP's most vital missions. Particularly in its post-2011 'period of mastery', the AKP has attempted to transform its domestic imperial appetite into a symbolic show of superiority vis-à-vis the West. In doing so, the party has not only stoked the desires of a broad supporter base but also demonstrated that its actions go beyond merely satisfying the needs of Islamic conservatives. The party has showed that it too aimed to join the neoliberal order, to benefit from all the opportunities it promises and to prove its power both to domestic and foreign actors. Istanbul was to showcase Turkey's ambition to join the neoliberal global order.

Announced by Erdoğan himself during the 2011 general election campaign, the Target 2023 project was crucial to satisfy this appetite. Erdoğan promised that Turkey would be one of the ten largest economies in the world by the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Republic

(Logie & Morvan, 2017, 16). Accordingly, a series of civilizational and development-oriented spatial initiatives, described by the AKP itself as 'crazy projects', were put forward. These projects were to be instrumental in the revival of national pride and the source of a symbolic sense of superiority over the West. The planned initiatives, which we can term the 'reincarnation of splendour', would supposedly make present-day Turks worthy of the ancestors who had built bridges, inns and baths in their time; they would herald the return of the Ottoman Empire and would be a sign of superiority in the competition between nations (Bora, 2017, 13). Among the AKP's 'crazy projects' in Istanbul are Marmaray, Canal Istanbul, the Eurasia Tunnel, the Third Bridge and Third Airport, as well as various skyscrapers, mosques and shopping malls. The most striking feature these projects share is an emphasis on being 'the most' (Adanalı, 2015, 121). Each project has been claimed as superlative: the world's fastest, the world's biggest, the world's largest and so on.

The passion for magnitude stems from a fetishization of and appetite for power. This appetite may fuel a more general greed for the symbolic supremacy of the Muslim-Turkish subject. The concept of gigantomania, first used to describe the obsession in Nazi Germany with erecting disproportionately large buildings and monuments (Bora, 2017, 15), constitutes the psychological-emotional grounds for AKP's fantasies about Istanbul. Gigantomanic fantasies have become the means by which Ottoman grandeur and a glorious past are rediscovered or fictionalized and transformed through contemporary representations into an imperial show of power both internally and externally.

The AKP realized most of its 'crazy' projects after 2011. One of these, Marmaray (the below-sea rail system connecting Europe and Asia), referred to as the 'project of the century', opened on 29 October 2013. The then-Prime Minister Erdoğan began his speech by quoting a line reportedly uttered by Fatih when he conquered Istanbul: 'The trick is to build a city; it's to make prosperous the hearts of the common folk'. On this day, which coincided with the 90th anniversary of the Republic, Erdoğan first and foremost commemorated Fatih with God's compassion and gratitude. He explained how Marmaray boosted national pride and self-confidence:

> This great pride we are experiencing today is undoubtedly the pride of Turkey, our beloved nation, and of Istanbul. Marmaray not only connects two continents, Marmaray brings the dreams of 150 years ago to reality.

> Marmaray brings together past and present, present and future. Marmaray brings this sacred nation together with self-confidence, with a faith that will show them what they can do when they believe.[22]

A similar discourse of pride and self-confidence can be seen in images that circulated online after the tunnel's opening. They reproduce the myth of Fatih the Conqueror marching ships over land to conquer Istanbul, implying that Erdoğan, as the grandson of Fatih, had repeated the conquest with a similar action. One of these images accompanies a text saying: 'His ancestor [Fatih] drove ships on land. Erdoğan drives trains under the sea'.

The construction of the Eurasia Tunnel, another gigantic project like Marmaray, was completed in 2016. The Ministry of Transportation organized an online survey, asking citizens to name the tunnel. The survey was launched with the slogan 'Continents unite from below, the name comes from the people'. The names of Abdülhamid II, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Alparslan Türkeş were struck from consideration due to their conflictual prominence. Stating that they were extremely saddened that the survey had turned into a 'contest of values', Ahmet Arslan, minister of transportation at the time, declared that project should be named the 'Eurasia Tunnel'.[23] The tunnel, which was opened in December 2016 when Erdoğan was president, was touted as Sultan Abdülhamid's dream, a framing that thus enabled Erdoğan to once again identify with both Abdülhamid II and Fatih. Thanks to the Eurasia Tunnel, being an Ottoman descendant became honourable, constituting a main source of national pride. In addition to securing national self-confidence at home, the tunnel also gave expression to the fantasy of symbolic superiority over the West, with its emphasis on being an example and inspiration to the world.

Another one of the AKP's crazy projects materialized in 2016. Unsurprisingly, the Third Bridge was named after Yavuz Sultan Selim. The bridge was inaugurated with a collective prayer led by the president of religious affairs, Mehmet Görmez. President Erdoğan was the first to

[22] Elif Çiftçi. (2013, December 21). *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Marmaray Açılış Konuşması* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8UXfNRFn4Ws.

[23] 'Bakan Arslan'ı Ziyadesiyle Üzen Anket İptal Edildi, Tünelin Adı Avrasya Olacak', *Diken*, 12 December 2016, see http://www.diken.com.tr/bakan-arslani-ziyadesiyle-uzen-anket-iptal-edildi-tunelin-adi-avrasya-olacak/.

cross the bridge.[24] Erdoğan's central role in the inauguration of these giant projects underscores that the Neo-Ottomanist narrative is embodied in Erdoğan's persona and fetishized and transformed into a heroic epic through his actions. Turkey's glorious history is remembered, written and made anew through the circulation of fresh mythic narratives for the people that inspires not an inferiority complex but self-confidence and satisfies the sense of superiority.[25]

I claim that the pride generated by these 'giant' projects appeals to a wider audience than just the supporters of the AKP. By instrumentalizing the West and its symbols for the revival of a new national identity, a reincarnation of Ottoman grandeur and a means of overcoming inferiority complex and building self-confidence, the AKP managed to speak to the hearts of the nation. The revision of the 2023 target with 'mega' fantasies for 2053 and 2071 is an indication of how exciting the desire to be 'the biggest in the world' (Adanalı, 2015, 120) is for *everyone*. The national reconstruction of self-confidence heals the sense of defeat that the Turkish subject has been nursing for more than a century. While concepts such as development, civilization, prosperity, resurrection and ascension provide a widespread emotional satisfaction, one wonders what real needs, desires, dreams and fantasies they appeal to. As the AKP proclaims the resurrection of the Ottoman Empire through gigantomanic fantasies, can these projects be conceived independently from the greed for expansion evoked by the conquest of Istanbul? In seeking answers to

[24] 'İstanbul Boğazı'nda 3. Köprü Açıldı', *Bianet*, August 26, 2016, see https://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/178207-istanbul-bogazi-nda-3-kopru-acildi.

The participation of names such as King Hamed bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain, President of the Presidential Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bakir Izetbegovic, President of Macedonia Gjorge Ivanov, President of TRNC Mustafa Akıncı, Speaker of the Azerbaijani Parliament Oktay Asadov, Prime Minister of Bulgaria Boyko Borisov, Prime Minister of Pakistan Punjab Province Shahbaz Sharif, Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia Rasim Ljajic, First Deputy Prime Minister of Georgia Dimitri Kumsisihvili, and former Prime Minister of Lebanon Suat Hariri are of the utmost importance in symbolizing a resurrection of the Ottoman Empire.

[25] In this regard, it is worth remembering that 1453 trucks were deployed to the Third Airport (the construction of which had not yet been completed) in May 2017 as part of celebrations for the Conquest of Istanbul. After this gigantomanic show of power, billed as 'the longest truck crossing', the public learned that an official application had been made to enter the Guinness Book of World Records. '3. havalimanında 1453 kamyon ile fethe özel gösteri', *NTV*, 29 May 2017, see https://www.ntv.com.tr/video/turkiye/3-havalimaninda1453-kamyon-ile-fethe-ozel-gosteri,-kaSCi6rcUGvtjBYhqR83Q.

these questions, the next section focuses on 'the lust for construction'. I will analyse how the symbolic conquest of Istanbul has stroked and at times satisfied the appetite for material superiority and enrichment not only among the ruling elites but also among the people.

5.4 Sites of Material Supremacy and an Appetite for Enrichment: The Lust for Constructions

Across its two decades of rule, the AKP's central plan for economic growth in urban space has undoubtedly been 'the lust for construction'. Indeed, the concept of urban transformation (*kentsel dönüşüm*) as a model for economic growth based on construction has become the party's hallmark. Urban transformation should be understood as an opportunity which appeals to the appetite for enrichment on the part of the ruling elites, construction companies and contractors, but also among lay people. Since the beginning of AKP rule, Istanbul has undergone a radical transformation; the city is regarded as a world of opportunities and unrealized profits (Adanalı, 2015, 119–121). From this perspective, the Neo-Ottomanist narrative has embraced the dream of conquering Istanbul with an imperial appetite for material superiority.

Jocelyn Pixley argues that the most fundamental shortcoming of economic studies is that they ignore the relationship between economics and emotions. According to her, the concepts of 'interest' and 'expectation' are too emotionally charged to be explained by rationality alone. Yet, economists, as with many other disciplines, have tended to adopt the dichotomy of emotion/ration, preferring to analyse economics only in terms of rationality. Yet to fully comprehend economic activity is to take into account people's feelings about the present and the future. What is called self-interest is actually based on a person or group's desire to improve their 'pleasure, wealth, fame, status or power' (2002, 80). From this perspective, I interpret the economic growth model based on 'the lust for construction' mainly through the contagious and mobilizing functions of the domestic imperial appetite. Indeed, Çavuşoğlu claims that by blending with Neo-Ottomanism, the AKP's construction-based growth model has become a 'national popular project'. He argues that analyses aimed at understanding the AKP's ability to gain popular support remain insufficient if they do not take into account the hegemony derived from this growth model. To Çavuşoğlu, the AKP's urban policies have succeeded in incorporating previously non-commoditized spaces into the

real estate market, distributing (albeit unequally) the wealth generated to both ruling elites and some segments of society, thereby gaining mass support (2017, 78).

Undoubtedly, the AKP's construction-focused growth model has mobilized a vigorous political economy, but it has also become a way of generating a new middle class. The popular fondness for construction and housing projects in this period should be understood as an admiration and emulation of 'concretized power', of the capital embedded in construction itself (Bora, 2017, 14). The force behind the material conquest of Istanbul and the appetite for land acquisition and expansion is the Housing Development Administration (TOKİ), which was granted expansive powers under the prime minister's office. TOKİ intervenes in neighbourhoods where the poor in Istanbul live in a 'destructive and predatory' manner, using the fear of earthquakes fanned by the media and the promise of reaching civilization and modernization as a means of gaining consent (Çavuşoğlu, 2017, 87–88).

On the one hand, the AKP is displacing the poor from their neighbourhoods and directing them to TOKİ buildings through urban transformation practices. On the other hand, it promises housing opportunities to 'the new middle classes and white-collar workers who are eagerly looking forward to' the housing opportunities wrought by displacement. Housing has long been a 'commodity of thrust' for the middle class under AKP rule (Gülhan, 2017, 41). This new middle class is made up of people who 'once lived on the outskirts of the city and of politics, but have taken advantage of opportunities that moved them upwards in the social ladder. Now they naturally emulate those who were showing off before them, and suppress them if necessary' (Çavdar, 2017, 115). Luxury housing projects in Istanbul are given names like *Manhattan*, *Metropol* or *Viaport Venezia*, all of which are metropolises of the West that evoke wealth and globalization (Peker, 2015). Alternatively, they mix Ottoman and Turkish names such as *Ab-ı Hayat Evleri*, *Şehr-i Bahçe*, *Sultan Makamı* that recall and keep alive the splendour of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the practice of consuming housing, which the middle classes engage in with greed, functions as a signifier of individual identity, prestige and social status; owning a flat in Istanbul has become the dream of an ever-growing cohort. For the new middle class, which has the biggest share of the housing pie,

accruing wealth is no longer shameful or something to be concealed but is desired, displayed and praised (Çavuşoğlu, 2017, 135–148).[26]

Meanwhile, the AKP moved to satisfy the desires for enrichment and civilization among the lower classes that it displaced through the discourse and practices of urban transformation. Already in the 1990s, as mayor, Erdoğan promised wealth to the poor and religious people on the outskirts of the city, stating that he would rescue them from the squalor of the slums and move them into modern, high-rise apartments so that they too could experience modernity through 'huge blocks and colourfully illuminated parks' (Çavdar, 2017, 119–120). Indeed, TOKİ has become a means of satisfying, or at least pretending to satisfy, the appetite for 'civilization and enrichment' of those on the city's periphery. It created new mortgage opportunities, and 'brought civilization to their feet' with small down payments and low interest rates. Thus, the appetite for material superiority and enrichment promised by the construction-based growth model in combination with the Neo-Ottomanist narrative enabled the slum dweller to become a real estate developer, speculator and contractor. In the precarious Turkish economy, everyone dreaming of a secure future for themselves and their families adopted the spirit of a 'land developer' (Çavuşoğlu, 2017, 85–86). The coffeehouse conversations of low-income people began to be dominated by stories of wealthy developers and speculation that urban transformation would also begin in their neighbourhoods (Gülhan, 2017, 37).

The figure of Ali Ağaoğlu, a contractor unique to the spirit of the 2000s, has arguably become emblematic of the appetite for enrichment of both low-income groups and the new middle class. Before the AKP years, wealth was based on the principle of living sumptuous lives out of sight. However, Ali Ağaoğlu, 'the king of construction sites', put his signature on 'giant' housing projects, becoming a popular media figure who was keen to show the public 'the life he lives, the money he earns, the car he drives, the bed he sleeps'. In a sense, he was the embodiment of the oppressed's dreams of money, cars and women (Türk, 2017, 103). Ağaoğlu's example became an object of desire for a large segment of the society, primarily because it made possible the transformation of the 'lazy

[26] According to Çavuşoğlu, the AKP has in fact succeeded in uniting a kind of Muslim Protestant morality with the spirit of capitalism. The new Anatolian bourgeoisie's use of the enemy's own weapons against them goes hand in hand with its internalization of the discourse of modernization.

contractor', who had been denigrated by the capitalists of the old Turkey and referred to as a DIY contractor, into a spectacular possessor of wealth and power. Sometimes he appeared on the screen searching for a plot of land, sometimes driving his million-dollar luxury car on Bağdat Street and listening to music at full volume. In this way, he showed that he was *one of us*, even what we might become! Ağaoğlu always aspired to more land, more power and more pleasure; his world was a dream for those who watched him (Türk, 2017, 104–111).

There is a key characteristic of buildings constructed in Istanbul during the AKP period, both by TOKİ and by the individual contractor, who represents the imperial spirit of the period: the constructions reach endlessly to the sky. These multi-storey towering buildings are monuments to power and ostentation. Referred to in the literature as 'Dubaization' (Adanalı, 2015, 120), this aspect underscores how the imperial-neoliberal appetite, an urge for ostentation and fantasies of superiority prescribed by the Neo-Ottomanist narrative conquer the body of Istanbul: a masculine invasion evoked by huge phallic buildings.

I argue that the strength of the AKP's construction-based growth model draws on the sentiments preached and promised by the Neo-Ottomanist narrative. This power

> is not only nourished by Islam, but also by its capacity to reconstruct an authentic nationalist identity. The AKP's model of reinventing the Ottoman Empire has the support of the masses. Those who longed for the imperial Ottoman Empire, those who were tired of the domination of the nation-state, non-Muslim minorities, nationalists trapped in inferiority complexes by the sophistication of the EU, former Ottomans outside the borders of the nation-state, and those who believed that strong regional leadership is necessary for the stabilization of the region in general, were greatly impressed by Neo-Ottomanism (Çavuşoğlu, 2017, 84)

It is true that throughout its history, Istanbul has overflowed with and been dazzled by prosperity and has been a source of both attraction and envy (Demirağ, 2009). In Turkey, the main capital was always the capital of Istanbul, which reproduced itself there (Bora, 2006, 73). Perhaps for this reason, those who have directly or indirectly taken their share from it have been those who were caught up in a Neo-Ottomanist dream and desire to become powerful, glorious and wealthy. Of course, these people are not limited to AKP supporters. The construction-based economy

gained legitimacy because of the wealth it promised to large segments of society. Neo-Ottomanist discourses were the emotional driver of this process of persuasion, as construction has become about reconstructing national honour and pride as well.

During the Ottoman period, the conquest of a city was followed by the looting and pillaging of that city by the soldiers of the victorious army. The conqueror reshaped the city and arbitrarily decided who would share its economic and symbolic resources. As city dwellers were enslaved and driven out, they were replaced by new population groups (Berman, 2013). In Istanbul's case, the economic and symbolic conquest and looting driven by a lust for construction includes actors both large and small, from the ruling elites to the middle class and, to an extent, the lower classes too. Is it not possible, then, for someone other than these actors to experience the pride and splendour of the Neo-Ottomanist national identity? How do those who cannot share in the wealth and can only witness from the sidelines the giant projects and enrichment in Istanbul feel the splendour, power and dignity that the city's reconquest invokes in their own 'small' worlds? In the next section, I will attempt to answer these questions by analysing the meaning of the Panorama 1453 Conquest Museum and the Conquest Festivities that were organized in Yenikapı Square.

5.5 Sites of Reconquest for Everyone: The Panorama 1453 Conquest Museum and the Yenikapi Square Conquest Festivities

The Panorama 1453 Conquest Museum was opened by Erdoğan in 2009, when the Neo-Ottomanist narrative was beginning to be aired and circulate more intensively. The location of the Conquest Museum in itself carries a weighty symbolic meaning: it was built in the Topkapı Culture Park, located between Topkapı and Edirnekapı, the site of a battle during the siege and capture of Istanbul in 1453. On the museum's official website, the symbolic meaning of this area is nostalgically conveyed:

> Topkapı Culture Park: where one era ended and a new one began, where the epic of conquest was written, where Fatih began to be known as the Conqueror, where Byzantium, Istanbul and hearts were conquered, the address of the future of the Ottoman lineage, which blossomed in the shadow of the mountain covering the horizon in Söğüt and grew into

> a mighty sycamore in 1453, breaching the city walls and spreading its branches.[27]

An introductory text emphasizes that the museum's opening was attended by all the major dignitaries of the state, demonstrating the significance attached to this museum by the ruling elites. The text concludes with a wish: 'We hope that your excitement of conquest will always remain fresh and inspire the conquerors of tomorrow'. The website, which provides information ranging from the construction phase of the museum to its physical features, essentially promises that the museum will be a leading and superior example among its global counterparts, being 'full panoramic'. Thanks to this panorama technology, visitors will 'suddenly feel as if they themselves are at the dawn of 29 May 1453 and witnessing the moment of conquest'.[28] Visiting the museum, one will not only view these majestic and all-encompassing images but also 'rediscover and comprehend the spirit of that day' through such effects as the *takbir*s of soldiers, the neighs of horses, the sounds of cannons and the Mehter march.

In fact, as one of the most fundamental tools of national identity construction and processes of myth-making, museums have always been at the forefront of cultural policies in Turkey (Bozkuş, 2014, 2). For those unable to be the addressee, subject or actor of the Neo-Ottomanist expansionist regime, the Panorama 1453 Museum offers the opportunity to feel the 'spirit of conquest' and 'the power and glory of the Ottoman Empire', to be a part of it. For an entrance fee of 7.5 TL for local tourists and 3 TL for students, the museum makes it possible for *everyone* to experience this historical moment. Its website, which claims to have broken visitor records since its opening, offers a 360-degree panoramic virtual tour for those who cannot visit in person. *Everyone*, thus, has the opportunity to experience and feel the conquest of Istanbul, even while sitting in front of their computer screens.

In enabling people to remember and relive the glorious past, the Conquest Museum makes sure to employ superior technologies and all the possibilities of modernity and civilization. In this respect, the museum can be seen as a marker of assertiveness and defiance, as global as it is

[27] See https://www.panoramikmuze.com/.

[28] See https://www.panoramikmuze.com/.

local, as contemporary as it is historical. There, it is possible to transfer the glorious history on which the Neo-Ottomanist narrative is based to the present and to 'keep the spirit and magic of the conquest alive for *everyone* from 7 years old to 70'. Moreover, there is no beginning or end to the panoramic images that surround the visitor; the end of the images in a gigantic sphere corresponds also to the beginning. Conquest thus becomes the object of a desire that is constantly reproduced and satisfied, rather than something that happened in the past. Indeed, visiting the museum, you are certain to come across old men with goose bumps, women in wide-eyed admiration and young people and children competing to have their photos taken in front of the visual displays. In sum, the Panorama 1453 Museum is foremost a site of encounter for bodies mesmerized by the 'dream of conquest'. It is a spell that allows the glorious past to persist on the surfaces of bodies through emotions. In addition to being the cultural symbol of Istanbul's recreated identity, the Panorama 1453 Museum also leaves a taste of the Neo-Ottomanist national identity in all its visitors.

The Conquest Festivities are another site of 'conquest for everyone'. There is no shortage of analyses of the transformation and ideological content of these celebrations, which have moved gradually from the periphery to the centre throughout AKP rule. For instance, in *Benim Milletim* (*My Nation*), Büke Koyuncu conducts an in-depth discussion of the history of the Conquest Festivities dating back to 2014. What I will attempt here is to focus specifically on the celebrations that took place in Yenikapı Square in 2015 and 2016,[29] to avoid repeating the existing literature. I will also examine the content of the festivities, which promise *conquest for everyone*, as well as the importance of Yenikapı as a symbolic space. First, however, it is necessary to take a brief look at the historical journey of the Conquest Festivities.

Records show that the first celebration of the Conquest of Istanbul was held in 1910. At a time when nationalism was on the rise, it is no surprise that a search for a national ritual was on the agenda. The newspaper *Tanin* reported that the 1914 ceremony was celebrated with great enthusiasm, and that shops were even closed 'on all the streets between Hagia Sophia and Fatih's tomb'. During the ensuing years of the First World War and

[29] Here, I should note that in 2017 and 2018, the Conquest Festivities were not held as a rally 'due to security concerns and the month of Ramadan'; the celebration was limited to a protocol dinner held at the Haliç Congress Centre.

the early republican period, there is no evidence that the conquest of Istanbul was celebrated. In 1939, on the instruction of then-President İsmet İnönü, a preparatory commission was formed for the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul (which would take place in 1953). The preparations, during which major projects including conferences, exhibitions and the restoration of Fatih-era artefacts were envisioned, did not produce concrete outcomes due to economic difficulties and 'the fear of offending Christendom and Greece' (Koyuncu, 2014, 82–83). The first Conquest celebration in the history of the Republic was apparently held in 1953, when the Democrat Party (DP) was in power. There is no mention of İnönü's instructions in this narrative. The hastily organized 500th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul was held on 29 May 1953 outside the walls of Topkapı, at the site where Fatih had set up his tent. Neither the then-President Celal Bayar nor Prime Minister Adnan Menderes attended the ceremony (Koyuncu, 2014, 84).

The Istanbul Conquest Society, founded by Islamic conservative intellectuals during DP rule, embraced the celebrations between the 1960s and 1980s, turning the conquest of the city into a symbol of opposition. In this respect, the Society was arguably the forerunner of the discourse of reconquest on show today. The pressures (discussed earlier) that the tradition from which the AKP emerged faced on the political scene prior to the 1990s finally came to a head in 1994, when the first great conquest celebration was held in Istanbul after Erdoğan became the mayor of the city. Since then, conquest celebrations had been monopolized by the Welfare Party as an alternative ritual of national identity and as an oppositional event. The scope of the celebrations, which appealed to a narrow ideological circle, inevitably changed in the 2000s when the AKP came to power. The marker of this change was the free Kenan Doğulu concert, which was held in 2005 as part of the celebrations organized by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (Koyuncu, 2014, 95). Making the concert free of charge was a strategic move to popularize the celebrations. In 2009 and ever since, the celebrations became a popular festival and national ceremony.

At this point, let me jump forward and pick up where Büke Koyuncu left off, tracing the course of the Conquest Festivities in the last few years. In so doing, I will regard Yenikapı as the site of *conquest for everyone*, as the celebrations have been held there since 2015. The construction of the Yenikapı rally site began in 2012 and was completed in 2014. The

symbolic importance of the square comes from its location within Istanbul's Fatih district. The fact that Conquest Festivities are now being held in Yenikapı reveals the symbolic winner of the war between the parties in the Fatih-Harbiye dichotomy. Moreover, not only is it the final destination on the emotional journey of the AKP from victim to victor, but a site of collective euphoria, where national self-confidence reaches new heights.

The most important feature of the Yenikapı rally area is that it is big enough to host 2.5 million people. Indeed, records show that nearly two million people participated in the celebrations on the 562nd anniversary of the conquest in 2015. People were brought to Yenikapı Square in free buses from all over Istanbul, even from other cities. At a banquet organized under the slogan *Resurrection and Resurgence*, President Erdoğan started his speech by reciting the Surah of Fatih. He emphasized that it was Fatih who brought the call to prayer to Istanbul. He then prayed that the mosques of Istanbul would not remain without prayer or congregation. Koyuncu argues that the language which dominated the speeches of state officials at the feasts held in the 2000s was a discourse of tolerance. However, Erdoğan's 2015 Conquest Festivity speech boasts a discourse of defiance and even war, grounded entirely on a dichotomy of us and them. In it, he promises to eliminate any attack on Istanbul's (read Turkey's) religious identity, stating: 'The conquest is 14 May 1950, the *millet*'s assertion of its will at the ballot box! The conquest is 1994!',[30] implying that the conquest of Istanbul began with the DP government and with his reign as mayor.

The content of the 2015 Conquest Festivities, meanwhile, was performance-oriented enough to give the feeling of *conquest for everyone* and to create a Durkheimian sense of collective effervescence among participants by mobilizing feelings of victory, magnificence and self-confidence. From the air show by the Turkish Air Force's 'supersonic acrobatic team' to the installation of Turkey's largest stage, from the 4,700 square-metre poster of Erdoğan and then-Prime Minister Davutoğlu (which made it into the Guinness Book of Records) to the laser-guided conquest simulation and the giant Mehter team, this feast was a gigantomanic fantasy manifested. Indeed, the following day's newspapers would report that the celebration

[30] Gelincik 4089. (2015, June 4). Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, İstanbul 562. yıl Fetih Şöleni Konuşması [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZKdGwlFGz8.

of the 562nd anniversary of the conquest was watched with admiration all over the world.[31]

In 2016, the Conquest Festivities were held in Yenikapı Square once more. At the celebration, which was attended by an estimated one million people, Erdoğan was introduced as 'the architect of the Resurrection and Resurgence' and 'the loud voice of the world's oppressed', as he was called to the stage to deliver his speech, accompanied by the enthusiastic applause and cheers of the crowd. This time, his speech dealt with the motif of 'terrorism'. In the short period between the 7 June general elections in 2015 and the 2016 Conquest Festivities, several bombs had exploded in Suruç (20 July 2015), Ankara (10 October 2015), Sultanahmet Square (12 January 2016), Diyarbakır (13 January 2016), Ankara (17 February 2016), Ankara (13 March 2016), Istiklal Street (19 March 2016) and Diyarbakır (12 May 2016), killing hundreds of people. The 2016 Conquest Festivities therefore took place amid a climate of socio-political turmoil and collective fear. As soon as Erdoğan took the stage, the AKP Youth Branch unfurled a giant poster reading: 'Let's Drill the Mountains and End Terrorism'. Participants waved a giant Turkish flag. In his speech, Erdoğan said that behind the political and social unrest in the country lay the desire of domestic and foreign powers to take revenge of the conquest of Istanbul: 'Their concern is to avenge the conquest. There you see, the puppets they used were buried in the pits

[31] 'Dünya Bu Tarihi Şöleni İzledi', *Sabah*, 31 May 2015, https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2015/05/31/dunya-bu-tarihi-soleni-izledi.

they dug.[32] Those who unleashed them on us will eventually meet the same fate!'.[33]

Although the celebration of the 563rd anniversary of the Conquest was held under extraordinary circumstances and attendance was almost half what it was the previous year, it is important to note that it was nevertheless a show of power unsurpassed in previous years in terms of content. The acrobatics of the Turkish Air Force, the concert of the giant Mehter team and the on-stage re-enactment of the conquest of Istanbul using three-dimensional technology made it possible for the new national identity to be performed (and in a spectacular manner before hundreds of thousands of people). Today, Yenikapı has become the most vivid site of *conquest for everyone*, satisfying—albeit on a simulated level—the urges and needs, the appetite for conquest and the desire for enchantment of those who could not experience the reconquest of Istanbul in the symbolic sites relayed across this chapter, those who could not take their concrete share from this conquest—in other words, of *lay people*. In July of the same year, Yenikapı Square was to become the scene, and capture the spirit of a completely different and much larger rally. It hosted the creation of a new myth that embodied the emotional reservoir of Neo-Ottomanism: projecting victory, magnificence and self-confidence. And its participants were not limited to the AKP and its supporters. In the last chapter, I will analyse the 15 July 2016 Coup Attempt and subsequent events in light of the national narcissism that today characterizes the Neo-Ottomanist spirit.

[32] Erdoğan is referring here to 'Operation Trench', which was carried out in the south-east of Turkey between 2015 and 2016. On 22 July 2015, following the 7 June 2015 general elections, two police officers were found dead in their homes in Ceylanpınar; the government then ended the peace process. 'Operation Trench' was jointly carried out by counter-terrorism teams, Special Operations Police and soldiers in various districts in the Southeast, on the grounds that the PKK had been storing ammunition and digging trenches in preparation for clashes during the peace process. Operations were carried out in Diyarbakır's Sur district, Şırnak's Idil, Cizre and Silopi districts, Mardin's Derik and Nusaybin districts and Dargeçit on the Batman-Mardin-Şırnak border. During the operation, prolonged curfews were imposed in the aforementioned regions, 22% of the total population of Cizre, Silopi, Sur and Nusaybin were forced to migrate, and 1380 people were recorded to have died, including security forces. Human rights violations during curfews and operations in neighbourhoods incited controversy at the time.

[33] Mersin Gündem. (2016, May 29). *Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip ERDOĞAN İstanbul'un Fethinin 563. Yıldönümü Kutlama Programı* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOy1HjbZtSo.

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CHAPTER 6

Towards the Construction of a Neo-Ottomanist Myth: The 'Legend' of 15 July and National Narcissism

On 7 August 2016, an event dubbed 'the biggest rally in the history of the Republic', attended by approximately five million people, was hosted in Yenikapı Square in Istanbul. From the early hours of the morning, hundreds of thousands flocked to the rally by road and sea. Two and a half million Turkish flags were prepared for distribution in the area. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Spokesman of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey İsmail Kahraman, Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım, Chief of Defence Hulusi Akar, CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli attended the rally. This huge 'coming together', registered as the 'Rally of Democracy and Martyrs', attempted the creation of a new myth in the history of the Republic of Turkey.[1] Perhaps none of the symbolic emotional sites of Neo-Ottomanism that I have touched upon so far have matched the national spirit emotionally preached, invoked and addressed at the gathering in Yenikapı. Throughout this chapter, I will consider 15 July 2016 as pivotal to the construction of a new myth that ruling elites hoped would cause a cathartic emotional transformation in the nation's identity in the aftermath of the attempted coup. In doing so, I will identify the dominant emotion as 'national narcissism'. National narcissism had previously been invoked in the Neo-Ottomanist narrative

[1] 'Türk Siyasetinin Uzlaşı Meydanı: Yenikapı Ruhu', *Yeni Şafak*, see www.yenisafak.com/15temmuz/yenikapi-mitingi-olay-detay.

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https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-48723-1_6

but had not yet dominated the national spirit. Eventually, at the rally in Yenikapı, where the rulers of the country, as well as the main opposition leaders and the Turkish Armed Forces gathered, Neo-Ottomanist national narcissism was concretized.

The 15 July coup attempt constituted a major rupture in the emotional climate of the political tradition from which the AKP originated. It transformed a historical narrative dominated by defeat, repression and a discourse of victimization into a radically different one replete with victory and self-adoration. There was an attempt to fill the national spirit invoked after the 15 July coup attempt with positive and inclusive content. To this end, the notion of 'Yenikapı Spirit' was circulated with rhetoric that emphasized the grandeur, strength, might and courage of the Turkish nation as a whole. The myth created in Yenikapı was intended to appeal not only to the AKP and its supporters but to be inclusive enough to attract far broader segments of the society, to make them feel the national narcissism which clung to and emanated from the Neo-Ottomanist narrative. This chapter attempts to substantiate this claim, first by elaborating on the significance of myths in the creation of nations and national identities, then by adapting this framework to the 'legend of 15 July' to demonstrate that national narcissism was the dominant emotion evoked by the AKP regarding the events of 15 July. It was evident in the event itself, in the imprint it left, in how this imprint was transformed into an ethos and a narrative, in how sanctity was attributed to the event by referring to martyrs, veterans and heroes and finally, in how the event was remembered through monuments, commemorations and other symbolic political tools to secure its place in the popular imagination.

6.1 On National Myths

National myths are constructed through how a nation sees itself, what it wants to be and how it wishes to distinguish itself from other nations. In this respect, national myths define identity and prompt action. They are composed of fragments based on a blend of fantasy and reality; this blend is then turned into an internally cohesive narrative and relayed in colourful, memorable language. National myths are constructed rigidly so as to inhibit questioning of the origin, character and destiny of the nation, and are difficult to disprove. They thus serve certain social and political purposes. Perhaps the most important feature of national myths is that they are linked to the past but have the scope to make sense of the

present and future (Kumar, 2013, 94–95). In other words, myths are not only a model of reality, but they constitute a model for the construction of reality as well (Adak, 2003, 513).

Every nation has its myths, populated by certain characters and events. Myth creation is a practice inherent to nation-state formation. Myths act as glue, creating community and binding people into members of a nation. The truthfulness or falsity of myths is not actually in question; in the eyes of those who believe in them, their authenticity is indisputable. What is at stake is the symbolic and metaphorical meanings that a myth contains, the emotions it addresses and the messages it conveys (Rose, 2003, 154).

National myths establish identity. They not only define a given collectivity but also reveal what distinguishes this collectivity from others, and clearly demarcate the boundaries that separate them (Adak, 2003, 513). Anthony D. Smith claims that myths, memories, traditions and symbols are the primary elements that give nationalism its strength and spirit. Through them, national identities are rebuilt and reconstructed in each subsequent generation (1999, 9). Through myth creation, using metaphorical discursive tools such as rebirth and re-awakening, political actors present an ideal of collective salvation that will enable a nation to be healed of the wounds, defeats and pains of the past. By attributing heightened symbolic significance to historical events, myths can be revived and a longed-for golden age of the past is summoned to the present (1999, 68). National myths create symbols that reinforce identities and a sense of belonging. They provide the general suppositions and opinions that form the basis of solidarity, and serve as glue to mend rifts and overcome polarization. Emotional attachments and symbolic resources work together, enabling a nation to respond dynamically to challenges and crises. Gérard Bouchard claims that national myths are durable, persistent and inclusive representations. Inclusivity is one of the defining characteristics of myths—they operate beyond distinctions of class, language, religion, gender and political party (2013, 277). National myths nurture identities, setting in motion powerful narratives to which collectivities can turn in times of distress. They ameliorate feelings of humiliation and defeat, and reinforce a sense of security by presenting more coherent visions of the world. They energize the people during periods of war and other traumas, prompting them to take action for particular purposes. Myths also help to cover up or overcome contradictions of a nation. They

provide support for the functioning of institutions and embolden a society to be resilient in the face of difficulties (2013, 277–278).

Questioning the idea that myth creation is unique to primitive tribes or past civilizations, Bouchard argues that myths are indispensable symbolic tools for both modern and post-modern societies. According to him, myths are deeply meaningful, hybrid creations that emerge from a blending of fact and fiction, reason and emotion, truth and falsehood and the conscious and unconscious. While myths are tightly contextualized and specific to particular historical and social conditions, they also claim to have universal features. They are sanctified by their deep emotional roots. They cannot be simply dismissed as absurd, illogical or false; even the mildest questioning can provoke emotional reactions. The more a myth appeals to the emotional needs of a nation, the more effective it will be. The emotional and sacred dimension of myths reveals why people are ready to die for them. It is difficult to explain such devotion through any mechanism but emotions (2013, 3).

According to Bouchard, national myths are essentially formed by a combination of the following elements, each a building block in the process of myth-making: (1) A structuring event or episode that acts as an *anchor*: This is a meaningful and determining experience that has occurred in the recent or distant past. Typically associated with misfortune or a trauma, such an event can also be positive or uplifting. (2) Imprint or influence: This element points to a strong emotion in the collective consciousness. An imprint that results from a traumatic event becomes a wound, and manifests as suffering. Conversely, an imprint linked to a positive event may furnish a sense of power and confidence. (3) The translation of the imprint into an *ethos* (values, principles, ideals, beliefs, worldviews, feelings and attitudes): For instance, unity and solidarity may become fundamental values for a nation experiencing civil war. Or, a society facing challenges such as invasion, military confrontation or natural disaster may be overwhelmed by shame and ultimately seek ways to restore its pride and self-esteem. (4) The construction of a narrative: In order for an event to be continually remembered, its imprint must be perpetually activated and reawakened in different contexts. Narrativization is intended not to heal the wounds inflicted by the event but to remember them, thus bolstering the myth and prolonging its lifespan. (5) The sacralization of the ethos through intensive commemoration: Commemorations become the means of sanctifying the message contained in the myth and asserting emotions as a driving force. Such

acts are meant to create a shift in consciousness. At this stage, myth and message become almost doctrines. (6) Spreading a message through effective discursive and communicative strategies: This step is a vital tool, relevant at every stage following the occurrence of an event. For an event to be repeated, remembered and permanently imprinted, it first must be kept alive at the discursive level. (7) The intervention of social actors or coalitions: Instruments such as state institutions, trade unions, political parties, religious actors and the media play a key role in the construction of myths. This element demonstrates that myth creation is always tied to power relations (Bouchard, 2013, 5).

As the building blocks of myth-making processes, these elements offer an instructive framework for my purposes. After this introduction to the nature and operation of myths, I will analyse the 15 July coup attempt as a new national myth in order to substantiate my argument that the mythologization of this event reflects a new national mood invoked by Neo-Ottomanism.

6.2 The Birth of a Myth: 15 July

A period of intense social and political turmoil in Turkey across 2015 and 2016 came to its peak with an unprecedented series of events in July 2016. These events began on the evening of 15 July, and were registered as a 'coup attempt'. Its agents were identified as members of the Fethullah Gülen community, which, up until 2013 (specifically, until the corruption investigations carried out between 17 and 25 December of that year) had exerted a powerful influence on state institutions and accompanied Erdoğan and the AKP on their political journey. Recall that the coups carried out by the Turkish Armed Forces throughout the history of the Republic have occupied a significant place in the narrative of victimization, as well as in the expression of the emotions that accompany this narrative in the AKP's political discourse. The 28 February 1997 was the last coup-related moment of victimization for the AKP. In the subsequent years, the AKP government had more or less avenged the Kemalist republican regime and the Turkish Armed Forces (which it associated with the old regime) and had declared itself victorious. Yet by 2016, there was a new 'enemy', which, this time, emerged from 'within'.

> 'FETÖ'[2] members, who had nested within the Turkish Armed Forces stepped out of the chain of command, and launched a military coup attempt on Friday, 15 July 2016 at around 21.00. The coup attempt on 15 July was launched simultaneously in Ankara and Istanbul. In Istanbul, the Bosphorus and Fatih Sultan Mehmed Bridges, Atatürk Airport and Istanbul Provincial Security Directorate were captured. In Ankara, bomb attacks were carried out on strategic institutions of the state such as the National Intelligence Organization, the General Directorate of Security and the Gölbaşı Police Special Operations Centre. In both cities, putschists carried out low-level flights with F-16s they had hijacked. TRT [Turkish Radio and Television) buildings in Istanbul and Ankara were occupied, and the putschist gang members, defining themselves as the 'Peace at Home Council', had a statement forcibly read in TRT. In addition to a curfew, the text dictated that all private media organs read this statement. The Presidential Complex, the Turkish Grand National Assembly, the Prime Ministry, and various municipal buildings were attacked. For the first time in the history of the Republic, a bomb was dropped on the Turkish Grand National Assembly from F-16 planes hijacked by the putschist gang. Addressing the public through a live announcement on national television channels, President Erdoğan stated that the coup attempt in question was the attempt of a small minority within the TAF. President Erdoğan called on the nation to resist the coup in the streets to protect its will, and people took to the streets to prevent the coup attempt. Putschists opened fire on people, who took to the streets unarmed. In the anti-coup protests and resistance actions in Istanbul and Ankara, 248 civilians lost their lives. 1,537 people were injured. 24 putschists were killed and 50 putschists were wounded.[3]

The biggest factor behind the mythologization of the events of 15 July, reported above by the website *15temmuzdirenisi.com*, was the 'failure' of the attempted coup. President Erdoğan's call to the Turkish nation to resist the coup, a call he made by connecting to a television station via a smart phone, led hundreds of people to take to the streets. Throughout the night of 15 July, prayers were read from mosques across the country, prompting people to action. In the morning after a night that saw many civilians killed, many state institutions, including the Turkish

[2] Since 2016, those alleged to be responsible for the 15 July coup attempt are referred to as 'FETÖ' by the government ('Fethullahist Terrorist Organization').

[3] The website 15temmuzdirenisi.com cannot be reached anymore. To have an insight of the narrativization of 15 July coup attempt by the supporters of the government, see https://www.yenisafak.com/15temmuz/.

Grand National Assembly, bombed, and Ankara and Istanbul turned into war zones, life picked back up where it left off.

6.3 The Imprint of 15 July: Victory and Omnipotence

The claim that the coup was quashed by people's resistance shown on the night of 15 July was framed as an act of the Turkish nation 'claiming their will' and saving 'the country from the traitors at the cost of their lives'. A strong sense of victory and pride was unleashed by this rhetoric. The ruling elites attributed almost no role to themselves in preventing the attempted coup. They pointed instead to the 'Turkish nation'—who took to the streets that night, stopped the tanks, faced the bullets and challenged the soldiers—as the architect of the victory. Such rhetoric revealed the myth's aims at inclusivity: it was not only supporters of the AKP and Erdoğan who managed to prevent the coup that night, but the Turkish nation as a whole, citizens from young to old, women, men and even children, who 'loved their homeland' and 'who were brave enough to sacrifice their lives for their country'. Indeed, the events were framed as the 'Legend of 15 July' by the ruling elites. Not coincidentally, the 'legendary' quality signified extraordinary national success and power.

In fact, the seeds of a mood consonant with the spirit of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative were planted by Erdoğan himself, as discussed earlier in the context of the Davos incident. That said, in the eyes of the *millet*, beyond establishing an identification with Erdoğan, there was no 'opportunity' for this spirit to permeate individual members of the nation and be fully embraced by them. The nature and imprint of the 'Legend of 15 July' played a crucial role in grounding, 'top to bottom', the feelings of victory, heroism and omnipotence preached by the Neo-Ottomanist narrative, and making lay people *feel* them. On 15 July 2016, the foundations of self-confidence spread to the 'bottom' because of the acts of the members of the nation themselves. This new way of feeling, thinking and perceiving national identity was reinforced through widespread participation in the 'Democracy Watches' that continued day and night in every province after 15 July.[4]

[4] 'Demokrasi Nöbetleri', *Yeni Şafak*, see https://www.yenisafak.com/15temmuz/demokrasi-nobetleri-olay-detay.

6.4 The 'Ordinary' Actors of an Extraordinary Event: Martyrs, Veterans and Heroes

Immediately after the events of 15 July, the role of people who lost their lives or were injured while resisting the coup and changing the course of events was placed within a heroic narrative by the ruling elites and the media.

The Office of the President prepared several posters to establish a heroic narrative and circulated them in the social media with the title: 'The Legend of 15 July, with respect to our martyrs and veterans'. In one of those posters, right behind a woman wearing a headscarf stands an uncovered woman and people atop tanks in Istanbul. What these people did that night is presented as an example of 'extraordinary' courage. The rhetoric of a 'victory of the national will' is further legitimized through the heroicization of ordinary daring people as 'martyrs and veterans'.

Ömer Halisdemir is the most well-known of those who lost their lives while resisting the coup attempt. Halisdemir, who served as a Petty Officer Senior Sergeant in the Turkish Armed Forces, became a hero after killing Brigadier General Semih Terzi—who arrived with his soldiers to seize the Special Forces Command on the night of the coup—thereby changing the outcome of the attempted overthrow. What made Halisdemir a mythical heroic figure was the fact that he was killed by thirty bullets, fired at him by the putschist soldiers under Terzi's command after Halisdemir had shot him.

After the failed coup, elites in power forged a potent narrative of Ömer Halisdemir's courage and martyrdom. In a speech he delivered from a balcony after the coup, Erdoğan said, 'They did not think that a son of the homeland like Ömer Halisdemir would come out and shoot them in the middle of their foreheads'.

Two other people who lost their lives on the night of 15 July and became heroes were Erol Olçok and his 16-year-old son, Abdullah Tayyip Olçok. The elder Olçok had worked with Erdoğan since 1993, handling the AKP's advertising, corporate promotion and organizational activities. Olçok and his son were shot dead by putschists on the Bosphorus Bridge, reportedly while trying to demolish a barricade set up by soldiers. During

the speech he gave at their funeral, President Erdoğan could not hold back his tears.[5]

According to official reports, 248 civilians lost their lives on the night of 15 July. Interviews with the families of the fallen were documented by TRT under the title *For the Sake of a Crescent*. The documentary, which consists of 100 episodes, with a sequel in the making, was broadcast on all TRT channels. In each episode, the deep sadness summoned by witnessing the stories of those who lost their lives during the resistance quickly gives way to a discourse of pride and courage. The filmmakers attribute a profound sanctity to the extraordinary heroism of the civilians.

After 15 July, not only those who lost their lives but also those who survived the night, occupied a significant place in the ruling elites' discourse, the media and on social media as living heroes of the mythicization process. They were regarded as symbols of national courage and self-confidence. Perhaps the most striking of these was Metin Doğan, who became a symbol of resistance due to the photograph taken of him on the night of the coup attempt.[6] Doğan's attempt to prevent a tank from moving by standing and even lying in front of it was narrated and described as an act of 'extraordinary courage'. Doğan was invited as a 'hero' to speak at many universities, state organizations and rallies, and received plaques honouring him.[7]

It was not just men who were made heroes after 15 July. Among the women who took to the streets that night to protest and prevent the coup, several were chosen and made into symbolic heroines. Perhaps the most striking of these was Şerife Boz, who allegedly gathered the young people in her neighbourhood into the back of a truck on the evening of 16 July and drove them to Taksim Square to protest the coup. Early on, a photo of her in the driver's seat became emblematic of the night of the

[5] 'Erol Benim Yol Arkadaşımdı', *Yeni Şafak*, see https://www.yenisafak.com/hayat/erol-benim-yol-arkadasimdi-2756115.

[6] See www.yenisafak.com/15temmuz/metin-dogan-kisi-detay.

[7] 'Tankın Önüne Yatan Metin Doğan'a Plaket Verildi', *Anadolu Ajansı*. 24 July 2016, see https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/tankinonune-yatan-metin-dogana-plaket-verildi/614840.

coup. Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım confessed that he cried when he saw the image,[8] noting:

> I saw a photo, and was deeply impressed. A lady in a burqa is behind the wheel of a truck; next to her is a woman with her head bare, dressed in modern clothes, sitting in the passenger seat. Packed with people in the back of the truck. [...] They're going fast. This is the bond that unites Turkey. This photo is the one that caused the teardrops to fall from my eyes. We have no difference, together we are Turkey.[9]

Binali Yıldırım's speech focused on the coexistence of a woman wearing a burqa and a bareheaded woman, rhetoric that accorded with the claim to inclusiveness attempted in the transformation of 15 July into a myth. This rhetoric was highly useful, emphasizing the supra-ideological dimension of the resistance to the coup and conveying that ideal values such as courage, bravery and valour are not unique to Turkish men but to Turkish women as well. Indeed, after the failed coup, its heroines were likened (in a reference to the glorious past) to Nene Hatun, the mythical female figure from the War of Independence.[10]

Another female figure who was made a heroine was Safiye Bayat, reportedly the first person to initiate the Bosphorus Bridge resistance. Footage of Bayat, a young woman in headscarf, on the night of the coup shows her approaching the tanks stationed on the Bosphorus Bridge and attempting to talk to the soldiers there, who fired into the air to drive her away. Bayat made it through the night with injuries and became one of the surviving heroines of the resistance. She was interviewed while she was still in hospital, with the main news bulletins emphasizing her courage and patriotism. In the statements she gave to the press, she retold with great pride and enthusiasm her experiences with the putschist soldiers.[11]

[8] 'Demokrasi nöbetinde Başbakan Yıldırım'ı ağlatan fotoğraf', *Türkiye*, 18 July 2016, see https://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/gundem/demokrasi-nobetinde-basbakan-yildirimi-aglatan-fotograf-387147.

[9] '15 Temmuz'da Kamyonlu Fotoğrafiyla Bilinen Şerife Boz Tartışması', *BBC*, 30 April 2018, see https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-43949934.

[10] 'Onlar 15 Temmuz'un Nene Hatunları', *Timetürk*, 15 July 2017, see https://www.timeturk.com/onlar-15-temmuz-un-nene-hatunlari/haber-691597.

[11] TRT 1. (2016, July 24). *Tek Başına Darbeye Meydan Okuyan Kahraman Safiye Bayat Röportajı*. [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRCPEUO-pBM.

> On the night of 15 July, a hadith kept ringing in my ears: 'Love of homeland comes from faith.' I think that these words gave me strength. I knew I was going to a jihad. The commander pulled me to himself and opened fire over my cheek, but I didn't move a muscle. I said, 'Are you trying to scare me with this? Don't you realize yet that I am not afraid of you?'[12]

The attempt to mythicize the events of 15 July began by attributing the titles 'democracy martyrs' and 'veterans of democracy' to the aforementioned people and by telling their stories to the public. Among those listed as heroes were many lay people, from the doctors who gave first aid to the wounded on the street, to the police chief who confronted the putschist soldiers with the officers under his command and the villager who burned the crops in his fields to prevent the insurgent planes from taking off in Ankara's Kazan district. All were made into actors in the narrative of 15 July as a historic victory—almost a second War of Independence. Each of them—as patriots, as Muslims—was transformed into symbols embodying such values as loyalty, faith, courage and self-confidence, putting their country and nation above their own life. Thus was the transformation of the imprint of 15 July event into *ethos*—into values, principles, ideals, beliefs, feelings and attitudes embodied in the actions of those deemed heroes or heroines—complete. The translation of this ethos into a holistic and inclusive *narrative* of victory would take place at the 'Rally of Democracy and Martyrs', which was held in Yenikapı Square on 7 August 2016.

6.5 From *Ethos* to *Pathos*: Yenikapi Spirit and the Establishment of National Narcissism

During the period from 15 July to 7 August, remarkable progress was made in the heroization and making of an ethos tied to myth creation. By then, the Turkish public knew the names of the 'heroes' and 'martyrs' and their stories. Thousands of people attended the 'Democracy Watches' held in the squares of many cities to voice opposition to the coup and support a rhetoric of democracy. In a TV program he participated in on 30 July, President Erdoğan announced that the democracy watches would be accompanied with a rally in Yenikapı on 7 August. Preparations for the rally, which would be held under the auspices of the

[12] See https://twitter.com/lacivert_dergi/status/773446588031205376.

Presidency, were carried out by the Governorship of Istanbul and the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. A statement released before the rally, details the care taken to ensure the nonpartisan nature of the meeting: 'As a token of our national consciousness, only our glorious flag will be flown, and no other party flag, pennant or placard will be used'.[13] On the invitation posters to Yenikapı rally, it was written that: 'Our President, our chief commander invites the whole nation to the Rally of Democracy and Martyrs. Victory belongs to democracy; the squares belong to the nation'.

The Yenikapı Rally was conceived according to the motto 'one nation, one flag, one homeland, one state', which has long dominated Erdoğan's political discourse. After a moment of silence for the martyrs and the National Anthem, followed by the recitation of Quran, mass prayers, led by the Chief of Religious Affairs, were performed for the martyrs of 15 July. Religion and religious rituals were a key part of the state ceremony, as central as the National Anthem, as the collective prayer revealed. The legitimacy of religion in the eyes of the state, which constitutes one of the most powerful symbolic political tools in the AKP and Erdoğan's political journey from victimization to omnipotence, was made clear at this gathering, which included the head of the CHP among the participants. The effort to establish Islam as the dominant marker of national identity, a goal which has characterized the AKP's journey to power was thus crowned, and the national character of Neo-Ottomanism entered a new phase that can be defined as an 'Islam-Turkish' synthesis. In this equation, Turkishness was imagined entirely within the framework of Sunni Islam, with Islam (basically synonymous with Turkishness) as the dominant characteristic of national identity. The term 'Yenikapı Spirit' was coined to reflect this new national identity.

At the Yenikapı Rally, the leaders of the Turkey's political parties gave speeches.[14] That of Devlet Bahçeli (leader of the Nationalist Movement Party), who took the stage first, was dominated by praise and pride for the audience before him:

[13] 'Türk Siyasetinin Uzlaşı Meydanı: Yenikapı Ruhu', see https://www.yenisafak.com/15temmuz/yenikapi-mitingi-olay-detay.

[14] The invitation excluded Selahattin Demirtaş, who was the leader of HDP back then. Therefore, the 'Yenikapı spirit' , from the beginning, excluded the Kurds and their legal political party and leader.

> Despite the games played against us and the strife, you stood up with courage. You proudly raised our flag. You bravely defended the martyrs. You have defended the brotherhood with faith. […] You ran to Yenikapı without falling, and said, I'm standing. You gave the good news of a resurrection. I am happy because I am proudly watching the rise of our Turkey. I am happy because the nation, the will, the faith are all here. Wrist that won't be twisted, heads that won't bow, an invincible national power are all here, in this square.[15]

Speaking next, the leader of the CHP, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, described 15 July as a victory for democracy, noting 'We have 240 martyrs who lost their lives that night. They will take their place in the golden pages of our history of democracy. We will not forget them. We will not forget'. He stated that this event, which he addressed as a 'calamity', had opened the door for reconciliation in Turkish politics, ending his speech with the lines of poet Nâzım Hikmet: 'To live like a tree sole and free and brotherly as a forest, this invitation, this longing is ours'. The predominant tone of Kılıçdaroğlu's speech was reconciliatory, and he preached a style of politics compatible with basic values of the Republican regime such as democracy and secularism.

The then-Chief of Defence Hulusi Akar, who took the stage after Kılıçdaroğlu, also appealed to pride and heroism:

> The heroism and self-sacrifice of our noble nation for the dominance of the national will and the maintenance of democracy at the expense of one's life is beyond all appreciation. They will always be remembered with respect and gratitude. For this reason, I once again express my respect and gratitude to our noble nation embodied in you.

Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım claimed that '15 July is the Second War of Independence. Thanks to Allah, thanks to our martyrs who lie proudly under the ground, today we live as one and independent'. He ended his speech by emphasizing the omnipotence of the audience he was addressing: 'I heartily congratulate our youth and women who lay in front of the tanks. Our *Rabia*, one state, one nation, one homeland, one flag and our flag with a crescent and star is enough for all of us'.

[15] 'Türk Siyasetinin Uzlaşı Meydanı: Yenikapı Ruhu', see https://www.yenisafak.com/15temmuz/yenikapi-mitingi-olay-detay. The contents of all the speeches by political leaders at the Yenikapı Rally are taken from the same website.

Spokesman of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, İsmail Kahraman, referred to the continuity between a glorious past and the present:

> You are the grandchildren of Selahaddin Eyyubi, who devastated the Crusader armies that went on expeditions to destroy Islam. You are the grandchildren of Sultan Mehmed, who conquered Istanbul, the most beautiful town of the seven climates, by riding his grey horse to the Golden Horn, saying, 'I will either take Istanbul or Istanbul will take me,' who received the good news in the Hadith of the Prophet. You are the heirs of a state that ruled three continents and seven seas. You are people full of faith who will carry the Republic of Turkey to a point worthy of its past.

Finally, when it was President Erdoğan's turn to speak, he was invited to the stage as the 'Commander-in-Chief'. He took his place to the sound of the enthusiastic applause and cheers of the audience. At the very outset of his speech, emphasizing that the greatest role in this victory belonged to the Turkish nation, he said, 'My dear nation, who once again did not surrender their country to FETÖ and the invaders at the cost of their lives on the night of 15 July, for its independence and future, I greet you with my most heartfelt feelings, longing and affection'. Erdoğan continued:

> At the very beginning of my words, I would like to express my gratitude once again to all my brothers and sisters who had the courage to take to the streets, to the squares and crowded the airports on the night of 15 July, and to stand in front of the gun barrels, tanks, helicopters and planes. [...] Those millions of our citizens who poured to the streets and squares that night, and those who received the honour of martyrdom and veteran, have their names written in history with golden letters. [...] My brothers, this nation is distinct. In fact, the Turkish nation stood up to the coup plotters on 15 July with the same feeling as the faith that opened the doors of Anatolia in Manzikert a thousand years ago.
>
> On whatever foundations Osman Gazi built history's most powerful state in 1299, we also defended Turkey that night on the same principles. With whatever understanding our ancestors fought to the last drop of blood in Çanakkale, we repelled FETÖ on 15 July with the same will.
>
> Ey my people! Do you accept captivity and humiliation? No one will ever be able to hold this nation captive.

Based on these speeches, what can the emphasis on victory, sacrifice, courage, self-confidence and omnipotence tell us about the national mood which was attempted to be invoked? What is the dominant emotion that clings to and emanates from the 'Yenikapı spirit'? I contend that it is basically narcissism. The concept of narcissism derives from Greek mythology and is rooted in psychology and psychiatry. The myth is based on the story of Narcissus, a young man who falls in love with his own reflection upon the water's surface. Narcissism, in the Freudian sense, suggests a mood of powerfulness, self-confidence, arrogance, self-admiration and constant demands for the admiration of others. It is an enchanting sense of existence, which is why it is mostly nurtured by fantasy rather than reality (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006, 618). The basic patterns of narcissism are feelings of arrogance and grandeur, suffused with fantasies of success and power, grounded in a belief in the uniqueness and superiority of the self. Narcissists require constant admiration and approval due to their fragile self-perception. After a past experience of humiliation, defeat or loss, narcissism works as a defence mechanism. At the root of narcissism lies an insatiable need for recognition and power. It goes hand in hand with an indifference to the worldviews of others, a lack of empathy, persistent paranoia, anger and hypersensitivity (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006, 619–622).

It has become possible to take up narcissism as a political, psychological and sociological phenomenon rather than as an individual 'pathology' thanks to studies of narcissistic leadership. Before putting forward my claim about national narcissism, allow me to sketch out a framework of the relationship between narcissistic leaders and their followers. In an article on narcissism in the context of political psychology, Jerrold Post emphasizes that individuals with narcissistic injuries are drawn to charismatic leaders. According to him, the relationship between a charismatic leader and his followers is formed by a vision of the leader as nearly superhuman (*an Übermensch*). A remarkable emotional investment is made in the leader: people whose sense of self has been damaged in the past, desire to associate themselves with a strong personality; the charismatic leader represents salvation for them. By acting heroically and in a manner that meets the needs and desires of his supporters, the leader satisfies their hunger. His success becomes the success of his supporters. People depend on the charismatic leader to fulfil their need to feel safe and secure; the perception of the external world as threatening emerges as a threat to one's existence. Followers with an injured sense of self, wish to establish a

coherent identity by gaining a sense of an *us* through their commitment to a charismatic leader. The self, thus, exists as a relation. The group with which the self relates is idealized; the essence of the group is attributed to the leader's essence (1986, 676–685).

According to Post, narcissistic leaders are *mirror-hungry*; constantly in need of people who will approve of and admire them. Their supporters, meanwhile, are *ideal-hungry*; they consider themselves valuable only when they follow and associate themselves with someone they think is strong enough to admire. A mirror-hungry leader presents himself to his supporters as an omnipotent figure—a proposition that is extremely alluring and enchanting to supporters. Especially in times of crisis, people desire a leader who they believe is omnipotent; the narcissism of the leader is thus attractive, as it becomes synonymous with saviourhood. Such an association also reshapes the self-perception of the nation and satisfies a search for wholeness and perfection (1986, 686). Additionally, narcissistic leaders consider all manner of attacks on and reactions to them as attacks on their country—for them, their country, their nation and them are one and the same (Post, 1993, 110).

Here, national narcissism, the dominant emotion invoked by the Yenikapı Spirit, is produced by this association. The concept is inspired by collective narcissism, which holds that narcissism is not just an individual psychological state of mind but can spread to groups, societies and even nations. Collective narcissism results from an intense emotional investment in the unrealistic belief in the greatness of a group. It stems from the intersection of an elevated self-image and low public perception. Experiences of facing injustice or being exposed to criticism, doubt and humiliation can prompt narcissism at the collective level. Since narcissistic groups constantly expect approval and admiration, their perception and intolerance of threat are heightened. Aggression and hostility can become the dominant behaviour pattern of the group. The insistence on seeing the outsider as a threat and not forgiving any wrong therefrom runs parallel to a desire for social superiority and dominance. For this reason, collective narcissism generally opens the door to right-wing authoritarianism and blind patriotism (Zavala et al., 2009, 1074–1076). Meanwhile, national narcissism is a state of mind that is expressed as an over-emotional investment in and devotion to the symbols of the nation and an uncritical idealization of it. The most dangerous aspect of it is the possibility that hypersensitivity to threat can devolve into defensive and

vengeful impulses; the greater the perception of the nation's own vulnerability, the greater the power of national narcissism (Zavala & Cicocka 2011, 215–216).

In an article that explores nationalism through narcissism, José Brunner describes national narcissism as a kind of 'infatuation' generated through a reliance on shared fantasies of the past and present in order to cover up individual and collective impurity and vulnerability. These fantasies, Brunner adds, are dominated by the illusion of being an omnipotent, superior, historically unique nation. Those who think that their own nation's history is being deprecated, belittled and ignored by others will eagerly accept the invitation of national narcissism (1997, 261–263). Truth does not matter; the most important thing is to extract examples from history that will nurture the present image of the collective. For this purpose, past and present victories are transformed into narratives and extant forms of togetherness are sanctified. Values from the past are re-performed in the present in order to re-establish and restore both national self-esteem and a perception of continuity.

So, what does this theoretical interlude on the nature of narcissism tell us about Neo-Ottomanism under the AKP? Let me recall both the national pride predominant in the speeches given by various members of the state, from the government to the opposition and the Chief of the General Staff to the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey at the 'Rally of Democracy and Martyrs', and the unequivocal attribution of the coup's successful overthrow to the nation. Both were efforts to invoke national narcissism. Indeed, the first steps towards attributing sanctity to the 15 July were taken at the Yenikapı Rally. The events of 15 July were transformed into a narrative of victory in a manner consonant with a national mood that harbours national narcissism. The *pathos* of the events, accompanied by an emphasis on the majesty, power, superiority, omnipotence and past and present victories of the Turkish nation, was presented as a remedy that would heal the self-perception of the AKP and its supporters, and ultimately the Turkish nation. What was needed was the intensive application of symbolic instruments that would ensure that this new national mood was fully embraced by the people.

6.6 The Banal Manifestations of National Narcissism: Monuments, Commemorations, Marches and Designations

After the Yenikapı Rally, the AKP government and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey made various moves to spread the myth of 15 July and ensure its adoption by all segments of society. The most notable of these was the declaration of 15 July as a public holiday—named the 'Day of Democracy and Freedoms'—by the Turkish Grand National Assembly.[16] In the same session, the name of a district in Ankara previously known as Kazan was changed to Kahramankazan[17] after a group of farmers there entered the Akıncı Air Base with their tractors on the night to prevent putschist planes from taking off.[18]

Immediately after the coup attempt, monuments commemorating 15 July were built across Turkey, particularly in Istanbul and Ankara. The biggest of these monuments was built at the exit of the Bosphorus Bridge, one of the night's most contested sites. The eleven decare space on which this monument is located was designed as 'Martyrdom Park'. 250 cypress and rose trees were planted to represent the 250 people who lost their lives.[19]

Another monument was built on the grounds of the Presidential Palace in Ankara. Four figures symbolizing 'one nation, one flag, one homeland and one state' and 81 human figures representing Turkey's 81 provinces were sculpted with the Turkish flag in their hands. The construction of the monument was completed in the short span of just twenty-four days. On the monument's inner surface is a lithograph of the names of those

[16] '15 Temmuz Resmi Tatil İlan Edildi', *Milliyet*, 21 October 2016, see www.milliyet.com.tr/-15-temmuz-resmi-tatil-ilan-edildi-siyaset-2331014.

[17] T.n.: *Kahraman* means hero.

[18] 'Kazan'ın Adı Kahramankazan, 15 Temmuz Resmi Tatil Oldu', *BBC*, 25 October 2016, see www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-37767147.

[19] 'İşte Türkiye'nin 15 Temmuz Anıtları', *Sabah*, 23 July 2017, see www.sabah.com.tr/pazar/2017/07/23/iste-turkiyenin-15-temmuz-anitlari.

who lost their lives.[20] Erdoğan announced that a 15 July Museum would be built right beside this monument in Beştepe.[21]

In addition to grand monuments in Istanbul and Ankara, several monuments and parks were situated in every province to commemorate the historical event. Yozgat's Akdağmadeni Municipality built a 42-meter-high statue of a flag. The Martyrs' Monument, consisting of a single piece of marble weighing 107 tons, inscribed with the names of the martyrs of 15 July, was built in Bursa. The 15 July Martyrs' Monument erected in Denizli depicted citizens who stopped a tank and prevented it from moving during the attempted coup.[22] In short, in public parks and gardens, government institutions and university campuses, monuments of various sizes were created to immortalize 15 July.

There were more banal manifestations of the event too, involving the naming of squares, streets, avenues, schools and parks after people who lost their lives on the night of 15 July. Istanbul Bosphorus Bridge was renamed '15 July Martyrs Bridge'. A giant sign proclaiming 'The Legend of 15 July' was placed in Ankara's main Kızılay Square, which was retitled '15 July National Will Square'. Again in Ankara, the site of the General Staff Junction was renamed '15 July Martyrs Square', while the road leading to Esenboğa Airport became known as 'Martyr Ömer Halisdemir Boulevard'.[23] Niğde University became 'Martyr Ömer Halisdemir University', and TRT announced that the studio where the coup statement was read on the night of 15 July would now be called '15 July *Millet* Studio'.[24]

To render the 'Legend of 15 July' lasting in the curricula, the Ministry of National Education decided to hold '15 July Victory of Democracy and

[20] '15 Temmuz Şehitler Anıtı Açılışa Hazır', *AA*, 15 July 2017, see www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/bestepedeki-15-temmuz-sehitler-aniti-acilisa-hazir-/862048.

[21] 'Destan Müzeyle Ölümsüzleşiyor', *Sabah*, 7 April 2018, see www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2018/04/07/destan-muzeyle-olumsuzlesiyor.

[22] 'İşte Türkiye'nin 15 Temmuz Anıtları', *Sabah*, 23 July 2017, see www.sabah.com.tr/pazar/2017/07/23/iste-turkiyenin-15-temmuz-anitlari.

[23] 'İsmi Değişen Meydanlara Yeni Tabelalar Asıldı', *Habertürk*, 17 August 2016, see www.haberturk.com/yerel-haberler/haber/9212277-ismi-degisenmeydanlara-yeni-tabelalar-asildi.

[24] 'Darbecilerin Dokunduğu Yerin Adı Değişiyor', *Sonhaberler*, 28 July 2016, see www.sonhaberler.com/gundem/darbecilerin-dokundugu-yerin-adi-degisiyor-h139621.html.

Martyrs Commemoration' events in all public schools in the first week of the 2016–2017 academic year. On the first day of school, a booklet entitled 'The 15 July Legend of National Will' was distributed to students in state schools across the country. The foreword of the booklet was written by Erdoğan, and his portrait was printed on the inside cover. Quran recitations were held in some schools for the martyrs of the resistance, and poetry, prose, theatre and painting competitions about 15 July were held throughout the academic year.[25]

In addition to all these practices of banal nationalism enacted by the Ministry of National Education and other official state institutions to popularize both the events of 15 July and the emotion of national narcissism in daily life, many events were held with reference to 15 July, from sports competitions to theatre performances, concerts to poetry recitals, and several books written that depicted 15 July as an epic, published under such titles as *The Legend of Resurrection, The Legend of a Nation*, and *15 July, The Longest Night*.

In another manifestation of the adoption of 15 July by non-official organizations, various non-governmental organizations were established under such names as the 15 July Association, the 15 July National Will and Democracy Association and the 15 July Ankara Veterans and Martyrs' Relatives Association. Further, several songs and anthems were composed in reference to the failed coup. The most prominent of these was the '15 July Democracy March', broadcast by TRT Music. The lyrics are as follows:

> *It was the night of 15 July, the weather was hot/An attempt at betrayal burned the country/Today was the day, the whole nation stood up/*
>
> *Children, old and young people poured into the streets/Democracy took a blow, and the nation was shocked/Either freedom after that, or disgrace/The footsteps of millions shook the ground/Flag in hand takbir ran forward/*
>
> *We are the witnesses to the legend of democracy/We are the martyrs who are resurrected once they die/The Commander-in-Chief gave the order/*

[25] 'Okullarda ilk Hafta 15 Temmuz Anlatılacak', *Bianet*, 19 September 2015, see https://bianet.org/bianet/egitim/178804-okullarda-ilk-hafta-15-temmuz-anlatilacak.

Take care of the holy homeland/ Take care of the holy homeland/ We passed through the storm, homeland, for God's sake/

The entire world saw this/From the ground to the sky while those traitors scattered death/Many souls were martyred while raising the flag/Some defied the tank, some the gun/So that democracy would not be trampled on one more time.[26]

Many commentators on a YouTube video of this anthem—the lyrics of which are remarkably memorable and impressive—regard it as the best anthem in the country's history. Listeners reported that it gave them goose bumps and brought them tears. Still, it seems essential to pose the question: to what extent was this heralding of emotion successful? To what extent did the feelings evoked by the myth which ruling elites tried to bring about after the events of 15 July find broader social resonance and legitimacy? Answering these questions will allow us to make some claims about the outcome of the effort to mythologize 15 July in a manner evoking national narcissism, and the point thus reached in the AKP's political journey.

6.7 Whose Legend is 15 July? National Narcissism or Collective Narcissism?

Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to analyse the events of 15 July and the features of the national myth that the AKP elites sought to create after these events. Less than a decade ago at this point, it is both too early and indeed too late to claim that the events of 15 July were 'nationalized' with the aim of inclusivity, and that they address a mood that appeals to all segments of the nation equally. Indeed, in the subsequent years, the spirit of national unity and solidarity has been out of sync with the political and social reality.

After 15 July, the AKP government declared a state of emergency to establish security and 'expell traitors' from state institutions. Under the state of emergency, almost anyone who was not a supporter of the AKP and Erdoğan, both at the state and institutional level and in broader society, was declared a 'traitor and terrorist'. The AKP government and

[26] Fikirevim. (2017, July 13). *15 Temmuz Demokrasi Marşı* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5uRQiWK00I.

its supporters have once again instituted a strict divide between *us* and *them* by mobilizing a perception of threat and paranoia as manifestations of collective narcissism. The national narcissism invoked through the discourse of Yenikapı Spirit rather quickly lost its 'national' character as a result. Thus, it is apparent that after the 'Legend of 15 July', a remnant of collective narcissism remained that chiefly appealed to supporters of the AKP and Erdoğan.

After the declaration of the state of emergency, the prominent distinction between the AKP and *others* was consolidated with reinforcement, strictly articulated by the government both discursively and in practice. The distinctions between us and them, the friend and the enemy, patriot and terrorist, were once again dominating the discourse of Erdoğan and the AKP.[27] There is evidently a huge gap between the Yenikapı Spirit that emerged immediately after the 15 July coup attempt and the national spirit as it has been articulated in the years since. It thus seems essential to revise my argument at the beginning of this chapter: In the aftermath of the abortive coup, a mood of national narcissism was expected to spread across the country in accordance with the Neo-Ottomanist narrative. However, this narrative of the grandeur of the Ottoman Empire has weakened and is now less likely to be embraced by all segments of society because of the failure of the 15 July myth to fulfil its promise of inclusiveness—its failure to be 'nationalized'. The possibility of a narrative of past and present that all segments of the society might adopt has withered. Arguably, the predominant narrative has regressed to one that appeals only to Erdoğan, the AKP tradition and their current supporters. Additionally, the perception of continuity between the Turkish nation and the Ottoman Empire was broken rather than consolidated after the events of 15 July. Plenty of data and observations strengthen this claim. Posters produced by the presidential office after the attempted coup caused various controversies.[28] Some argued that the Turkish Armed Forces had been humiliated by the posters, or that those who tried to stage a coup were 'FETÖ' members among members of the Turkish Armed Forces, or that the AKP and its staff had acted in concert with

[27] See 'Civic Space under Siege' report by the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, November 2021, https://tihv.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Kusatma_Altindaki_Yurttaslik_Alani.pdf.

[28] 'Saray'dan Çok Tartışılacak 15 Temmuz Afişleri', *Oda TV*, 11 July 2017, see https://odatv.com/saraydan-cok-tartisilacak-15-temmuz-afisleri-1107 171200.html.

those alleged to be responsible for the 15 July coup attempt for years, debates which demonstrate that neither 15 July nor the Yenikapı Spirit could be as encompassing or 'national' as intended. Another manifestation of this failure is that the propaganda film *Kurtlar Vadisi: Vatan (Valley of the Wolves: Homeland)* did not receive the expected reception at the box office[29]; movie theatres remained empty, even though some municipalities showed the movie free of charge.

During events held in 2017 to mark the first anniversary of the attempted coup, the dimensions of the political disintegration that took place afterwards became even clearer: photographs of CHP deputies taken in parliament on the night of 15 July were not included in a photo exhibition that opened in the Turkish Grand National Assembly.[30] CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu did not attend the commemoration in Istanbul. The CHP's Gürsel Tekin claimed that Kılıçdaroğlu had been banned from speaking at the ceremony.[31] Kılıçdaroğlu, in a special session held at the Grand National Assembly on 15 July 2017, spoke of this exclusion and said, 'Unfortunately, the opportunity to create a strong democracy, which emerged in the climate of reconciliation created by the spirit of 15 July, was wasted'.[32]

Although the 'Legend of 15 July' was aired as a myth in line with the spirit of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative, it was unable to achieve the level of inclusiveness and 'national' articulation. The legitimacy of 15 July and the Yenikapı Spirit could not be ensured, neither among the people nor on the political stage. In the course of the AKP's political journey from victimhood to omnipotence, 15 July was a moment of 'collective narcissism' characterized by self-worship, which enabled the creation of new enemies and threats, rather than a new narrative of national victory.

[29] 'Necati Şaşmaz'ın Kurtlar Vadisi Vatan Filmi Ne Kadar İzlendi?', *Haber 7*, see http://www.haber7.com/sinema/haber/2454522-necati-sasmazin-kurtlar-vadisi-vatan-filmi-ne-kadar-izlendi.

[30] 'TBMM'nin 15 Temmuz Sergisinde CHP'lilerin Fotoğrafları Yer Almadı', *Sputnik News*, 15 July 2017, see https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/2017 07151029294107-tbmm-15temmuz-sergisinde-chp-fotografi-yer-almadi/.

[31] 'Kılıçdaroğlu 15 Temmuz Anma Töreni'ne Neden Katılmadı?', *Posta*, 16 July 2017, see http://www.posta.com.tr/kilicdaroglu-15-temmuz-anma-torenine-neden-katilmadi-1315365.

[32] Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu 15 Temmuz 2017 Meclis Konuşması, see https://chp.org.tr/haberler/15-temmuz-2017-tarihli-15-temmuz-demokrasi-ve-milli-birlik-gunu-ozel-oturumu-konusmasi.

The legitimacy of Neo-Ottomanism as a narrative of *ressentiment* filled with nostalgia and romanticism also lessened with the reactivation of a dichotomy between us and them after the events of 15 July. Meanwhile, the MHP confined itself to embracing and instrumentalizing 15 July on a discursive level in order to justify its political manoeuvres. Indeed, the speech of MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli in the parliament on the first anniversary of 15 July was a confession of this failure:

> Despite the fact that one year has passed since 15 July, the persistent polarization and vicious fights on this issue are an alarming and painful loss for our independence. [...] Why can't we agree on the 15 July FETÖ coup attempt? Why can't we all stand up to the oppressors together? Why can't we be one breath around rightfulness, truth, people? What is it that separates us? What comes between us? How should we explain and interpret the existing differences of opinion when it is obvious that 15 July was an assassination attempt on Turkey, a murder aimed at destroying our nation?[33]

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CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

7.1 The Centenary of the Republic of Turkey: A National Identity Crisis?

I set out in this book to question the relationship between emotions and politics, starting from the claim that an analysis of the style of politics practised by the AKP in Turkey, would be incomplete unless emotions are taken into account. Criticizing the emotion-blindness of studies focused on 'reason' and 'interest', I have shown that emotions are not individual or psychological, nor internal or private phenomena. Rather, emotions permeate the capillaries of the social and political sphere and are inherent to—even determine—processes of policy-making and political participation. In order to re-conceptualize emotions as collective, relational, dynamic phenomena, I have drawn on Sara Ahmed's perspective to reveal the nature of emotions that move among bodies, stick, contact and surround them like a 'thickness in the air'.

To analyse Turkey's recent experience of AKP rule solely through emotions, it was necessary to focus on certain symbolic sites in which collective emotions circulate most intensely. Political symbols are a reservoir of emotions; they mobilize people to make emotional investments and subsequently act in the political and social sphere. Emphasizing the unifying and distinguishing nature of symbols allowed me to conceptualize them as narratives, images, objects, actions, events and relations,

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rich in meanings and emotions. I have demonstrated that symbolic politics constitute a powerful tool of expression and performance and play a vital role in mobilizing, impelling to action, uniting and dividing both political actors and the people. As a means of approaching political experience through emotions, I have drawn on the idea that political symbols and symbolic politics provide a dynamic, reciprocal and productive relationship between the ruling elites and the people.

To address the emotional manifestations of symbolic politics in Turkey, it was important to explore the symbolic discourses and actions of political actors, their behaviours and attitudes, the narratives they rely on and the emotional motives through which collectives participate in the practices of meaning-making. Such a line of questioning primarily led me to a powerful political narrative, a symbolic political engagement that has dominated the AKP era. Neo-Ottomanism mobilized certain emotions among the people and aimed at the restoration of national identity. Perhaps more than anything else, it appealed to emotions and paved the way for the creation of a new national mood. Characterized by an emphasis on the grandeur, might and majesty of the Ottoman past, this narrative found a strong resonance with the public. Turkey began to embrace it across a range of widespread symbolic manifestations.

Previous governments in Turkey's political history had resorted to invoking the narrative of Neo-Ottomanism and attempted to secure its adoption into political discourse. What distinguishes the AKP experience from them, however, is that for the first time Neo-Ottomanism was not only put forward by a ruling elite, but also found its way into many aspects of daily life; it has been embraced by the people. In other words, although Neo-Ottomanism was born in the field of political discourse, it became a banal element of everyday life and a new form of nationalism for a broader population.

The approach taken here to analyse the AKP experience through emotions has been to concentrate on the most powerful symbolic political sites, where the emotions that underpin, adhere to and emanate from the Neo-Ottomanist narrative came into being. I have analysed the Neo-Ottomanist narrative by way of the intersection of leader, space and myth. Each of these sites contains powerful reservoirs of meaning and emotion that permeate not only politics, but also many other aspects of society. Each symbolic site became a potent tool of symbolic politics, produced by the ruling elite and emotionally invested in by the people themselves. Consequently, the analytical focus of this study was determined in a

manner that might account for the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between the ruling elites and the people.

The most powerful symbolic site of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative is undoubtedly Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, first as the leader of the AKP and then as the president of Turkey. His political background, character traits and actions throughout his rule have been in perfect harmony with both the motives behind the emergence of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative and the emotional needs of his supporters. In the two decades since the AKP came to power, Erdoğan, as a political symbol, has been the most visible subject and object of investment for the emotions that have accompanied and transformed the party's political path. As a political symbol in his own right, Erdoğan has managed to embody and mobilize various emotions at every step of his leadership journey. Beginning from a narrative of victimization suffused with strong historical references, he transformed it into one of triumph, glory and greatness. Neo-Ottomanism has been built upon a sense of *ressentiment* invoked through the discourse of victimization that dominates Erdoğan's personal history and the history of the Islamic conservative tradition, fundamentally grounded in an archive of oppression. This constituent feeling has festered in the wound of humiliation that emerged in the wake of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the experience of its already defeated encounter with the West. In addition to the sense of loss and humiliation, for the Islamic conservative subjectivity, the experience of exposure to the West and Westernization is recalled as a kind of trauma, intensely impacting their collective narrative of the past.

The experience of the encounter with the West entered Erdoğan's narrative of victimization not only as humiliation and the loss of self-confidence, but also as an accompanying sense of envy. In other words, this mood was partly characterized by an admiration and emulation of the power, might and influence of what was encountered. Indeed, envy, as an emotion of deep unease and hostile despair, also contains an intense desire for its object. However, the sense of the impossibility of this desire in reaching its object facilitated its transformation into another emotional response: disgust. An imaginary of the West, which found a strong place in Erdoğan's narrative of victimization, was thus given substance by a multi-layered, transitive movement of feelings of humiliation, envy and disgust. Erdoğan has been extremely successful in mobilizing this archive of emotions in the people and, across his leadership, has ably made use of opportunities to compensate for these emotions.

Perhaps the most striking point in this analysis of emotions tied to a Western imaginary was the realization that the emotions explored in this chapter are not unique to the Islamic conservative subjects. The feeling of impotence and humiliation vis-à-vis the West could also be attributed to a broader Turkish subject as well. That is, the encounter with the West, even for those who admired it, even for those who embraced Westernization, was a wounded contact. Perhaps the reason Erdoğan's audience grew larger and larger for so long is tied to how his discourse and actions satisfy the emotional needs of a broader Turkish subject.

In Erdoğan's narrative of oppression, the perpetrator that constitutes the main source of victimization, constructed with reference to concrete historical instances, is undoubtedly CHP. Indeed, CHP is rendered the object of the emotions Erdoğan appeals to when conveying the encounter with the West as a constituent site of victimization. Ultimately, he has created a caustic narrative about the founding years of the Republic and the single-party era. Here, the motif of oppression predominates, and hatred stands out as the chief emotion that he addresses and mobilizes. Framed as the perpetrator of the Islamic conservative collective subject's feelings of suppression, exclusion and humiliation, CHP becomes both the longstanding agent of victimization and a persistent object of hatred. Moreover, and rather conveniently for the ontology of the emotion of hatred, Erdoğan's discourse has been dominated by the propagation of hatred against CHP and its *mentality*; in other words, against everyone who embodies principles represented by CHP.

The emotions evoked by the narrative of victimization are not limited to those I have mentioned. For the Islamic conservative collective subject, CHP and its mentality have led to another traumatic experience: the execution of Adnan Menderes. In every period of Erdoğan's leadership, Menderes was a site of trauma and a tool of identification, one that Erdoğan never ceased to recall and remind the people of. Particularly before strongly consolidating his power, he often identified himself with Menderes as a symbol of victimization called up from the past, keeping alive an intense hatred of those who caused Menderes's tragic end. The other emotional outlet of this identification, which goes hand in hand with hatred, is anxiety. For Islamic conservative subjectivity, anxiety constitutes one of the strongest emotional sites, permeating the experience of a past shaped by coups, party closures and even the perception of threats to existence. While anxiety triggers a cautious attitude, it is also rich in anger and *ressentiment*, as it harbours the threat of the

unknown. Indeed, regarding CHP and its mentality, one of the major emotions permeating Erdoğan's narrative of victimization is anger. Anger finds its expression either in the demand for or the position of power, and this emotion was particularly prominent in Erdoğan's speeches and demeanour when referring to 28 February 1997. 28 February was often repeated, remembered and recalled as a site of victimization. Such repetition made it possible to keep anger alive at all times, both because 28 February took place in the recent past and because of its impact on Erdoğan's personal and political life. As such, anger has become more and more embodied in Erdoğan and his supporters with the consolidation of power and authority.

The Neo-Ottomanist narrative was built on this emotional reservoir. It made compensation and redress possible while keeping alive this narrative of the past and the feelings that accompanied it. Until 2009, Erdoğan had constructed his political and collective identity through references to a legacy of oppression. In this respect, the Davos incident has a highly symbolic and historical character. It filled Erdoğan and his supporters—even the Turkish subject more generally—with emotions that engendered a major rupture with and transformation of the narrative of victimization, to the extent that this incident reverberated not only in Turkey but across the world, idolizing Erdoğan in the eyes of the Middle East. Thus, Davos incident served to compensate for the emotions of the encounter with the West.

Following Davos, Erdoğan gradually assumed the mood of the powerful, rather than the victimized. Indeed, after this incident, Erdoğan came to be identified with Abdülhamid—even, in a sense, becoming Abdülhamid himself. Congruous with the slogan of 'Resurrection and Resurgence', Abdülhamid was reborn in Erdoğan's body. He was selectively remembered and recalled as a tool of revenge to compensate for the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, for his dethronement, for the persecution of the Islamic conservative subjects by the Republican regime and for the destruction of national honour and pride. As a radical form of rehabilitating the past in the present, revenge was enacted through the revival of Abdülhamid at the level of symbolic politics, as well as at the level of real politics, through a political style that substituted and restored the Ottoman past by destroying many of the values of the Republican regime.

The Neo-Ottomanist narrative was established against a backdrop of feelings of humiliation, envy, disgust, hatred, anxiety, anger and revenge.

The cumulative nature of these emotions and the fact that they can only be expressed from a position of power enabled me to see the centrality of *ressentiment* to Neo-Ottomanism. *Ressentiment* is a state of mind that is more than the sum of the emotions mentioned above. It stems from the fact that, for so long all these emotions could not be expressed outwardly, and were taken to heart. However, even though the narrative of victimization, remembered in the past as pain, persecution and injustice, was largely compensated for by Erdoğan's rise to power, the emotional manifestations of *ressentiment* have yet to fade. On the contrary, their expression continues, and with greater intensity, through a wide variety of symbolic acts by both Erdoğan and his supporters. Ontological *ressentiment* is the sentiment that best describes the emotional state of the subject who clings to *ressentiment* even though all their demands for compensation have been met, who keeps the wounds of the past alive by fetishizing them and who surrenders to an irreparable desire for revenge. Therefore, Neo-Ottomanism was not built on mere *ressentiment*, but on ontological *ressentiment*; that is, it became embodied in the very fabric of identity. Whether this state of mind is unique to Islamic conservative subjectivity in Turkey remains an open question.

I have further aimed to read the real political manifestations of ontological *ressentiment* through Istanbul as a symbolic space. With an ontological rage and urge for revenge and an imperial appetite carried over from the Ottoman past to the present, Istanbul has been the site of the most 'savage' practice of Neo-Ottomanist symbolic politics. It has served a great many purposes in terms of the meanings attributed to Istanbul in reference to the Ottoman conquest of the city, evoking a sense of Islamic triumph and superiority and functioning as the most effective medium of revenge against the Republican regime. The desire to reconquer Istanbul, which was essentially born out of ontological *ressentiment*, was clothed in nostalgic recollection and the romanticization of the city's Ottoman past. The vengeful and aggressive symbolic politics carried out around Istanbul was justified with reference to the feelings of nostalgia and romanticism. Hagia Sophia and Çamlıca Mosque are the most prominent locations in this symbolic politics and have been examined as sites of an Islamic desire for homecoming, while how the Atatürk Cultural Center and the Ottoman Military Barracks function as the sites of two culture wars, suggesting a clash of Kemalist and Islamic conservative values, has also been discussed. Gigantomanic fantasies such as huge bridges, airports and buildings have been established as manifestations

of Neo-Ottomanism and a greed for power, an imperial appetite and a symbolic display of superiority over the West. The lust for construction, as a medium of desire for material superiority and enrichment, serves the goal of expansion and empowerment that Neo-Ottomanism implies. Finally, the Panorama 1453 Conquest Museum and the Yenikapı Square Conquest Festivities have been explored as spaces designed for *conquest for everyone*, with the aim of making the desire for reconquest and a sense of triumph a national one. While analysing each of these sites, I have argued that the emotions that surface in Istanbul are nostalgia, romanticism and an imperial appetite, though with ontological *ressentiment* always operating as an undercurrent. I concluded the chapter by asking whether such a longing for a golden age, such a will to power and such a need to establish national pride and self-confidence are unique to an Islamic conservative collective subjectivity.

In the final chapter, I have tried to address the 15 July 2016 coup attempt—which took place during the writing of this book, and whose symbolic meanings and consequences cannot be ignored for what they say about the progression of AKP rule and the history of Turkey—in terms of national narcissism, which I approach as a state of mind whose creation was sought in the aftermath of the coup attempt. At the rally held in Yenikapı Square less than a month after the coup attempt, its traumatic impact still fresh, the mood was one of national narcissism. From the speeches by political elites to the general atmosphere, the idea they sought to establish was rich in mythic content and based on the impression of victory. Perhaps because the emotion to be derived from this tragic event—which was almost 'celebrated' through an emphasis on the might, greatness, heroism and courage of the Turkish nation as the heir to the great Ottoman Empire—was inclusive narcissism, the event initially had a certain grassroots appeal. However, soon thereafter, it became easier to see whose narrative, or legend, it actually was. In the aftermath of the coup attempt, the AKP reintroduced a rigid dichotomy of 'us' and 'them', and resorted to policies that excluded and penalized large segments of society. As a milestone of the AKP's rule, marked by feelings of triumph and collective narcissism, the 'Legend of 15 July' has transformed into a divisive myth that only Erdoğan and his supporters can embrace. In other words, far from gaining credibility as an appealing form of national narcissism, the events of 15 July caused the AKP government to once again, this time irrevocably, close in on itself and lose its political and social legitimacy in the eyes of a large segment of society.

So, what does this book tell us today, in 2023, which marks the centenary of the foundation of the Turkish Republic? Indisputably, the AKP's politics of emotions has been a central factor in the party's longevity. As a result of the AKP's Neo-Ottomanist symbolic politics, it seems that 'Turks have remembered the Ottomans again'. The emphasis on Islam, so prominent in the reconstruction of the Ottoman past and a key determinant of AKP politics, is today embedded in the state as 'the return of the repressed', and has carved out a wide space for itself within the official ideological framework. In this context, the AKP's Neo-Ottomanist politics of emotion has been decisive in stretching, disrupting and even breaking the truisms and moulds of the Republican regime's imagination of national identity. From this perspective, one could conclude that the AKP has emerged victorious from its battle with the Republican regime, or that, given the polarization of the nation today, Turkey is experiencing an identity crisis under Erdoğan's autocratic regime. The future fate of the Neo-Ottomanist narrative seems to be closely tied to *how* Erdoğan will fall and how his Islamic conservative rule will be remembered in the Turkish political history.

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