

Journal of Middle Eastern Politics and Policy

A Harvard Kennedy School Student Publication

Contemporary Turkey Edition

Editors: Reilly Barry and Ghazi Ghazi

Table of Contents

A Foreword from Ambassador James Jeffrey	6
James Jeffrey	
The Shehzade Takes a Selfie	12
Jenny White	
Teetering on the Brink: Turkey's Troubled Ties with the West	20
Nathalie Tocci	
Between Islamism and Pragmatism: Interrogating Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey-Africa Relations	26
James Barnett	
The Sèvres Syndrome: A Key to Understand Foreign Policy Attitudes of Turkish Citizens	32
Emre Erdoğan	
Spectacles of Tolerance: The Precarity of Turkey's Religious Minorities in the Era of Neo-Ottoman Delusions	44
Aykan Erdemir	
Turkish-Islamist Synthesis 2.0: Continuity and Change in Turkey's National Project and Foreign Policy	53
Nora Fisher Onar	
Turkish Kaleidoscope: Fractured Lives in a Time of Violence	62
Book Review by Kaya Genç	
The Remaking of Republican Turkey: Memory and Modernity since the Fall of the Ottoman Empire	68
Book Review by Reilly Barry	

Foreword from Ambassador James Jeffrey

Turkey On The International Scene

I am delighted to be writing an introduction to this edition of the Harvard Kennedy School's *Journal of Middle Eastern Politics and Policy*, focused on Turkey. During nine years of diplomatic service in Turkey, and many more working on that country from Washington and neighboring states, I have been struck by the difficulties policy makers, the media, and academia encounter trying to make sense out of this contradictory state of immense geopolitical, historical, and sociological importance.

As one of the top economies by GDP in the world, and thus a member of the G-20, successor state to one of Eurasia's great empires, with a powerful, increasingly expeditionary military, blessed and cursed by its location between Western Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia, and a major player in more international organizations than perhaps any other state, from NATO and the European Union to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Turkey is too big to ignore, yet too small to dominate any of the regions it lies astride. Rather, it seeks a relatively stable regional environment, but is threatened by Russia, Iran, various flavors of Islamic extremism, and a radical Kurdish movement, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), both a domestic and external foe. At the same time it continues its historic balance between its Middle Eastern, Asian, and Islamic heritages and its Western vocation, with a different slant under President Erdoğan than under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and other "Kemalist" successors from 1923-2002.

The bad news is that for the past decade Erdoğan has taken Turkey, previously the darling of many in the West, in new, unilateral directions that concern the United States, the EU, and Turkey's Arab neighbors. The good news recently dominates, however. As a status quo partner to the West, Turkey has pushed back hard diplomatically and militarily against Russia in Syria, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Ukraine. It is a barrier to Iranian expansion to its south, a linchpin of NATO's regional anti-missile defense, and a key partner of the U.S. in the current Afghan crisis. After years of irritating former middle east partners, in part due to Erdoğan's imperial demeanor, in part due to his flirtation with the Muslim Brotherhood, Erdoğan of late has reached out to Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt, and, most recently, Turkey's most skeptical regional neighbor, the UAE.

The underlying importance of Turkey, its undeniable role as a security partner, and its recent charm offensive place Washington in an awkward position. For the past few years, fueled by controversies over Ankara's purchase of the Russian S-400 missile system and its opposition to the U.S. partnership with the PKK offshoot the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the U.S. foreign policy establishment, including past citadels of support for Turkey in the Pentagon and Congress, has soured on Ankara. But the recent changes for the better in Turkey's behavior, and a new awareness that the United States desperately needs partners against serious threats to global stability, open the door to a possible shift in U.S. policy. We have seen certain initial steps already in the Biden administration's handling of its complicated NATO ally. Likewise, Turkey is signaling, including by its non-reaction to President Biden's embrace of the Armenian genocide, readiness to turn a page also for the better.

Where Washington and Ankara will go in the months ahead remains uncertain. Will both put the now 'frozen' issues between them, beginning with the S-400 and relations with the SDF, on the shelf and focus on the many areas of cooperation? Or will Washington's penchant for 'with us or against us,' and Erdogan's penchant for infuriating even those most sympathetic to Turkey torpedo any rapprochement? Given the instability currently raging in the whole Middle East-Caucasus, Black Sea region, much hinges on the answer.

But answering questions require information. In this edition of the *Journal of Middle Eastern Politics and Policy*, authors examine various aspects of Turkish foreign policy and domestic politics that impact the country's future in a complex world, and provide guidelines for dealing with this fascinating state and society.

Author Bios

A Foreword from Ambassador James Jeffrey

Ambassador James F. Jeffrey is currently the Chair of the Middle East Program at the Wilson Center. He retired from the Foreign Service with the rank of Career Ambassador in June, 2012. He was recalled to the Foreign Service in 2018 to serve as the State Department's Special Representative for Syria, and in 2019 to serve concurrently as the Special Envoy to the Coalition to Defeat ISIS. He retired from those positions in November, 2020. Between 2012-2018 he was the Philip Solondz Distinguished Visiting Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a Visiting Instructor at George Washington University, energy consultant, and member of the Secretary of Defense's Defense Policy Board and the CIA Director's External Advisory Board.

Ambassador Jeffrey has held a series of senior posts in Washington, D.C., and abroad. Prior to his service as Ambassador in Ankara, 2008-2010, and Baghdad 2010-2012, he served as Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor in the George W, Bush Administration. Previously he served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the Department of State. Earlier appointments included service as Senior Advisor on Iraq to the Secretary of State; Chargé d'affaires and Deputy Chief of Mission in Baghdad; Ambassador to Albania, Deputy Chief of Mission in Ankara and Kuwait; and Deputy Coordinator for Bosnia.

A former infantry officer in the U.S. Army, Ambassador Jeffrey served in Germany and Vietnam from 1969 to 1976. His wife Gudrun and he have two children, Julia,

“The Shehzade Takes a Selfie,” Jenny White

Jenny White is a social anthropologist and Professor Emerita at the Institute for Turkish Studies at Stockholm University. A former president of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association and of the American Anthropological Association Middle East Section, she is the author of seven books about Turkey, three of them academic, three fiction and one hybrid. Her most recent book is *Turkish Kaleidoscope* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

**“Teetering on the Brink: Turkey’s Troubled Ties with the West,”
Nathalie Tocci**

Nathalie Tocci is Pierre Keller visiting professor at the Harvard Kennedy School and director of the Institute for International Affairs in Rome.

“Between Islamism and Pragmatism: Interrogating Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey-Africa Relations,” James Barnett

James Barnett is a Fulbright visiting fellow at the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies at the University of Lagos, Nigeria and a non-resident research fellow at the Hudson Institute in Washington D.C. His research focuses on militancy and geopolitics in Africa.

“The Sèvres Syndrome: A Key to the Understand Foreign Policy Attitudes of Turkish Citizens,” Emre Erdoğan

Prof. Emre Erdoğan is the Head of the Department of International Relations at Istanbul Bilgi University. With a doctoral degree in Political Science from Boğaziçi University, he has served as researcher and senior consultant in various projects in academia and civil society. His research focuses on political participation, foreign policy and public opinion, child and youth well-being, methodology and statistics. He extensively studies and publishes about youth in Turkey, integration of Syrian refugee youth in Turkey, othering, polarization and populism.

“Spectacles of Tolerance: The Precarity of Turkey’s Religious Minorities in the Era of Neo-Ottoman Delusions,” Aykan Erdemir

Dr. Aykan Erdemir is the senior director of the Turkey program at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. He is a former member of the Turkish Parliament and served in the European Union-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee. He is a steering committee member of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom

of Religion or Belief and a member of the Anti-Defamation League's Task Force on Middle East Minorities. Dr. Erdemir has received his BA in International Relations from Bilkent University and MA in Middle Eastern Studies and Ph.D. in Anthropology and Middle Eastern Studies from Harvard University. He was a doctoral fellow at the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and a research associate at the University of Oxford's Center on Migration, Policy and Society. Dr. Erdemir worked as faculty member at Bilkent University's Department of Political Science and Public Administration and Middle East Technical University's Department of Sociology, where he also served as the Deputy Dean of the Graduate School of Social Sciences. He is coauthor of *Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites and Spaces* (Routledge, 2016).

“Turkish-Islamist Synthesis 2.0: Continuity and Change in Turkey’s National Project and Foreign Policy,” Nora Fisher Onar

Dr. Nora Fisher-Onar is Assistant Professor of International Studies at the University of San Francisco and author of *Pluralism in Turkey: Islam, Liberalism and Nationalism*, forthcoming with Cambridge University Press.

Turkish Kaleidoscope: Fractured Lives in a Time of Violence Book Review by Kaya Genç

Kaya Genç is author of four books: *The Lion and the Nightingale*, *Under the Shadow*, *An Istanbul Anthology*, and *Macera*. *The Economist* called *Under the Shadow* a ‘refreshingly balanced’ book whose author ‘has announced himself as a voice to be listened to’. *The Times Literary Supplement* praised the way *The Lion and the Nightingale* ‘grounds Turkish current affairs in the context of the past couple of decades and explains the attraction of extreme politics to the country’s youth’. He contributed to the world’s leading journals and newspapers, including two front-page stories in *The New York Times*, cover stories in *The New York Review of Books*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *The Times Literary Supplement*.

The Remaking of Republican Turkey: Memory and Modernity since the Fall of the Ottoman Empire

Book Review by Reilly Barry

Reilly Barry is a second year A.M. candidate at Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, where she focuses on Turkish domestic politics and foreign affairs, as well as Turkish regional involvement in the Caucasus and historical geopolitical competition with Iran. She has been published at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, co-authoring the policy note "Turkey's Opposition vs. the AKP: Measuring Messaging," and has been cited in media outlets such as France24 on Turkish foreign policy. In 2020 she was a main presenter on the panel "Ottoman Revival and Return in Turkey" at the Middle East Studies Association's annual conference. She has overseen three editions as Editor-in-Chief of Harvard Kennedy School's *Journal of Middle Eastern Politics and Policy*, previously acting as the managing editor of the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*.

The Shehzade Takes a Selfie

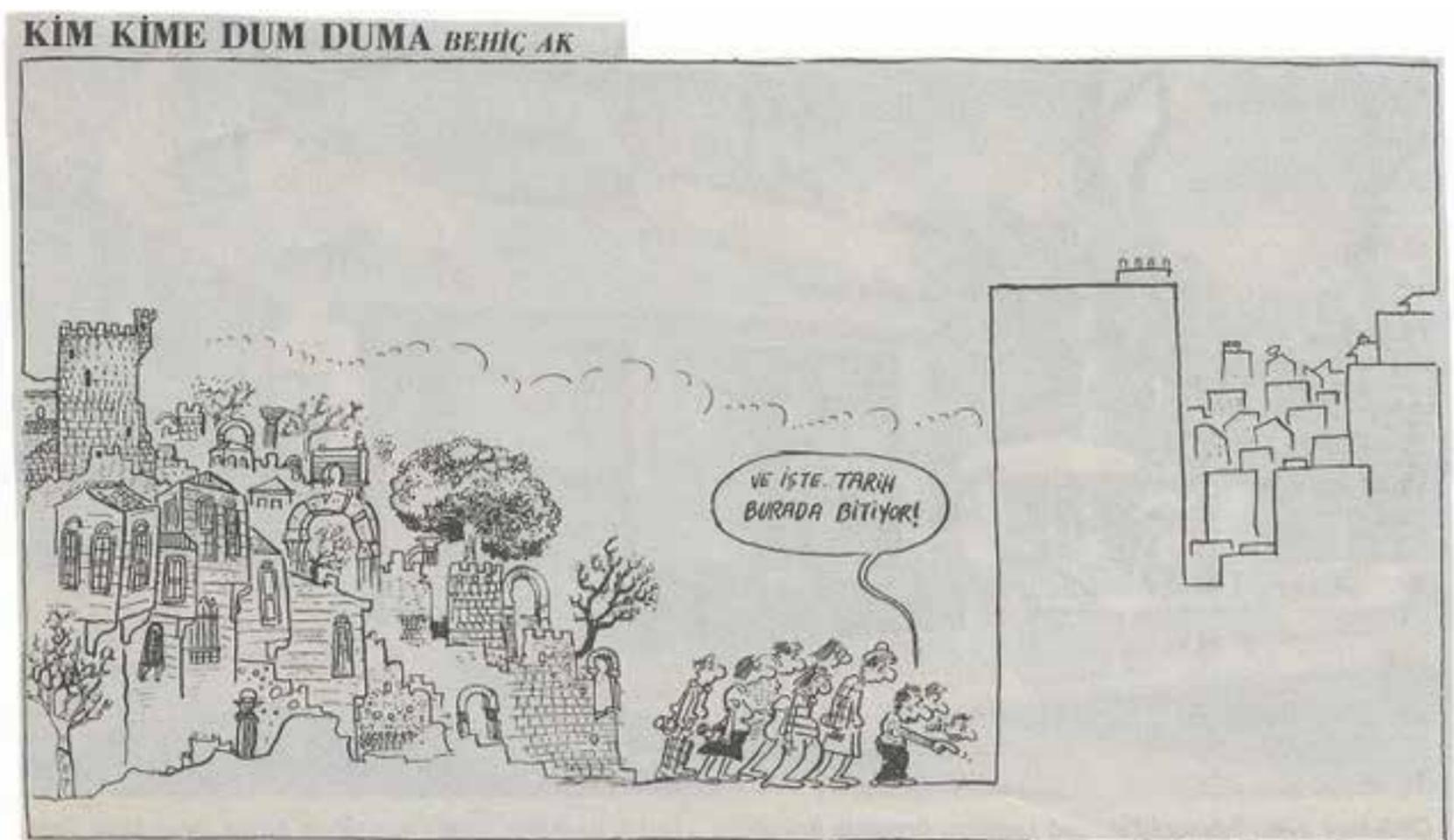
Jenny White

Professor, Stockholm University Institute for Turkish Studies

After its founding in 1923, the Turkish Republic, under its first president Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, dramatically cut ties with its pre-Republican Ottoman history. A 1929 law changed Arabic-based Ottoman to a reconstructed Turkish language in the Latin alphabet (Lewis 2002), making the educated elites of the time illiterate overnight and rendering documents and literature in Ottoman unreadable by

the next generation.¹ This was accompanied by massive social and institutional transformation and a wholesale invention of national history that ignored the previous five centuries of the Ottoman Empire and posited that Turks were direct ancestors of Sumerians (2900 BCE) and Hittites (1600 BCE). (Tanyeri-Erdemir 2006) To make their point, Kemalist Republi-

¹ The erasure of history continues with the destruction of archives of past issues of major newspapers as these have been taken over by the AKP government.



Behiç Ak, Cumhuriyet 10/29/88.
Reprinted with permission of the artist.

can leaders moved the capital from Ottoman-infected Istanbul to an arid plateau in the middle of Anatolia. The new capital, Ankara, was designed by a German city planner, Hermann Jansen, and built from scratch in an international modernist style (Bozdoğan 2002). Thus was created the imaginative geography of a new, Westernized Turkey that saw itself as morally and culturally superior to the Ottoman Empire it had replaced.

In Behiç Ak's cartoon, published in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper in 1988, the crumbling ruins of previous civilizations on Turkish soil are visible in the left background, along with the ecology, architecture, and customs of a bygone age. Tourists in sporty clothes, cameras slung around their necks, are eager consumers of a romanticized past but stare uncomprehendingly as the tour guide points to the blank wall of a modern Turkish city and says, "And, well, history ends here!"

The term imaginative geographies was popularized by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) to refer to the imaginative process by which a space and the people that inhabit it are given meaning by the observer through certain discourses, texts, and images. Both space and time are partitioned and dramatized in a way that supports a moral distinction between the observer and the observed. Said was referring to the way in which the West shapes how the "Orient" is perceived and, in some ways, how it comes to see itself. Thus, Western observers might label the inhabitants of an Oriental space as "bar-

barians" who have fought each other "for hundreds of years," thereby rendering the difference between us (the idealized cosmopolitan West) and them (the Orient) timeless and preserving the inhabitants of the Orient as violent, backward or exotic in the amber of imagined history. Said writes that "Space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here." (55)

The actual residents of the imagined Orient, however, are also busy imagining themselves in reaction to the colonizing gaze ("We are not what you imagine; we are modern"). Residents may commodify that imaginative geography ("Come and experience what you imagine us to be"), and they may themselves colonize the past by inventing and dramatizing histories to fit changing political narratives. Leila Harris (2014) writes about the struggle of environmentalists in Turkey to negotiate this contradictory symbiosis of self-other and east-west. She examines the role of mimicry in the replication of global environmental values and practices, and ambivalence, the feeling of loss when the attempt to live up to Western standards fails, but also the fear that success in doing so would endanger Turkish culture and lifeways. (Bhabha 1994, 89) The process of constructing and resisting imaginative geographies seems more troubled than poetic.

Although scholars have challenged the *de novo* exceptionalism claimed by the Re-

public, presenting evidence of continuity between the Ottoman and Republican periods (cf Meeker 2002), Republican reforms nevertheless created profound historical, linguistic, literary, architectural, and aesthetic breaks with the Ottoman past. (Kasaba 1997; Tanyeri-Erdemir 2006; White 2012) I would argue that Turkey's uprooted institutions and re-engineered social identities, abandoned architectural and aesthetic legacies, and haphazardly formulated national histor(ies) have made national identity and its material and geographic expression particularly vulnerable to reinvention under the influence of politics and the market. (White 2021) The wall between the present and the past for most citizens not schooled in the now extinct Ottoman language constrains them to continually re-interpret and re-appropriate already alienated snapshots of a blurry past. It also facilitates the literal burial of genocide and other abuses of power, as demonstrated by Parla and Özgül (2016), who identified an Armenian cemetery beneath what is now Gezi Park. In 2013, thousands of protesters came out against the government's plan to replace the park with a mall built as a replica of an Ottoman-era barracks. Early in the Republic, the land containing the cemetery had been confiscated by the Turkish government, and the tombstones were used in the construction of the steps of Gezi Park. Protesters rescued Gezi Park as a Turkish civic space from being turned into a politicized neo-Ottoman commercial site. But that same geographic space is haunted by the largely unknown or unacknowledged

history of the killing and deportation of minorities and systematic confiscation of their property. The imaginative process described by Said is constrained by what is unsayable and eventually becomes unknown. History literally goes underground.

As Benedict Anderson (1983) argued, nations create their own historical metafiction. In Turkey, this has meant a succession of leaders since 1923 who have taken a hand in reimagining Turkish history and geography, inventing what it should be and burying what they believe it should not. First, the memory of Ottoman times was erased in favor of Kemalist modernization. The most recent reinvention came about in the 1980s. By taking advantage of economic reforms, provincial entrepreneurs were able to expand their businesses and become wealthy, slowly gaining political power. This mostly conservative population supplied support for Turkey's Islamist parties and eventually pushed aside the Kemalist Republican elites and took over the task of reimagining Turkey's history and geography. Since the 1990s, Ottoman "history" has made a comeback as an element of national identity, promoted by political parties that wished to distance themselves from secular Republicanism and that saw the Ottoman Empire as a home-grown example of Muslim rule thus injecting Islam into a secularized political sphere. (Fisher-Onar 2018) This misstates the Ottoman Empire's political identity, but a requirement for authenticity has never been part of this process.

The 1990s saw a boom in the purchase of Ottoman-era artifacts that had previously languished in bazaars and second-hand stores. To the uninitiated, Ottoman calligraphies looked like Arabic and thus had the imprimatur of religion, as well as an intimation of Ottoman grandeur. Ottoman “history” has given a language of display to the new elites, many of whom have conservative, provincial, or working-class roots.

In 1991, I was invited along with a group of visiting American schoolteachers to lunch at the home of a wealthy Turkish businessman from an old elite family.² Waiters dressed in white served traditional Turkish dishes in the garden of the family’s Ottoman-era villa overlooking the Bosphorus. Our host explained that his wife herself had overseen the preparation of the food in her kitchen. The stuffed grape leaves, his wife pointed out, were the size of her little finger, the Ottoman court standard. The family had invited friends who spoke English, and they moved among the teachers, engaging them in pleasant conversation. Only after several people requested it were we invited to see the inside of their home, which was furnished with enormous antique mirrors and slightly shabby but beautiful late-Ottoman furniture. This man’s business partner was from an eastern provincial city and had expanded his textile factory into a holding company. He learned of our visit and insisted that we come to see his home as well. A few days later, we were bussed to a family compound of

three newly built luxury houses set on top of a hill overlooking the Bosphorus on the Asian side. The businessman and his wife swept us from the bus directly into a tour of each house in turn, with explanations of special features, such as an illegal swimming pool under the floor. At his own home, he pointed proudly to a pedestal of shimmering glass standing in the middle of the beige shag carpet. This was part of a fountain from the sultan’s palace, he explained, made of glass seeded with silver. From a sideboard, he took out a large silver tea set and showed us the sultan’s seal impressed on each item, proving, he explained, its authenticity. To show how valuable it was, he passed around the bill of sale. After that, the businessman disappeared, and his wife served us each a glass of tea and some savories, then left as well. In the wilting heat, we searched for someone to take us back to our lodgings.

What we had witnessed was a competitive display of social status, with each family legitimating its status on the basis of history. In one case, Ottoman history was the family’s personal patrimony and, whether they were cash-wealthy or not, their possession of an Ottoman villa, knowledge of courtly food preparation, mastery of English, and the presence of friends who had traveled and studied in the West marked the family as Republican elite possessed of social and cultural capital. (Bourdieu 1984) The other family’s elite legitimacy, by contrast, rested entirely on its wealth, demonstrated by the purchase and display of objects linked to the Ottoman court rather than on cultural or social capital.

² I relate this story in White, 2002, pp. 45-47.

Having made their point, they dispensed with any effort to show hospitality.

Over the next thirty years, through a variety of Islam-inspired parties culminating in the current ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Ottoman past has risen “in zombie-like fashion,” as Walton (2016, 513) put it, and become the handmaiden of political discourse about national identity, inspiring both national and foreign policy. The conquest of Byzantine Constantinople by Sultan Mehmed I in 1453 has been commemorated since 1953 as a nationalist ritual that emphasizes Muslims conquering Christians, the “outside enemy” in the Turkish national imaginary. (Brockett 2014) Since the AKP came to power in 2002, however, this ritual has gained new importance, expanded into a multitude of reenactments and other activities, and has effectively displaced the 1923 founding moment of the Turkish Republic. (Çınar 2001) The realm of foreign policy activism has expanded in line with an imaginary geography that posits that Turkey’s national interests and responsibilities extend to what had been Ottoman territories and, as a former imperial world power, beyond. The inhabitants and states of these former Ottoman regions have, on the whole, reacted badly to Turkey’s proprietary gaze on their territories and peoples.

Social and political forms and objects have been extracted from their Ottoman context, infused with new meanings, and implemented in daily life, political rhetoric, public ritual, art, media, and film

(Ergin and Karayaka 2017). Decontextualized and romanticized Ottoman history has been deployed to represent Turkey as a global power, to reference anti-Christian sentiment, to create new forms of distinction, and to generate wealth, for instance, by providing neo-Orientalist experiences for tourists. (Potuoglu-Cook 2006) Elif Batuman summed up the effect of commercialization on what some now call *Ottomania*: A Burger King Sultan meal combo with an ad featuring a Janissary devouring a Whopper with hummus; the increasing popularity of “Ottoman cookbooks, Ottoman-style bathroom consoles, wedding invitations with Ottoman calligraphy, and graduation gowns and flight-attendant uniform designs inspired by kaftans and fezzes.” (Batuman 2014)

Derek Gregory draws our attention to the material processes that underlie Said’s poetic abstractions of Orientalist spatialities. (Gregory 1995, 476) The representations encoded in commodities and popular culture can be seen as both abstractions as well as concrete fabrications that re-envision the past. Gregory compares this process to Samuel’s “theatres of memory,” in which people pick and choose elements of the past to create a metafiction. (Samuel 1996) The past becomes a plaything of the present and is performed through the minutiae of everyday practices and public display, encoded in commodities and fantasy architectures. Gregory gives the example of a luxury hotel in Las Vegas that has recreated the tomb of Tutankhamun, the pyramid of Luxor, and the Nile river in its lobby beside a kosher-style deli

and an acrobatic troupe called the Flying Mummies. This is an appropriation of Others' cultural spatialities, "captured, displaced, and hollowed out" and sold to tourists. (Gregory 1995, 477)

Turkish society lacks direct access to the thoughts and aesthetics of the past that most other societies take for granted. Ordinarily, the past is accessible through literature that people can read, streetscapes they can stroll through, accretions of customs, stories, folklore passed from one generation to the next. To be modern normally means to build on this past or to break with it. Without a known past, modernity takes on the trappings of the present. Modernization in Turkey has meant stripping things and people of identity in order to produce them as green screens onto which government and business can project the metafictional identity that best supports current relations of power and profit. Under the AKP, modernization has largely taken the form of homogenization, standardization, and revenue extraction.

Architectural restoration in Turkey, for example, focuses not on historical authenticity but rather on decor, standardization, and revenue extraction. Cultural values and "old" things are not seen to bring a profit, except for commercial replicas that can be sold to tourists, Turkish and foreign. Representations of the past are encoded in commodities, popular culture, private and state rituals, structures and museums. As invented geographies are consumed, they acquire, as Said wrote, "emotional

and even rational sense." Meltem Ahıska observes that "the myth of past grandiosity, authenticity, and so on are consumed in the present not as ambivalent memories but as if they are real things." (in Küçük & Özselçuk 2019, 168)

If Behiç Ak's cartoon were to be extended to the right beyond the featureless Republican modern, we would encounter an artificially contrived landscape of sanitized and glorified Ottoman public buildings (mosques and palaces, symbols of power, not the lived-in homes of ordinary Ottomans), perhaps a rendition of *Miniatürk*, a theme park in Istanbul that features scaled-down replicas of many Ottoman buildings. (Walton 2016) The tourists would be Turkish, cameras slung around their necks, dressed perhaps in Ottoman-themed costumes, and consuming a homogenized, modern, commercial production of invented history, sterilized of everything that should not be known.

Even globalization has been decontextualized, commodified, and invested with moral superiority. Gated housing developments on the outskirts of Istanbul promise to take middle-class Turks far away from the unwashed chaos of urban life to a homogenized fantasy built to resemble Tuscany or built around a miniature artificial Bosphorus, much like Luxor in Las Vegas. Sharon Zukin calls these abstractive landscapes, where disruption and integration into the world economy have taken away indigenous vernacular usage and replaced it with commercial use that in itself has no references and, thus, is available to be

filled with bland or bizarre architecture. She likens the built landscape to that of Disneyland. (Zukin 1993)

In Turkey, imaginative geographies become abstractive landscapes, thus doubly alienated from the cultural wealth and social complexity of the lived past. Cartoonish new statues erected around the country commemorate not historical figures or events but local products (a boy poking his head out of a watermelon in an agricultural town; a cup in midair pouring tea in a town where porcelain is produced). Melih Gökçe, the previous mayor of Ankara, erected first an enormous statue of a robot and then a dinosaur. (Şahin 2015) In Amasya, a statue appeared of a Shehzade (sultan's son) holding a cell phone and taking a selfie. (Taylor 2015) In a twist on Samuel's "theatres of memory" (Samuel 1996), in which people pick and choose elements of the past to create a metafiction, in Turkey, where the past has been made inaccessible, what is called history is a shapeshifting shadow on the green screen of society, where a dinosaur has become as plausible as a Shehzade taking a selfie.

Endnotes

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso Press.

Batuman, Elif, 2014. "Ottomania", *The New Yorker*, February 17 & 24.

Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London: Routledge.

Bozdoğan, Sibel. 2002. *Modernism and Nation-Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic*. Seattle:

University of Washington Press.

Brockett, Gavin D. 2014. *When Ottomans Become Turks: Commemorating the Conquest of Constantinople and Its Contribution to World History*. *American Historical Review*, pp. 399-433.

Çınar, Alev. 2001. "National History as a Contested Site: The Conquest of Istanbul and Islamist Negotiations of the Nation." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43(02):364 - 391.

Ergin, Murat, and Y. Karayaka. 2017. "Between Neo-Ottomanism and Ottomania: Navigating State-led and Popular Cultural Representations of the Past." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 56:33-59.

Fisher-Onar, Nora. 2018. "Between Neo-Ottomanism and Neoliberalism: The Politics of Imagining Istanbul." In *Istanbul: Living With Difference in a Global City*. (Eds) N. Fisher-Onar, S. C. Pearce, E. F. Keyman. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, pp. 1-21.

Gregory, Derek. 1995. "Imaginative Geographies", *Progress in Human Geography* 19(4):447-485.

Harris, Leila M. 2014. "Imaginative Geographies of Green: Difference, Postcoloniality and Affect in Environmental Narratives in Contemporary Turkey." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 104(4): 801-815.

Kasaba, Reşat. 1997. "Kemalist Certainties and Modern Ambiguities." In Sibel Bozdoğan and R. Kasaba (eds) *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 15-36.

Küçük, Bülent, & C. Özselçuk. 2019. "Revisiting Occidentalism/Orientalism: An Interview with Meltem Ahıska." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 118(1): 165-174.

Lewis, Geoffrey. 2002. *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Meeker, Michael. 2002. *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity*. Oakland: CA: University of California Press.

Parla, Ayşe and C. Özgül. 2016. "Property, Dispossession, and Citizenship in Turkey; Or, the History of the Gezi Uprising Starts in the Surp Hagop Armenian Cemetery." *Public Culture* 28(3):617-653.

Potuoğlu-Cook, Öykü. 2006. "Beyond the Glitter: Belly Dance and Neoliberal Gentrification in Istanbul". *Cultural Anthropology* 21(4), pp. 633-660.

Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Şahin, Savaş Zafer. 2015. "Transformer ve Jurassic Ankara'ya Karşı." *Şehreküstü Blog*. May 3.

Samuel, Raphael. 1996. *Theatres of Memory, Vol. 1*. London: Verso.

Tanyeri-Erdemir, Tuğba. 2006. "Archaeology as a Source of National Pride in the Early Years of the Turkish Republic," *J. of Field Archaeology* 31(4): 381-393.

Taylor, Adam. 2015. "A Turkish city just unveiled a statue of an Ottoman prince taking a selfie. It's already been damaged." *The Washington Post*, May 11.

Walton, Jeremy F. 2016. "Geographies of Revival and Erasure: Neo-Ottoman Sites of Memory in Istanbul, Thessaloniki, and Budapest." *Die Welt Des Islams* 56: 511-533.

White, Jenny. 2021. "The Unbearable Lightness of Being Turkish." In *Knowledge, Authority and Change in Islamic Societies*. (Eds) Allen James Fromherz and N. Samin. Leiden: Brill. Pp. 217-228.

---- 2012. *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

---- 2002. *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics*. Seattle: Washington University Press.

Zukin, Sharon, *Landscapes of Power*. 1993.

Teetering on the Brink: Turkey's Troubled Ties with the West

Abstract

For over a decade now, scholars and practitioners in Turkey, Europe, and the United States have denounced and despaired about Turkey's estrangement from the West. From the progressive disenchantment with Turkey's process of EU accession to Ankara's increasingly uncomfortable position within NATO, the growing empathy between President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to the open insults between the former and French President Emmanuel Macron, Turkey's relations with the West have been teetering on the brink of a precipice for some time. Yet, every time they dangerously approach the point of no return, either one party or both take a step back. This article briefly recounts the vicious circle in which Turkish-West relations have been trapped for over a decade, as well as the reasons why a complete rupture in relations is unlikely. It does so to look ahead at the prospects for the relationship with an eye to

Nathalie Tocci

reversing the vicious circle the parties are trapped in, as well as inducing positive transformation in Turkey itself.

Introduction

Relations between Turkey and the West have been fraught for some time. For well over a decade now, academics, practitioners, and pundits have deplored Turkey's drift away from the West, its domestic slide towards authoritarianism, and its growing assertiveness and independence in foreign policy, including Ankara's warmth towards Vladimir Putin's Russia and visible distancing from the European Union and the United States. Long gone are the days of unambiguous partnership, integration, and friendship: at most Turkey, the US, and the EU can be defined as frenemies,¹ ready to cooperate when the occasional interest overlaps but invariably looking at one another with palpable mistrust, perhaps even dislike.

¹ Steven Cook (2017) 'Turkey: Friend or Frenemy? A Tangled Relationship Keeps Getting Worse', CFR Blog, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/turkey-friend-or-frenemy-tangled-relationship-keeps-getting-worse>

Yet every time the relationship nears the point of no return, the buildup of political tension momentarily diffuses. The relationship does not structurally improve: the mistrust remains thick, and declarations aside, neither side is ready to turn the page truly. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a new dawn in relations under current domestic circumstances in Turkey, the EU, and the US. This said, a total breakdown of relations is not on the cards either. After briefly mapping the latest escalation in Turkey's relations with the West, this article explains why a rupture is unlikely. It does so to look ahead and suggest avenues that might eventually bring the relationship back on a healthier track.

To the Brink and Back

In Turkey, the good old days of silent democratic revolution are long gone, alongside those of the country's economic miracle, its zero problems with neighbors, and of Kurdish-Turkish peace. Today Turkey is galloping towards centralized authoritarian governance with power lying solely in the President's hands. Rights are progressively curtailed – the freedom of expression, the shrinking space for civil society, women rights, not to mention minority rights. Turkish foreign policy asserts national(ist) interests assertively and often unilaterally, be it in Syria, Libya, the Eastern Mediterranean, or the Caucasus. This is not to say that Turkish foreign policy is irrational or even ideological. Quite the contrary, it is often rationally calculated to strengthen President Erdoğan's domestic support amidst an increasing-

ly ailing economy.² Turkey's readiness to work with Russia, notwithstanding often diametrically opposed interests, is evidence of such pragmatism, and at times opportunism.³

Consequently, relations with the EU, the US, and NATO have been fraught. With the US, there is a wide panoply of irritants, from the non-extradition of Fetullah Gülen, believed by the Turkish leadership to have masterminded the 2016 coup attempt, to Turkey's 2017 acquisition of the Russian S-400 missile system, to the US's cooperation with Kurdish forces in Syria, and President Biden's recognition of the Armenian genocide. Furthermore, whereas under the Trump administration, Erdoğan could count on the White House's sympathy for authoritarian "strong men" as well as the erraticness of US foreign policy, under President Biden, even those loose hooks are gone, with the latter making democracy and alliances – beginning with NATO – lynchpins of his foreign policy.

With the EU, relations have gone from bad to worse.⁴ In fairness, Turkey is not the only one to blame. At least since 2005 – i.e., since Turkey began accession negotiations – the EU has been all consumed by successive internal crises. Starting with the constitutional crisis after the Dutch

2 Sinan Ulgen (2020) 'A Weak Economy Won't stop Turkey's Activist Foreign Policy', October, Carnegie Europe, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/10/06/weak-economy-won-t-stop-turkey-s-activist-foreign-policy-pub-82935>

3 Nathalie Tocci (2020) 'Peeling Turkey Away from Russia's Embrace: A Transatlantic Interest', Commentary, IAI, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/peeling-turkey-away-russias-embrace-transatlantic-interest>

4 N. Tocci and S.Aydin-Dugzit (2015) Turkey and the European Union, Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN 978-1-137-38731-8; 978-1-137-38730-1 N. Tocci and S.Aydin-Dugzit (2015) Turkey and the European Union, Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN 978-1-137-38731-8; 978-1-137-38730-1

and French rejection of the Constitutional treaty, passing through the Eurozone crisis and the specter of Grexit, followed by the refugee crisis, the shock of Brexit, the diffuse threat of Euroscepticism, and ending with the Covid-19 pandemic that risked becoming the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back, the European project has been mired in a drawn-out battle for survival. Political and socio-economic divergences within the EU have grown over the last two decades, triggering a sequence of institutional, economic, and political crises. Divergences both between and especially within member states and the ensuing public grievances have spurred nationalism and euro-skepticism across the Union. In this context, the European bandwidth for foreign policy in general has fallen. Specifically, the willingness to engage in further rounds of enlargement shriveled, being further damaged by the evident de-democratization in formerly enlargement countries like Poland and Hungary. Given the difficulty of ensuring that democratic standards are respected after a country enters the EU, the general willingness to let new members into the club has plummeted. Enlargement, beginning with Turkey, has been shelved for the time being.⁵ Alas, it has not stopped here. As Turkey de-democratized and was seen as antagonizing EU Member States Greece and Cyprus, the European debate on Turkey, far from focusing on integration, has revolved around sanctions instead. By the fall of 2020, Turkey's relations with the West were dangerously

⁵ Mark Leonard (2016) 'Playing Defense in Europe', Project Syndicate, 1 September, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/playing-defense-in-europe-by-mark-leonard-2016-09>

approaching a breaking point.

Yet, rupture did not happen. In the case of US-Turkey relations, while secondary sanctions in response to the purchase of the S-400s were imposed, Washington and Ankara continue to seek cooperation both within NATO and on a host of foreign policy dossiers from Afghanistan to Syria, Iraq, and Libya. More markedly, the EU-Turkey relationship has taken a step back from the brink. As Turkey de-escalated in the Eastern Mediterranean, supported a government of national unity in Libya, and signaled its willingness to mend ties with the EU, Europeans reciprocated with a restated readiness to improve relations, beginning with a modernized customs union.

Turkey-West relations remain far from idyllic. When Hagia Sophia was converted to a mosque and, a few months later, Ankara withdrew from the Istanbul Convention on combating violence against women, the outcry across the West was loud and clear. And the meeting between Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel with President Erdoğan, meant to signal a new start in relations, was not exactly seamless, beginning with the eruption of "sofagate," in which the Turkish President presented his two guests with one seat, leaving President von der Leyen standing until she awkwardly sat on a nearby sofa. In other words, we are far from turning the page in Turkey's relations with the West. In fact, after almost fifteen years of steadily deteriorating ties under the same leadership in Ankara, it

is safe to conclude that under current domestic conditions in Turkey, such a page will not be turned. In present circumstances, Ankara's relations with the West will continue teetering on the brink while not tipping over.

The Reasons for non-Rupture

This brief overview encapsulates the reasons for Turkey's distancing from the West. From the domestic situation in the country to its foreign policy adventurism, there is plenty of cause for conflict and divergence. What remains hidden between the lines and is worth unpacking is why such rupture, while often threatened, has not taken place. Every time a key decision-making moment is scheduled and the media inflates the risk of the definitive rupture, the meeting comes and goes at most with a whimper, and life goes on. Why?

Distrust and dislike between leaders aside, the structural underpinnings of relations between the West and Turkey in general and Turkey and the EU, in particular, are so wide and deep that rupture simply isn't an option. Political sparring notwithstanding, there has been an unstoppable convergence in trade, financial, and knowledge flows over the decades.⁶ Beneath the political surface, structural economic and human indicators point towards an inexorable coming together between the EU and Turkey. And for all the acrimony surrounding Turkey's membership of the North Atlantic Alliance, neither Ankara, Washington, nor indeed any other

⁶ Beken Saatçioğlu, Funda Tekin, Sinan Ekim and Nathalie Tocci (2019) 'The Future of EU-Turkey Relations: A Dynamic Association Framework amidst Conflictual Cooperation', Feuture Paper, march, https://feuture.uni-koeln.de/sites/monteu-us/user_upload/FEUTURE_Synthesis_Paper.pdf

ally has an interest in severing Turkey's relations with the West. Add to this the deepening interdependences in areas like migration, energy and climate, foreign policy, and counter-terrorism. On many of these issues, the EU and Turkey do not see eye to eye: the need for cooperation is not premised on an agreement but rather on the respective awareness of mutual need and interdependence. In some areas, notably migration, security, and foreign policy, the West needs Turkey more than the other way around. In other areas, like the economy, energy, and climate policy, Ankara will increasingly turn to Brussels. All this suggests that Turkey's ties to the West are so close and so important that the relationship is unlikely to fall below a political threshold of no return. No matter how great personal antipathies may be, neither side can afford a divorce.

Looking ahead

We are thus destined to teeter on the brink for some time. The question is how such teetering can be governed in a manner that veers Turkey-West relations away from pure transactionalism and towards a more rules-based cooperative framework. When it comes to EU-Turkey relations, an upgraded customs union, conditionally proposed by the European Council in March 2021, would provide political anchoring and ensure a rules-based agreement that would deeply transform Turkey's political economy in key sectors such as services, procurement, state aid, and trade dispute settlement. It is unlikely that Turkey's current political class

would be willing to embark upon such a deep transformation of Turkey's political economy. But if so, it is up to the EU to call the bluff. An upgraded customs union would also provide the launching pad for Turkey's progressive integration into the various facets of the single market and its developments in key sectors such as energy, climate, digital, infrastructure, and space. Viewed from this angle, given that approximately thirty of the thirty-five chapters in Turkey's accession negotiations pertain directly or indirectly to the single market, formally suspending such talks would make little long-term sense. At the same time, keeping the accession process alive would not imply Turkey's eventual membership in the Union's federalizing core in areas such as fiscal and monetary policy, migration and asylum, and security and defence. It would therefore allow for cooperation in these areas without unrealistically assuming Turkey's inexorable political convergence with the EU. This also enables an escape from the often irreconcilable debate between those who believe that Turkey was never destined to join the EU – either because the Union never sincerely opened its arms to Turkey and/or because Turkey was never sincere in its democratization – and those who believe that it was a vicious cycle of perfectly avoidable mistakes on both sides that explains the sorry predicament the EU and Turkey are in.

Turning to foreign policy instead, the EU and the US should reflect on how to draw Turkey back towards the West and, in particular, away from Russia's embrace.⁷

⁷ Nathalie Tocci (2020) *ibid.*

At face value, this should not be mission impossible. On many foreign policy questions, from Libya to Syria, Nagorno Karabakh, and Ukraine, there is more that divides Ankara and Moscow than vis-à-vis Brussels or Washington. However, the evident entente between Erdoğan and Putin and the relative passivity of Europeans and the US in and around Europe explains why Turkey and Russia have ended up working with one another far more smoothly than Turkey and the West.

To an extent, NATO's Secretary-General has already taken a proactive role, particularly by promoting de-escalation in the Eastern Mediterranean in the fall of 2020. Much more can be done. The Biden administration, marking a difference from its predecessor, could push its European and Middle Eastern partners on Turkey's inclusion in the otherwise divisive East Med Gas Forum. And both the US and Europeans, drawing on the relative convergence of policies in Libya and Ukraine, could explore avenues to work with Turkey to support Libya's national unity government, usher the country towards elections, and encourage de-escalation in Ukraine. None of this will be easy, not only because there is far from perfect alignment between Ankara, Washington, and European capitals, but also because President Erdoğan's foreign policy prides itself on independence, often exercised by flitting seemingly erratically towards and away from the West. However, the reverse – i.e., de facto pushing Ankara into Moscow's lap – has been detrimental to Turkey, Europe, and the US's interests. This

is ultimately what should guide European, US, and ultimately Turkish foreign policy too.

Between Islamism and Pragmatism: Interrogating Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey-Africa Relations

James Barnett

Within Africa's most populous nation, two buildings constructed over a century apart point to the diverse avenues through which Turkey enhances its soft power in Africa today.

On a quiet hilltop outside the central districts of Nigeria's capital, Abuja, sits the \$30 million Nizamiye Hospital. Known by many locals simply as "Turkish hospital," this sleek medical center offers a host of specialized and high-end medical services largely unavailable to those in Africa's most populous state: open-heart and cataract surgeries, MRI and CT scans, mechanical ventilators, and anesthesiology. With its mixed staff of expatriate and Nigerian doctors, Nizamiye serves as a quotidian yet powerful example of Turkey's growing role as an African donor and development partner.¹ Several hundred miles to the southwest in Lagos, Nigeria's largest city, sits the 130-year-old Shitta-Bey Mosque. Nestled between overcrowded apartments

on a hectic market street in the historic downtown, the "Turkish mosque" is not, in fact, Turkish. Though constructed in the Ottoman style, it was financed by a Sierra Leone-born Muslim who earned the Ottoman title "Bey" from the Sultan in recognition of his work on behalf of West Africa's Islamic communities. In 2018, Turkish state media gleefully reported that the mosque's Nigerian caretaker was seeking a partnership with the Turkish government to cover maintenance, renovations, and scholarships for members of the congregation to study in Turkey.²

Across Africa, but particularly in the Muslim-majority countries north of the equator, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government is attempting to portray Turkey as the face of both modern development and modern Islam (albeit one with antecedents in the Ottoman

1 For more on the hospital see Chinedu Asadu, "NIZAMIYE: The world-class hospital catering for the rich and poor," *The Cable*, January 9, 2019, <https://www.thecable.ng/nizamiye-the-world-class-hospital-catering-for-the-rich-and-the-poor>.

2 Rafiu Ajakaye, "Nigeria's oldest mosque seeks partnership with Turkey," *Anadolu Agency*, October 18, 2018, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/nigeria-s-oldest-mosque-seeks-partnership-with-turkey/1285107>; "Nigeria's Turkish mosque, the trust of Sultan Abdülhamid II," *Anadolu Agency*, October 22, 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/religion/2018/10/22/nigerias-turkish-mosque-the-trust-of-sultan-abdulhamid-ii>.

era). At the same time, Turkey has spent the past few years steadily building up its military presence and security cooperation with several strategic African states as part of its heated competition with regional rivals such as Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In the eyes of these rivals, Turkey's foreign policy in Africa represents a "Neo-Ottoman" power play designed to export political Islam onto the continent and develop Ottomanesque suzerainty over strategic real estate through which it can become the regional hegemon.

A closer reading of the situation reveals that many aspects of Turkey's engagement with Africa are relatively benign and quotidian. Turkish businesses see potential in African countries that are generally characterized by expanding populations and middle classes yet lack sufficient infrastructure or strong manufacturing bases. This explains much of the uptick in Turkish investment in the continent in the past decade, just as other countries like China and India have increased their investments as well.

There is, however, an undeniable religious dimension to Erdoğan's foreign policy that did not exist under his predecessors. Does this make his foreign policy Neo-Ottoman, as critics allege? The label can be misleading as the Muslim Brotherhood-like Islamism of Erdoğan and his AK Party is not one the Sultans would have ever endorsed (indeed, the Brotherhood owes a debt to an earlier generation of Islamic revivalists who opposed the Sultans).³ Yet rarely do pol-

³ See, for example, Umar Ryad, "A Printed Muslim 'Light-

iticians let historical complexities get in the way of their narratives. Erdoğan has indeed invoked Ottoman history, albeit selectively, to explicate and justify his engagements with Africa today. The fact that the Ottomans were once the greatest Islamic power in the world enhances Erdoğan's credibility when he speaks of Turkey as the epicenter of a new brand of Islam and Islamist politics. As Turkey emerges as an expansionist power in Africa and elsewhere, observers would do well to understand what drives the Erdoğan regime's unique engagement with the continent.

Turkey-Africa Relations: Then and Now

While the past few years have seen a flurry of commentary over Middle Eastern states' increasing involvement in African political spaces, it is important to first recognize that the divides between Africa and the Middle East so often employed by analysts are rather arbitrary, late-modern constructs that do not reflect historical reality. The Bab-al-Mandab strait that separates the Horn of Africa from the Arabian Peninsula is barely 15 miles wide, while the Sahara Desert has no clear inception or terminus. For millennia, societies have crossed these ostensible natural barriers, producing cultural, linguistic, commercial, religious, and political links across what the late Kenyan theorist Ali Mazrui dubbed

house' in Cairo: al-Manār 's Early Years, Religious Aspiration and Reception (1898-1903)," Arabica 56, no. 1 (January 2009): 27-60. JSTOR.

“Afrabia.”⁴

This is not merely an academic point, as it reminds us that “Turkey-Africa” relations are not a post-colonial phenomenon. The Ottomans exercised intermittent suzerainty or direct control over parts of North Africa and the Horn of Africa littoral between the 16th and 19th centuries, serving as checks on Spanish influence in the former and Portuguese influence in the latter. The Sultans also established trade, diplomatic, and military links with West African states such as the Kanem-Bornu Empire in the same period. It is no surprise then that many Turkish officials and commentators scoff at the notion that Turkey is a “newcomer” to the African scene.

Post-Ottoman Turkey, however, was reduced to a second-tier regional player in the interwar and Cold War periods. It had hardly any interest in Africa and lacked embassies in most countries in the first decades of African independence.⁵ Interest in Sub-Saharan Africa grew modestly in the era of Turgut Özal in the 1980s, while subsequent governments in the 1990s saw additional impetus for bolstering ties with the region, in large part as a balancing strategy for Turkish businesses whose access to lucrative European markets seemed uncertain amid the slow pace of EU ascension talks.⁶ However, apart from a vague Africa Action Plan commissioned in 1998, Ankara

made few tangible steps towards bolstering African ties until the era of AK Party rule. Credit for the significant Turkish presence in Africa today thus goes to President Erdoğan and his former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey’s leading foreign policy architect of the 2000s. Behind this pivot to Africa lie multiple commercial, geostrategic, and ideological rationales—and the question of regime security is ever-present as well.

Competition and the Domestic Drivers of Neo-Ottomanism

As competition between Turkey and its regional rivals has increasingly spilled into Africa in recent years—especially following the 2017 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis, in which Turkey drew closer to Qatar—a narrative has taken hold in Western policy circles of a new “scramble for Africa.” There are vast differences between the colonial-era partition of Africa and today’s geopolitical tussles, and the West’s newfound obsession with “Great Power Competition” has at times produced misreadings of Africa’s political landscape.⁷

Nevertheless, the Gulf powers and Turkey have undoubtedly shaped the trajectories of African countries at crucial inflection points. In Sudan, economic protests that began in late 2018 offered an opportunity for Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt to shed a trouble-

4 Ali Mazrui, “Afrabia: Africa and the Arabs in the New World Order,” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 20, no. 3 (1992): 51-62. <https://doi.org/10.5070/F7203016755>.

5 Mehmet Ozkan, “What drives Turkey’s involvement in Africa?” *Review of African Political Economy* 37, no. 126 (December 2010): 533-540. JSTOR.

6 Soner Cagaptay, *Erdogan’s Empire: Turkey and the Politics of the Middle East* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 238.

7 Some Western and African analysts speculated, for example, that Russia was behind an August 2020 coup in Mali despite a lack of evidence supporting the theory, to say nothing of a recent history of coups in the Sahel region. See “Was Russia behind the coup in Mali?” *Deutsche Welle*, August 26, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/was-russia-behind-the-coup-in-mali/a-54705282>.

some partner, longtime dictator Omar al Bashir, who had grown increasingly close to Turkey and Qatar. At least one of these three countries reportedly gave assent to the coup that toppled Bashir, promising the plotters increased financial support for a new military regime (which they eventually delivered on).⁸ While events in Sudan proved a setback for Turkey's position in the Red Sea region, Ankara had more success in Libya, where several thousand Turkish-funded Syrian mercenaries and dozens of high-grade Turkish drones deployed in support of Libya's UN-recognized government helped turn the tide of the conflict, stemming an assault on Tripoli by forces loyal to Khalifa Haftar, a warlord backed by the UAE, Egypt, and France.⁹ To Libya's south, the Sahel is also emerging as an arena of competition among Middle Eastern actors. Turkey has increased its outreach to Sahelian states, including through a defense pact with Niger and training programs for Malian forces, at

8 The exact roles of the so-called "Arab troika" of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt in the 2019 coup remain subject to a degree of rumor and speculation, but each state visibly and proactively sought to shape Sudan's post-Bashir transition in ways that would favor their preferred partners within the Sudanese security sector, sidelining civilian technocrats backed by the West all the while. James Barnett, "Sudan Hints Yes to Israel, Then It Says No, Then It Says Soon," *Mosaic*, October 2, 2020, <https://mosaicmagazine.com/observation/israel-zionism/2020/10/sudan-hints-yes-to-israel-then-it-says-no-then-it-says-soon/>; Justin Lynch, "Arab States Foment Sudan Chaos While U.S. Stands By," *Foreign Policy*, June 5, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/06/05/arab-states-foment-sudan-chaos-while-u-s-stands-by-sudan-khartoum-protests-violent-crackdown-saudi-arabia-united-arab-emirates-egypt-democracy-push/>; Khalid Abdelaziz, Michael Georgy, and Maha el Dahan, "Abandoned by the UAE, Sudan's Bashir was destined to fall," *Reuters*, July 3, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/sudan-bashir-fall/>.

9 Isabel Debre, "Pentagon report: Turkey sent up to 3,800 fighters to Libya," *Associated Press*, July 18, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/tripoli-syria-turkey-libya-middle-east-c339f71bf029f36b1091ee31c9f0171a>; for more on the role of Turkish drones in recent conflicts, see Francis Fukuyama, "Droning On in the Middle East," *American Purpose*, April 5, 2021, <https://www.americanpurpose.com/blog/fukuyama/droning-on/>.

a time when France is set to draw down its counterterrorism mission in its former colonies.¹⁰

In addition to pursuing economic opportunities, Turkey's rivals claim that their presence in Africa is intended to combat extremism, a claim which often carries an accusation (implicit or explicit) of Turkey's role in supporting radical actors on the continent. Similarly, charges of Neo-Ottomanism are frequently leveled against Erdoğan, suggesting that Turkish foreign policy is driven by a quest to become the pre-eminent regional power and center of Islamic civilization that it was under the Sultans.

The Erdoğan government indeed promotes its brand of Islam and Islamist politics in Africa as part of an effort to make Turkey a model of modern Islamism. Erdoğan has also supported radical militants as part of his intervention in Libya (though Turkey's rivals have as well).¹¹ Ankara's ties with the Muslim Brotherhood network are well-documented.¹² At the same time, Turkey's

10 Hannah Armstrong, "Turkey in the Sahel," *International Crisis Group Commentary*, July 27, 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/turkey-sahel>.

11 Whether directly or indirectly, both Turkey and its rivals have emboldened radical actors such as Madkhali-Salafi militias as part of their interventions in Libya. Additionally, in Yemen, the Saudi-Emirati coalition has supported radical Salafi militias with ties to al-Qaeda. "Addressing the Rise of Libya's Madkhali-Salafis," *International Crisis Group, Middle East & North Africa / Report No. 200*, April 29, 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/addressing-rise-libyas-madkhali-salafis>; Nicholas Heras, "Securing Southern Yemen for the UAE: Abu al-Abbas and the Battle for Taiz," *Jamestown Foundation Militant Leadership Monitor*, June 6, 2018, www.jamestown.org/brief/securing-southern-yemen-for-the-uae-abu-al-abbas-and-the-battle-for-taiz.

12 For example, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was initially skeptical of AK Party but grew closer to its model following its own rise to power in 2011-2012. Thousands of Egyptian Brotherhood members found refuge in Turkey following the 2013 Egyptian coup and crackdown on the group. Abdelrahman Ayyash, "The Turkish Future of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," *The Century Foundation Report*, August 17, 2020, <https://tcf.org/content/report/turkish-future-egypts-muslim-brother->

increasing engagement with Africa over the past decade has not been driven primarily by a mindset of zero-sum competition with its regional rivals or by a desire to achieve anything like Ottoman-era levels of suzerainty in the region. Neo-Ottomanism is, first and foremost, a matter of domestic politics. Erdoğan's regime capitalizes on nostalgia for the one-time great-power status of the Sultans, opportunistically mixing Ottoman-era rhetoric, ideas, and iconography with more contemporary strains of Islamism and even the sorts of ostensibly secular Kemalist nationalism that dominated 20th-century Turkish politics. When engaging with African audiences, Turkish officials push a narrative that the Ottomans were benefactors and partners of Africa's pre-colonial Muslim societies, generally eliding the Ottomans' own energetic (if largely unsuccessful) participation in the colonial-era scramble for Africa.¹³ As seen in the case of the Shitta-Bey Mosque in Lagos, the Ottoman legacy also provides avenues for Turkey to enhance its soft power by assuming its ostensibly historical roles of sponsorship or custodianship.

However, Ottomanesque rhetoric is directed at domestic audiences far more than it is at African audiences. Erdoğan's neo-Ottoman rhetoric and expansionist adventurism appears intended to rile up his base at home. In this sense, Erdoğan is perhaps best understood as a populist more than a Neo-Ottomanist, and a po-

hood/?session=1.

13 For more, see Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016).

larizing one at that.¹⁴ Some of the most pronounced neo-Ottomanesque moves Erdoğan has undertaken in the past few years—converting the Hagia Sofia into a mosque, for example, or more aggressively challenging the status quo in the eastern Mediterranean—have occurred at times of acute domestic crisis and political blowback within Turkey, such as the implosion of the national currency, the Lira. One thing that distinguishes Erdoğan's situation from most other populist leaders is that he has already survived one coup that he seems to believe was supported by his neighbors, and he now lives in constant fear of another. Erdoğan's insecurity thus feeds his expansionist foreign policy—and vice-versa as Turkish moves in the Middle East, Africa, and the eastern Mediterranean all harden the anti-Erdoğan sentiments of his regional rivals.

Turkish policy in Africa is heavily colored by Erdoğan's feud with the one-time ally and now banished cleric Fethullah Gülen, a feud that has grown much more acute since Gülen's suspected involvement in the July 2016 coup attempt. The Gülen network's investments in Africa, particularly in the education sector, began in the 1990s, thus predating the other aspects of Turkey's increased engagement on the continent. Erdoğan initially championed Gülenist schools as flagships of new, internationally engaged Turkey.¹⁵ However, the Turkish govern-

14 Soner Cagaptay, *A Sultan in Autumn: Erdogan Faces Turkey's Uncontainable Forces* (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2021), xv.

15 Frederico Donelli, "The Gülen Movement in Africa: From Turkish Transnational Asset to Anti-State Lobby," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 13, no. 1 (2019): 67-80. <https://doi.org/>

ment has recently pressured African governments to close Gülenist schools, though it has only had mixed success in these efforts. Some African governments are hesitant to do so, either because the schools have proven quite popular or because these governments wish to retain bargaining chips they can use in playing Turkey against its Middle Eastern rivals. Yet, on the whole, Erdoğan holds the upper hand in Africa against his exiled rival. Most recently, Turkish agents managed to capture and extradite one of Gülen's nephews in Kenya under vague circumstances.¹⁶

Privileging Muslim States? Pragmatism and Ideology in Turkey-Africa Relations

While much of the discussion of Turkey-Africa relations among Western analysts focuses on Erdoğan's outreach to Muslim-majority parts of Africa, Ankara has not been picky in its partnerships. Turkey now has embassies in 41 out of 54 African countries (up from just 12 in 2003)¹⁷, while Turkish firms operate everywhere from Morocco to Madagascar. Indeed, a good deal of Turkish engagement in Africa can be explained by relatively straightforward business calculations. Turkish construction firms with strong global reputations from their work in Central Asia have found demand in infrastructure-poor Africa, while Turkish Airlines has taken advantage of opportunities traveling the continent's under-served routes.

10.1080/23739770.2019.1632588.

16 Carlotta Gall and Abdi Latif Dahir, "Turkey Claims to Have 'Captured' Cleric's Relative in Kenya," *New York Times*, May 31, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/31/world/europe/turkey-kenya-gulen.html>.

17 Cagaptay, *Erdogan's Empire*, 237.

That said, Muslim countries have played a central role in Erdoğan's Africa strategy. Somalia stands out as the first and clearest example. As the country was reeling from famine in 2011, Erdoğan visited Mogadishu to announce major relief efforts. At a time when Western diplomats refused to set foot in the country, Erdoğan invoked Islamic solidarity to explain Turkey's unusual investment in the war-torn country. This moment was, in many ways, the signal of a new phase in Turkish engagement with Africa, although it is not clear if Turkish officials saw the initial outreach to Somalia as part of long-term strategic investment.¹⁸ Regardless of Ankara's initial intentions, Turkey quickly became one of the strongest backers of the fledgling Somali state. Since 2011, Turkey has made significant investments in everything from schools and ports to Somalia's military, which it trains at a massive military facility unveiled in 2017 in Mogadishu.¹⁹ In this sense, Somalia was a high-risk, high-reward gamble for Erdoğan (chronically unstable on the one hand, geostrategically well-positioned and in need of friends on the other). To date, it seems to have paid off. Not only does Turkey enjoy strong relations with the current Somali government, but its largesse appears to have earned Turkey genuine support among the Somali public outside of the breakaway Republic of Somaliland as

18 Zach Vertin, "Turkey and the New Scramble for Africa: Ottoman Designs or Unfounded Fears?" *Lawfare*, May 9, 2019, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/turkey-and-new-scramble-africa-ottoman-designs-or-unfounded-fears>.

19 Abdirahman Hussein and Orhan Coskun, "Turkey opens military base in Mogadishu to train Somali soldiers," *Reuters*, September 30, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-turkey-military-idUSKCN1C50JH>.

well as some semi-autonomous regions. Beyond the Somalia example, Turkish diplomacy in Africa has privileged Muslim countries. Erdoğan's flagship tour of West Africa in January 2013, for example, consisted of visits to Muslim-majority Niger and Senegal followed by a summit with the Muslim president of oil-rich Gabon, which is a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.²⁰ Neo-Ottoman rhetoric and Islamist tendencies are apparent in Erdoğan's approach to Africa, even as they are hardly the defining feature of Turkey-Africa relations in every instance. Turkey's leasing of the Sudanese port of Suakin in 2017 is a prominent example. While the decision to invest in Suakin was largely driven by shrewd strategic calculations, as the port gave would give Turkey a naval toehold in the strategic and increasingly contested Red Sea, the choice of Suakin also held symbolic significance. Suakin was once, for a time, an Ottoman port. More broadly, the port was part of a flurry of joint Turkish-Sudanese agreements that seemed to reflect Erdoğan's genuine affinity for Sudan's Islamist then-dictator, Omar al-Bashir, who was suffering from international isolation over the crimes against humanity committed by his regime as well as his support for African and Arab Islamists (including Palestinian militant organizations like Hamas with which Erdoğan also sympathizes). Erdoğan also claimed that one of the primary reasons for revitalizing Suakin was to make it a tourist

20 Yilma Haile Michael-Hinz and Ludger Schadomsky, "Turkey sets its sights on Africa," *Deutsche Welle*, January 8, 2013, <https://www.dw.com/en/turkey-sets-its-sights-on-africa/a-16506268>.

stop for Africa's Hajj-bound pilgrims.²¹ In the early 2010s, Erdoğan used appeals to Islamic solidarity to explain his commitment to Somalia while Niger's president, for his part, welcomed Turkish investment in 2013 by praising Erdoğan for overseeing the "modernizing of Islam."²² Erdoğan's efforts to make Turkey an international model of Islam go beyond rhetoric, however. The AK Party government has promoted a "Turkish model" of Islam overseas through the work of the Directorate of Religious Affairs or Diyanet, which has been significantly empowered under Erdoğan.²³ Naqshbandi schools have also proliferated in Africa, while imam-hatip schools, which meld secular and religious education, serve as a basis for many Turkish-funded education projects in Africa (Erdoğan is himself a product of an imam-hatip school).²⁴ Turkish Sufi orders have additionally served as a vector of religious and ideological dissemination in Africa, which Ezgi Guner argues is rooted in the NGO-ization of Sufi orders after decades of state repression in Turkey as well as the growth of neoliberal education policies in Africa.²⁵ Erdoğan has

21 James Barnett, "Parsing the Red Sea," *The American Interest*, March 23, 2018, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2018/03/23/parsing-red-sea/>.

22 Samuel Ramani, "Eye on Niamey: Middle East regional powers vie for influence in Niger," *Middle East Institute*, May 20, 2021, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/eye-niamey-middle-east-regional-powers-vie-influence-niger>.

23 Ezgi Guner, "The Scalar Politics of Turkey's Pivot to Africa" in "Africa and the Middle East: Beyond the Divides," *Project on Middle East Political Science POMEPS Studies 40* (June 2020): 59-63. https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FINAL-POMEPS_Studies_40_Web-rev.pdf.

24 Daren Butler, "With more Islamic schooling, Erdogan aims to reshape Turkey," *Reuters*, January 25, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/turkey-erdogan-education/>.

25 Ezgi Guner, "NGOization of Islamic Education: The Post-Coup Turkish State and Sufi Orders in Africa South of the Sahara," *Religions* 12, no. 1 (2021): 24-46. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12010024>.

also stressed Islamic connections in his outreach to the Sahel, building or refurbishing a number of prominent mosques in Mali and Niger.²⁶

The Future of Turkey-Africa Relations

What sort of role Turkey plays in Africa moving forward will hinge to a significant degree on how it manages its relationships with its regional rivals. The more hostile its competition with states such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt, the more likely we are to see Libya-like scenarios play out across the region, particularly in the Maghreb, the Sahel, and the Horn of Africa, offsetting any positive aspects of Turkish engagement. There have been some encouraging signs of détente of late, with a formal resolution to the GCC dispute in the form of the January 2021 al-Ula Declaration as well as an initial step towards normalizing Turkish-Egyptian ties in the form of a May 5 deputies meeting in Cairo.²⁷ Suspicion of Erdoğan's Islamist proclivities remains high among Arab leaders, however, as do concerns over the foreign policy of Turkey's ally, Qatar. The Middle East's geopolitical landscape remains prone to upheaval, as seen in the escalating Saudi-Emirati tensions of summer 2021, which may, interestingly enough, bring Saudi Arabia closer to

Turkey.²⁸ Any predictions must therefore be grounded in some intellectual humility.

Nevertheless, it seems likely that volatile and fragile African states will continue to offer tempting arenas for competition if not outright military intervention on the part of expansionist, mutually suspicious Middle Eastern powers. Unfortunately, there is no shortage of such states. Warring parties in Libya reached a ceasefire in October 2020, but the peace is fragile, and it is uncertain if foreign mercenaries will leave the country in line with the terms of the UN peace process.²⁹ Somalia remains in the throes of conflict and political paralysis, placing it at constant risk of further political and territorial dismemberment. Sudan's democratic transition has faced several setbacks, its security forces prone to infighting and seemingly eager for foreign patronage to help sideline their rivals. The Sahel remains unstable, and France, which under President Emmanuel Macron has taken a hard line against Islamism and opposed Erdoğan in Libya and the Mediterranean, could conceivably seek to bolster the UAE's position in the Sahel as a counterweight to Turkey's, creating the conditions for more confrontation.³⁰

One would hope then that Erdoğan would exercise some restraint and prag-

26 Armstrong, "Turkey in the Sahel."

27 Samy Magdy, "Egypt, Turkey officials meet for talks to reset frayed ties," Associated Press, May 5, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/egypt-africa-middle-east-europe-turkey-55317e240824c3870fb41d1151ceff98>.

28 Neil Quilliam and Sanam Vakil, "The Rocky New Era of the Saudi-Emirati Relationship," *Foreign Policy*, July 27, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/27/the-saudi-emirati-love-affair-is-over/>.

29 "Mercenaries 'impede' peace, must leave Libya to allow elections," United Nations UN News, July 30, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/07/1096752>.

30 For more on Macron's rivalry with Erdoğan, see Michael Doran and Peter Rough, "Macron's Turkish Gambit," *Tablet*, December 1, 2020, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/macron-turkish-gambit>.

matism in engaging Africa moving forward, as he indeed has before. The rapid reversal of fortunes that Turkey experienced in Sudan following the collapse of the Ankara-aligned Omar al-Bashir regime in April 2019 has forced Erdoğan to adopt a less ideological approach to the country, for the time being, diversifying Turkey's partnerships rather than doubling down on the Brotherhood-linked Islamists who dominated the former regime (and who have now been sidelined, imprisoned, or exiled at the hands of Gulf- and Egyptian-backed generals). In April, Erdoğan held a phone call with the military head of Sudan's transitional government—a general closely linked to the Gulf states and Egypt—and invited him to a bilateral summit in Ankara which eventually took place in August.³¹

Ankara may similarly judge elsewhere that exclusive or disproportionate support for Islamist actors may carry risks that are not worth the reward. A blanket cessation of support for Muslim Brotherhood-aligned groups is highly unlikely, but Erdoğan appears capable of adopting more cautious and calibrated approaches when appropriate. The lack of significant Islamist political mobilization in Ethiopia, for example, suggests that

Turkey will focus on securing the clo-

31 “President Erdoğan, Chairman of the Sovereignty Council of Sudan General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan talk over phone,” Presidency of the Republic of Turkey: Directorate of Communications, April 2, 2021, <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/English/haberler/detay/president-erdogan-chairman-of-the-sovereignty-council-of-sudan-general-abdel-fattah-al-burhan-talk-over-phone>; “Erdoğan invites al-Burhan to visit Turkey,” Sudan Tribune, April 4, 2021, <https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article69397>; “Turkey promises to stand by Sudan as leaders vow to enhance ties,” Daily Sabah, August 12, 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-promises-to-stand-by-sudan-as-leaders-vow-to-enhance-ties>.

sure of the country's remaining Gülenist schools,³² the soft proselytization of “Turkish Islam” among Ethiopia's Muslim minority, and encouraging growth in the sectors of the Ethiopian economy where Turkey enjoys a comparative advantage over its competitors. In other words, Turkey is unlikely to challenge the status quo in the country or get too deeply involved in its turbulent politics in an attempt to transform Ethiopia into some battleground on which to confront Egypt or the Gulf states. Indeed, during a summit with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in August, Erdoğan expressed his desire for a peaceful resolution to Ethiopia's internal conflicts as well as its border dispute with Sudan.³³ Such rhetoric, boilerplate as it is, suggests that Erdoğan would rather be seen for the time being as a regional peacemaker rather than a party to any conflict.

What is clear is that Turkey is building the foundations of a long-term presence in Africa. The establishment of de facto military bases in Libya and Somalia suggests that Erdoğan believes Turkey must retain a sizeable presence in the Mediterranean and—to a lesser extent—the Red Sea if it is to enjoy anything like the international status it once enjoyed. One

32 As of July 2021, the government-aligned Maarif Foundation had taken over two Gülenist schools in Ethiopia while at least four additional schools in the national capital, Addis Ababa, remained under Gülenist administration. Maarif is currently in legal proceedings to assume administration of these schools. “Turkey's Maarif takes over 2nd FETÖ-linked school in Ethiopia,” Hürriyet Daily News, July 15, 2021, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-maarif-takes-over-2nd-feto-linked-school-in-ethiopia-166340>.

33 “Erdoğan backs peaceful resolution to Ethiopia's Tigray conflict,” Al Jazeera, August 18, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/18/erdogan-offers-to-mediate-end-to-ethiopia-tigray-conflict>.

can hope that tensions between Turkey and its rivals will subside and a less securitized form of competition take shape. But Erdoğan will continue to see Africa as a continent with some of the fastest-growing Muslim populations in the world; a slice of strategic real estate lying between Europe and the Middle East; a land of emerging markets frequently overlooked by Western firms. In short, an arena of opportunities.

The Sèvres Syndrome: A Key To Understand Foreign Policy Attitudes of Turkish Citizens

Emre Erdoğan

Not a Treaty, But a Syndrome

The Sèvres Treaty is a peace treaty signed between the Allied Powers and the Ottoman delegation in a porcelain factory near Paris on August 10, 1920. The treaty was a part of the Versailles Treaty, which ended the First World War. The treaty was signed by a commission representing the Istanbul Government, and the government led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk never accepted this treaty. The treaty divided the Ottoman Empire by allocating territories to the Allied Powers and giving independence to Armenians and Anatolian Greeks, and leaving a tiny part of the land to the Turkish component of the Empire. This treaty has not been ratified by the National Assembly located in Ankara. It was abolished with the Lausanne Treaty, signed in 1923 after the victory of Ankara in the Independence War. From one perspective, the Lausanne Treaty is accepted as the first revisionist attempt (Mont-

gomery, 1972, Tharoor, 2020).

It has been more than one century; however if someone asks a Turkish citizen “under the conditions of the Sèvres Treaty, which country was occupying Antalya,” the answer will be most probably correct: Italy. Although the treaty has never been ratified or applied, it is still a part of the national education curriculum in Turkey. For Turkey’s citizens, the treaty is more than a diplomatic agreement; it is the symbol of the eternal fight between Turkey and the West -its closest ally since the Second World War-. It functions as a hardwired frame to interpret international events -from military conflicts to Eurovision Song Contest, from diplomatic disputes to the football games-. It is a useful tool for politicians from the left and right who want to mobilize public support for their policies. And with the rise of populist politics is a cornerstone for the rhetoric of populist politicians who fail to deal with the crisis and who are looking for external scapegoats.

The reasons for the usefulness of this framing are manifold. According to Yılmaz (2006, 2011), the Sèvres Syndrome presents a deep distrust towards the Western countries, a solid motive to act alone in the international scene without looking for alliances and “Westernization” of the society without the West. These political imperatives of the ruling elite have been echoed in the official documents, the national education curricula, and everyday life. This feeling of insecurity has been triggered with the perceptions of the existence of enemies from “Stalin’s expansionism, to Armenian and Syrian irredentism, to the bilateral military cooperation of Greece and Syria, to the invasion of Iraq, and finally, to Turkey’s ostracism from the European Union” (Guida, 2008).

The Sèvres Syndrome is reflected in the rhetoric of politicians, the language of textbooks, the headlines of newspapers, and everyday discussions. The national education system under the government’s control gives enormous space to narratives about the Independence War and the war against everyone. From that point of view, this syndrome is an indispensable part of the Turkish political culture and socialization processes (Jung, 2003, Webb, 2011; Hovsepyan, 2012; İnce, 2012)

Accepting this syndrome as something unique to Turkish political culture may be misleading. First of all, it may be accepted as a kind of political paranoia, common in almost every nation-state

(Hofstadter, 2012). It is known that conspiracy theories are beneficial for giving meaning to a complex world, and such a powerful narrative may be a well-performing heuristic (Douglas et al., 2017; Gürpınar, 2019; Plenta, 2020). From a political psychological perspective, the Sèvres Syndrome may act as an indicator of collective victimhood (Bar-Tal et al., 2009) or collective narcissism (Cichoka & Cislak, 2020).

Vamık Volkan coins the concept of the Chosen Trauma to explain this situation: “the shared mental representation of the large group’s massive trauma experienced by its ancestors at the hands of the enemy group, and the images of heroes, victims, or both connected with it” (Volkan, 2007). In the case of Turkey, there are two pillars of the chosen trauma: the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the Independence wars of ethnic minorities -Greeks, Albanians, Bulgarians, etc.- supported by the foreign powers and the humanitarian tragedy caused by the dissolution of the Empire led to the emigration of millions to Anatolia from the Balkans and other territories. Consequently, the founding fathers of the Turkish Republic united this diverse group, with nothing in common other than religion, under a new tent called the Turkish nation (Erdoğan, 2015). Not surprisingly, this chosen trauma has been reflected in the building blocks of the new Republic. Regardless of the reasons, the Sèvres Syndrome may be the key element to understand Turkey’s stand in world politics and is still understudied. Beyond being

a false or paranoid belief or a part of conspirational thinking, we need to think about the role of the Sèvres Syndrome as a determinant of foreign policy beliefs and a part of the justification politicians' acts.

are read to the participants, and they are asked to state how much they agree with these arguments on a scale from 1 to 4. The below figure shows the results of the last survey -November 2020-, percentage of those who agree with them.

Sèvres Syndrome in Numbers

In 2003, a group of scholars developed a battery to measure Sèvres Syndrome in society using public rhetoric. Six items

According to to Figure 1. Sevres Syndrome Over Years (Totally Agree + Agree), 80% of participants believe that Europe has assisted separationist organizations like PKK, and European countries want to dissolve and disintegrate

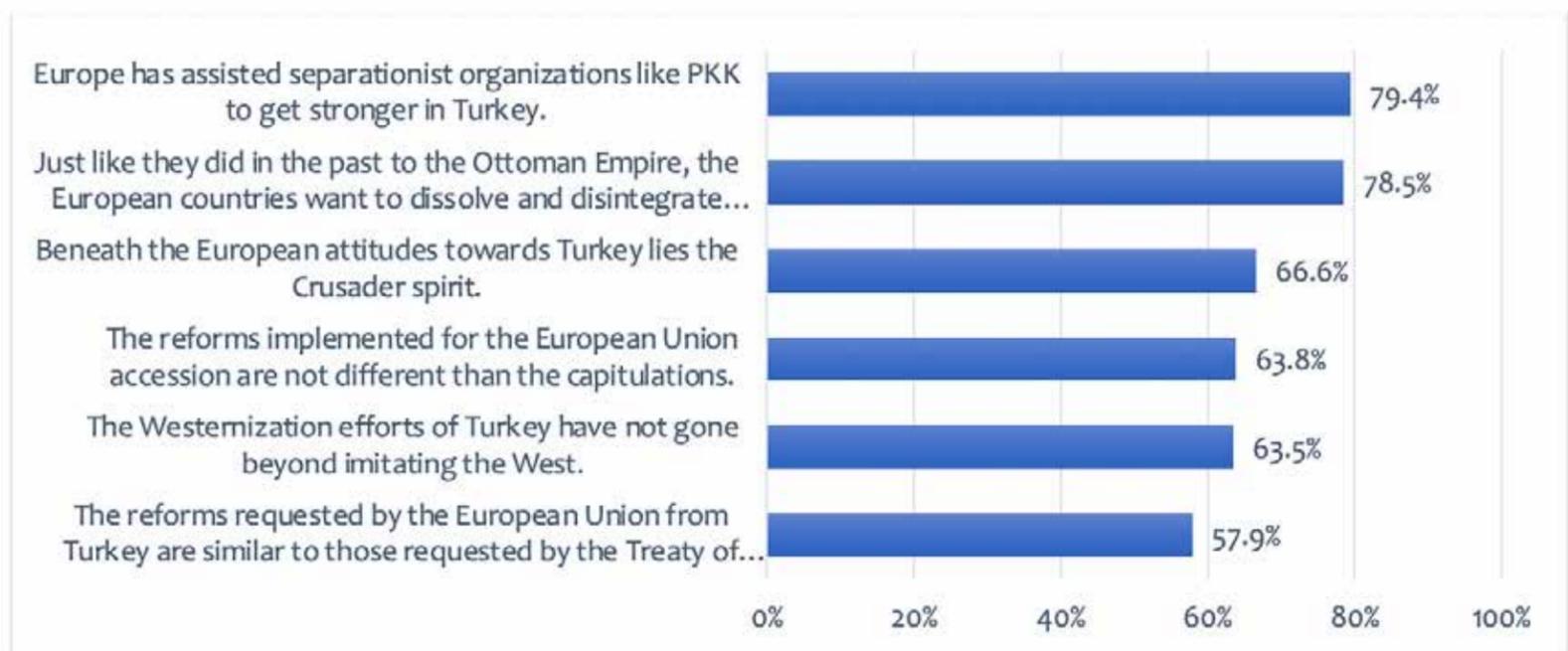


Figure 1. Sevres Syndrome Over Years (Totally Agree + Agree)

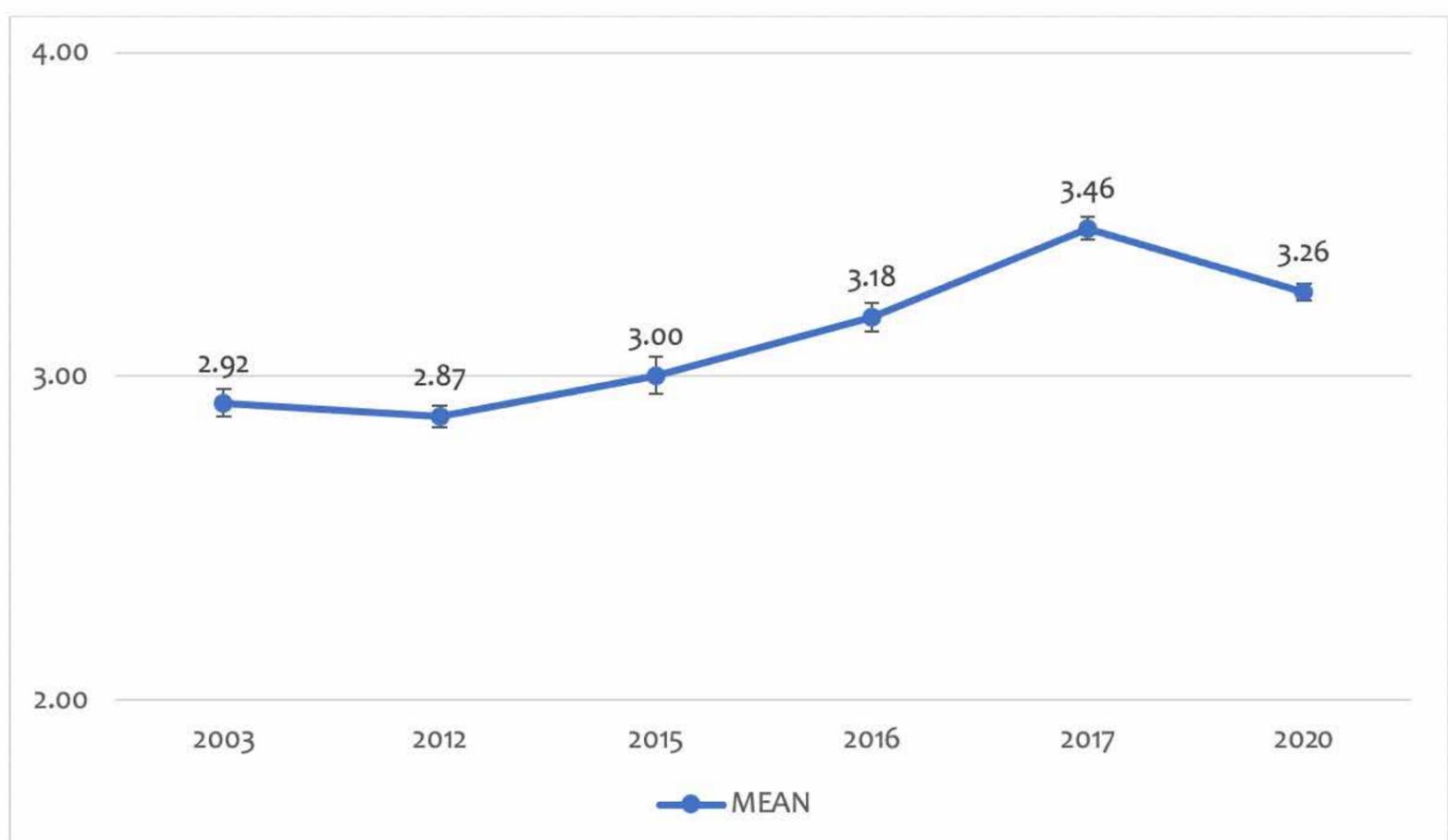


Figure 1. Sevres Syndrome Over Years (Average Scores, 1-4).

Turkey. Two-third of the respondents agree with the arguments that the Crusader spirit -another historical reference- is still alive and the reforms implemented for the EU full membership are like the capitulations – a set of privileges given to European countries by the 16th century-. Another two-thirds of participants accept the argument that the Westernization efforts of Turkey are just imitations. Finally, 58% of participants agree with the argument that the reforms requested by the EU are similar to the Sèvres Treaty. All these answers show a clear presence of anti-Western feelings based on historical references.

Figure 1. Sevres Syndrome Over Years (Average Scores, 1-4).¹

Since 2003, we have asked this battery -with a slight modification in 2015- in different nationally representative surveys. The above figure shows the change/stability in the Sèvres Syndrome in Turkish society over the years. To represent the overall change, we constructed a scale by taking the simple averages of individual responses. The scale has strong validity (Cronbach α is about 0.90 in each wave), and it takes a value between 1 and 4. Confidence intervals are also presented in this figure.

In three surveys conducted between 2003 and 2015, the scale was very stable, changing between 2.92 and 3.00. This stability seemed to be very inter-

¹ The dataset is based on several surveys such as Euroskepticism in Turkey-2003; Euroskepticism in Turkey-2012; Turkish Perceptions Survey 2015, Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey, Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey-2017 and Dimension of Polarization-2020. All surveys are representative of Turkish voters.

esting as, during these 12 years, about one-fourth of the population changed due to the relatively higher rate of population growth (2.2% per year), which means that those who are participating in the electorate have the same attitudes towards the West with older generations, an essential indicator of how the political culture successfully reproduces this rhetoric over generations.

However, the situation changed by 2015, and the average Sèvres Syndrome started to increase, first reaching 3,18 in 2016 and 3,46 in 2017, the highest score we observed during the last 17 years. Our last survey shows that this score is 3,26, significantly lower than the 2017 survey results.

The timings of these surveys allow us to make speculations about the reasons for this change over time, highly dependent on the conjectural changes and the rhetoric of the ruling elite. By 2013, following the Gezi Protests, the governing party and its leader started to use highly Xenophobic rhetoric, which frames these public protests as the intervention of foreign countries to prevent the rise of Turkey. Erdoğan -the party leader- attributed the responsibility of these protests to foreign countries and provocateurs. This conspirational mindset has mainly been accepted by his constituency (Nefes, 2017). Even today, 78% of the AKP constituency perceives the Gezi Protests as acts fueled by foreign countries; it was 82% in 2016 (TurkuazLab, 2020).

In 2016, the score presented a significant increase to 3.18 in a survey conducted in a volatile political environment.

In June 2015, the AKP failed to form a majority government, and the summer has been spent on unfinished attempts to form a coalition government. The repetitive elections of November 2015 gave the majority to the AKP. During the summer and autumn of 2015, the public agenda was dominated by increased terrorist activities in the Southeastern Region and metropolitan cities, leading to thousands' deaths (Mandıracı, 2016). The leaders of the government -Erdoğan and Davutoğlu- highly emphasized anti-westernist and Xenophobic arguments as the pillars of their populist rhetoric (Erçetin&Erdoğan, 2018). Academic fieldwork showed that this rhetoric had been echoed in the electorate. According to Erişen and Erdoğan (2019), the most crucial change between these two elections was the perceived threat and prejudice and intolerance towards the HDP, the Kurdish Nationalist Party.

The survey of 2017 was conducted in a very fragile timing 2017. The Coup Attempt of 2016 and the Presidential referendum of 2017 were two important milestones. The government's reaction to the Coup Attempt was framing it as an attempt supported by foreign (Western) powers and local agents. Empirical studies also show that the media followed Erdoğan's nationalist rhetoric (Guiler 2016; İşeri et al., 2019), and voters of the AKP adopted it. The second important breaking point was the referendum for transition to the presidential system. The AKP and the MHP (the ultra-nationalist party) formed the "Yes" camp, whereas

the opposition and a small portion of the nationalists were at the other pole. Erdoğan used his classical scapegoating strategy to put the foreign powers and their local allies on the target (Erçetin&Erdoğan, 2021). This rhetoric was coupled with the unpleasant approach of the European countries to the willingness of Erdoğan to conduct an international campaign targeting Turkish diaspora living abroad. Moreover, the EU leadership showed its deep concern about the new regime (Sloat, 2017). This strategy seems to be worked, as some empirical studies showed that Erdoğan became successful in convincing a significant portion of voters with this rhetoric (Erçetin, 2019; Bilgin&Erdoğan, 2018; Aytaç et al., 2017).

The final point at this graph presents a relatively lower score but significantly higher than the average of 2010s. There are several explanations for this slight decline, starting with the economic and social impact of COVID-19. A recent survey showed that the Turkish public appreciates the success of the western world in fighting the economic, health, and social impacts of the COVID-19 (The GMF, 2021). Another reason may be a result of the electoral victory of the Nation's Alliance in the last local elections, which triggered significant support and appraisal from the Western world (Wuthrich and Ingleby, 2020). Although the elections happened under very disadvantageous conditions for the government and Erdoğan and his candidates frequently played the "Evil Westerners"

card, it seems that the current level of polarization did not bring them enough votes to win elections in the metropolitan cities (Erdoğan, 2019).

All these events have the same pattern. Whenever the government faces a crisis, its leaders prefer to use scapegoating strategy. This rhetoric is echoed by the government-controlled media and accepted by the electorate, which helps the governing coalition win the elections. However, a point to remember here is the fact that the political culture of the country is still dominated by this collective anxiety towards the West; without it, the anti-western rhetoric would be less successful and attractive political actors.

Correlates of the Sèvres Syndrome

It is not easy to draw a causal link between the Sèvres Syndrome and specific characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of citizens. However, our last dataset allows us to give a list of correlates of the Sèvres Syndrome at the individual level.² When we focus on demographic and socioeconomic factors, we observe that women and more educated ones have relatively lower scores on this scale. Voters living in the metropolitan areas are more negative attitudes towards the West, whereas Kurdish-speaking voters are more favorable.

Sèvres Syndrome is positively correlated with Turkish nationalism, religiosity, and rightward self-placement in the left-right political spectrum.

In terms of Schwartz' values, conserva-

tion is positively correlated, and Openness and Self-Enhancement are negatively correlated.

There are significant differences across party constituencies. The supporters of the CHP, the İYİ Party, and HDP have relatively lower scores on this scale, even after controlling for other variables.

These findings show that the Sèvres Syndrome is relatively higher in typical conservative, nationalist, and rightist voters of the governing party. As education has a negative effect, it is possible to perceive it as a problem of underdevelopment. However, it requires a more detailed examination.

Apart from its correlates, the Sèvres Syndrome has significant consequences as the Turkish public's foreign policy attitudes. It is possible to summarize this effect after controlling demographic and socioeconomic variables, party preferences, nationalism, ideology, and religiosity.

A higher score in this scale leads to a lower propensity to vote positive on a possible referendum on the full membership of Turkey to the EU ($\beta = -0.22$); It also has a negative effect on the sympathy towards the US ($\beta = -0.27$), It decreases the willingness to cooperate with the US or the EU in international relations (relative risk ratio=0.42 and 0.43, respectively) It contributes to the willingness to cooperate with Russia in international relations ($\beta = 0.09$)

² Data is the part of the Dimensions of Polarization of Turkey -2020 Survey

Higher scores on this scale lead to the support of the use of military force in international affairs ($\beta= 0.16$), lower confidence in multilateralism ($\beta= 0.27$), and support for unilateralism ($\beta= 0.17$).

It also correlated with an active role in the Balkans and the Middle East (relative risk ratio=1.43).

Based on these findings, it is possible to say that the Sèvres Syndrome also lays the constitutional activist foreign policy of Turkey in recent years; it's a part of a very Hawkish position in international issues.

To Conclude

Determinants of foreign policy attitudes are discussed mainly in the US and the Western context. The Mood Theory or the Almond-Lippmann Consensus is not valid anymore. Now, there is room for integrating values, emotions, personality, and morality into studying these attitudes. Public opinion is not a residual in the study of foreign policy (Kertzer et al., 2014; Gravelle et al., 2017). In the case of Turkey, the overall tendency is to ignore the foreign policy preferences of citizens as they are not based on the information and the subject to polarization. Meanwhile, the anti-Westernist rhetoric of the leaders of Turkey is also well-documented. This situation allows us to discuss the role of Sèvres Syndrome as a determinant or correlate of foreign policy attitudes.

The above-presented data shows that the Sèvres Syndrome is an indispensable element of the foreign policy attitudes

of Turkish citizens. Trend data presented above shows that the political developments and the reaction of populist leaders triggered this feeling of insecurity and created a basis for anti-Westernist policy preferences. Individual-level data shows that the Sèvres Syndrome is owned by the Nationalist-Religious constituency of the ruling coalition.

We know how the Sèvres Syndrome is being reproduced in the political culture through the leaders' rhetoric, the national education system, popular products, and everyday life practices. We also know that the generational gap is not valid in this topic, showing the success of the political culture to reproduce itself. What we don't know is how to dissolve this hardwired belief and how to create a counter-culture of mutual confidence.

Endnotes

Aytaç, S. E., Çarkoğlu, A., & Yıldırım, K. (2017). Taking sides: Determinants of support for a presidential system in Turkey. *South European Society and Politics*, 22(1), 1-20.

Bar-Tal, D., Chernyak-Hai, L., Schori, N., & Gundar, A. (2009). A sense of self-perceived collective victimhood in intractable conflicts. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 91(874), 229-258.

Bilgin, H. D., & Erdoğan, E. (2018). Obscurities of a referendum foretold: the 2017 constitutional amendments in Turkey. *Review of Middle East Studies*, 52(1), 29-42.

Cichočka, Aleksandra, and Aleksandra Cislak. "Nationalism as collective narcissism." *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 34 (2020): 69-74.

Current directions in psychological science, 26(6), 538-542. Douglas, K. M., Sutton, R. M., & Cichočka, A. (2017). The psychology of conspiracy theories.

Erçetin, T., & Erdoğan, E. (2018). How Turkey's repetitive elections affected the populist tone in the discourses of the Justice and Development Party Leaders. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 44(4), 382-398.

- Erçetin, T., & Erdoğan, E. (2021). 'Mirror, mirror on the wall, please tell me...': the populist rhetoric of the 'new' media of 'new Turkey' during the April 16, 2017 referendum. *Turkish Studies*, 22(2), 290-313.
- Erçetin, T., (2019), "Bir populist korku senaryosu altında: Biz ve Onlar", *Kitap bölümü*, (s. 189-231), Der: Pınar Uyan Se-merci and Emre Erdoğan, İthaki Yayınları.
- Erdogan, E. (2015, September 14). The Unbearable Heaviness of Being a Turkish Citizen. The German Marshall Fund of the United States. <https://www.gmfus.org/publications/unbearable-heaviness-being-turkish-citizen>.
- Erdogan, E. (2019, May 14). Turkey's Local Elections: What We Know and What We Do Not Know. The German Marshall Fund of the United States. <https://www.gmfus.org/publications/turkeys-local-elections-what-we-know-and-what-we-do-not-know>.
- Erişen, C., & Erdoğan, E. (2019). Growing perceived threat and prejudice as sources of intolerance: evidence from the 2015 Turkish general elections. *Turkish Studies*, 20(1), 1-25.
- Guida, M. (2008). The Sèvres syndrome and "Komplo" theories in the Islamist and Secular Press. *Turkish Studies*, 9(1), 37-52.
- Guiler, K. (2016, November 16). Towards Erdogan and the East: Conspiracies and public perception in post-coup Turkey. Project on Middle East Political Science. <https://pomeps.org/towards-erdogan-and-the-east-conspiracies-and-public-perception-in-post-coup-turkey>.
- Gürpınar, D. (2019). *Conspiracy Theories in Turkey: Conspiracy Nation*. Routledge.
- Hovsepyan, L. (2012). *The Fears of Turkey: the Sèvres Syndrome*. Information and Public Relation Center.
- Iseri, E., Şekercioglu, E., & Panayirci, U. C. (2019). The sphere of consensus in a polarized media system: the case of Turkey during the catastrophic coup attempt. *International Journal of Communication*, 13, 25.
- İnce, B. (2012). Citizenship education in Turkey: inclusive or exclusive. *Oxford Review of Education*, 38(2), 115-131.
- Jung, D. (2003). The Sèvres syndrome: Turkish foreign policy and its historical legacies. *American Diplomacy*, 8(2), 22.
- Mandıracı, B. (2016, July 20). Turkey's PKK Conflict: The Death Toll - Turkey. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/turkey-s-pkk-conflict-death-toll>.
- Montgomery, A. E. (1972). The making of the Treaty of Sèvres of August 10 1920. *The Historical Journal*, 15(4), 775-787.
- Nefes, T. S. (2017). The impacts of the Turkish government's conspiratorial framing of the Gezi Park protests. *Social Movement Studies*, 16(5), 610-622.
- Plenta, P. (2020). Conspiracy theories as a political instrument: utilization of anti-Soros narratives in Central Europe. *Contemporary Politics*, 26(5), 512-530.
- Sloat, A. (2017, April 17). Here's What Erdogan's Referendum Means for Turkey, the EU, and the U.S. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/04/17/heres-what-erdogans-referendum-means-for-turkey-the-eu-and-the-u-s/>.
- Tharoor, I. (2020, August 10). Analysis | A century-old treaty haunts the Mediterranean. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/08/10/treaty-sevres-erdogan-turkey/>.
- Turkish Perceptions of the European Union. The German Marshall Fund of the United States. (2021, April 29). <https://www.gmfus.org/publications/turkish-perceptions-european-union>.
- Volkan D. V., 2007, *Chosen Trauma, The Political Ideology Of Entitlement And Violence*, <http://vamikvolkan.com/Chosen-Trauma,-the-Political-Ideology-of-Entitlement-and-Violence.php>
- Webb, E. (2011). Resisting anamnesis: a nietzschean analysis of turkey's national history education. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 19(4), 489-500.
- Wuthrich, F. M., & Ingleby, M. (2020). The Pushback Against Populism: Running on "Radical Love" in Turkey. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(2), 24-40.
- Yılmaz, H. (2006). Two pillars of nationalist Euroscepticism in Turkey: The Tanzimat and Sevres syndromes. *Turkey, Sweden and the European Union: Experiences and Expectations*, 29-40.
- Yılmaz, H. (2011). Euroscepticism in Turkey: Parties, elites, and public opinion. *South European Society and Politics*, 16(01), 185-208.

Spectacles of Tolerance: The Precarity of Turkey's Religious Minorities in the Era of Neo-Ottoman Delusions

Aykan Erdemir

Turkey watchers continue to debate whether neo-Ottomanism, an ideological proclivity to exalt and revive an imagined Ottoman past and its traditions of religio-political authority and domination, accurately describes Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's increasingly belligerent foreign and security policy.¹ While some analysts have offered pan-Islamism as a more accurate designation,² others describe Turkey's policy simply as an "assertive" one that reflects the realities of Ankara's shifting interests and outlook in an era of great-power competition.³

1 Marwa Maziad and Jake Sotiriadis, "Turkey's Dangerous New Exports: Pan-Islamist, Neo-Ottoman Visions and Regional Instability," Middle East Institute, 21 April 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkeys-dangerous-new-exports-pan-islamist-neo-ottoman-visions-and-regional>; Nicholas Danforth, "The Nonsense of 'neo-Ottomanism'", 29 May 2020, War on the Rocks, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/05/the-nonsense-of-neo-ottomanism/>; Axel Corlu, "Erdogan's micro-imperialism could prove disastrous for Turkey and its neighbours" Ahval, 11 February 2020, <https://ahvalnews.com/turkey-foreign-policy/erdogans-micro-imperialism-could-prove-disastrous-turkey-and-its-neighbours>

2 Behlul Ozkan, "Turkey's Imperial Fantasy," The New York Times, 28 August 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/29/opinion/ahmet-davutoglu-and-turkeys-imperial-fantasy.html>; Behlul Ozkan, "Turkey, Davutoglu and the Idea of Pan-Islamism," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 56:4, 119-140, 2014, DOI: 10.1080/00396338.2014.941570

3 Asli Aydintasbas, "Turkey Will Not Return to the Western Fold: Ankara's Assertive Foreign Policy Is Here to Stay," *Foreign Affairs*, 19 May 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2021-05-19/turkey-will-not-return-western-fold>;

On the domestic front, however, it should not be controversial to claim that neo-Ottomanism has informed Erdoğan's policies. This much is clear from his government's frequent references to Ottoman grandeur and its praise of Ottoman sultans and their rule at home, and given Erdoğan's attempts to replicate their manner of ruling over and interacting with subject peoples, especially religious minorities. This phenomenon calls for an examination of the impact of the current Turkish ruling elite's neo-Ottoman delusions on Turkey's religious minorities and how these communities cope with the ensuing demands, challenges, and threats.

The defining characteristic of Turkey's neo-Ottoman domestic policy under Erdoğan has been its Janus-faced nature, which combines benevolence with an iron fist. On the one hand, Ankara embraces policies and discourses that high-

Sinan Ülgen, "A Weak Economy Won't Stop Turkey's Activist Foreign Policy," *Carnegie Europe*, 6 October 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/10/06/weak-economy-won-t-stop-turkey-s-activist-foreign-policy-pub-82935>

light the government's tolerance of and generosity toward religious minorities, particularly Christians and Jews.⁴ On the other hand, the government scapegoats minorities for imagined crimes while requiring them to serve as props in organized spectacles of tolerance, whose purpose is to rebut foreign accusations of government-sponsored abuse.⁵ Instead of enjoying the constitutional rights of true citizens, religious minorities must pay tribute to Erdoğan to ensure his forbearance.

The Republic's Unfulfilled Promises

The Turkish president's use of both benevolence and wrath in his relations with religious minorities takes place against the backdrop of an 80-year period of nominally secular republican rule (1923-2002), which preceded the rise to power of Erdoğan's Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP). The Republic of Turkey committed itself to the notion of constitutional citizenship from the outset, removing from its constitution in 1928 the provision enshrining Islam as the religion of the state and adding the principle of *laïcité*, or the separation of

church and state, in 1937.

However, religious minorities continued to experience systematic discrimination and became victims of expropriation policies, state-orchestrated pogroms, and other violent hate crimes. Many among Turkey's staunchly secular elite, especially in the security establishment, were complicit in reproducing a late Ottoman paranoia that led to the perception of minorities as fifth columns vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation by outside forces as part of their schemes to undermine the Turkish state.

The republic's failure to institutionalize equal citizenship rights for religious minorities provided Erdoğan opportunities to exploit by promising lay and religious leaders of minority communities a more personal and intimate access to an omnipotent and benevolent ruler. In this neo-Ottoman model, Erdoğan as leader has the power and resources to grant various concessions to religious minorities to ameliorate long-running problems, in stark contrast to the bureaucratic indifference of a nominally secular and relatively dysfunctional elite that preceded the AKP rule.

To this day, it puzzles many among Turkey's pro-secular elite why and how a significant number of religious minorities in the country endorsed or voted for the AKP during its early years in power. This stems from the pro-secular elite's inability to grasp the significance of relative improvements that the

4 Given the stormy relations between the Ottoman ruling elite and various Alevi groups, especially since the 16th century, the Erdoğan government's treatment of Alevis differs significantly from his treatment of other religious minorities, and therefore, would require a separate assessment beyond the scope of this piece. See Aykan Erdemir, "The Limits of Erdoğan's 'Nation,'" The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Perspectives Papers No. 724, Bar-Ilan University, 25 January 2018. <https://besacenter.org/turkey-erdogan-nationalism/>

5 For an in-depth analysis, see Aykan Erdemir, "Scapegoats of Wrath, Subjects of Benevolence: Turkey's Minorities Under Erdoğan" *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* Vol.24, 5-23, 19 April 2019, <https://www.hudson.org/research/14970-scapegoats-of-wrath-subjects-of-benevolence-turkey-s-minorities-under-erdo-an>

AKP delivered to minority communities whose earlier pleas were stonewalled by Erdoğan's nominally pro-secular predecessors. These improvements include the restitution of certain confiscated minority properties or the state-sponsored restoration of various churches and synagogues – albeit not as fully functional houses of worship in most cases.⁶

Performing Loyalty on the Neo-Ottoman Stage

Erdoğan's benevolence toward Turkey's Christian and Jewish minorities has come with the demand that these communities regularly demonstrate their full loyalty to and support for the Erdoğan government for domestic and international audiences. Erdoğan has also pressured minorities to participate actively in the Turkish government's spectacles of tolerance, well-publicized ceremonies involving religious minorities that aim to showcase Ankara's positive treatment of those minorities.⁷ Such demands for showing loyalty and gratitude have become particularly acute during times of crises that exposed Erdoğan to international criticism for his government's mistreatment of minorities at

6 Mine Yıldırım, "What does Turkey's Restitution Decree mean?," Forum 18 News Service, 6 October 2011, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1621

7 For an examination of the Turkish government's spectacles of tolerance, see Tuğba Tanyeri-Erdemir, "Museumification and Demuseumification of Sacred Sites in Turkey: Practices and Politics of Archaeology, Heritage, and Faith" in *Archaeological Ethics in Practice*, eds. Sarah Costello and Sarah Lepinsky. Boston, MA: ASOR, forthcoming; Tuğba Tanyeri-Erdemir and Robert Hayden, "Shrines and Places of Inter-communal Connection & Contestation in Post-Ottoman and other Post-Imperial Spaces," Keynote lecture presented at the Workshop on "Recreating Pluralism: Socio-Religious Continuity in Post-Ottoman Societies," Swedish Research Institute Istanbul, 18 June 2017.

home and abroad.

From the beginning of his rule, Erdoğan and his aides have seen spectacles of tolerance as key to building legitimacy for the AKP at home and abroad while deflecting international criticism. When Erdoğan established the AKP in 2001, he claimed to have broken with his Islamist past and defined the orientation of his new party as "conservative democratic," likening it to the Christian Democrats of Europe.⁸ In 2009, then-Prime Minister Erdoğan held a meeting with religious minority leaders in Turkey, promising reforms and pledging to embrace them with "respect and love."⁹ Three years later, Turkey's then-Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç penned an op-ed for Project Syndicate claiming that "after decades of official neglect and mistrust," Erdoğan was listening to religious minority leaders' "problems and concerns." Arınç described this development as "a clear signal of his government's intent to buttress their sense of civil inclusion."¹⁰

Erdoğan's increasing consolidation of power and turn to authoritarianism in the aftermath of the Gezi Park protests of 2013 – countrywide unrest triggered by Erdoğan's attempts to replace Istanbul's Gezi Park with a shopping mall

– led to a spike in the Turkish govern-

8 Karl Vick, "Secular Democrat or Zealot?" *The Washington Post*, 10 November 2002, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2002/11/10/secular-democrat-or-zealot/895c46b0-eee2-44f4-9081-a47161a852a0>

9 Aaron J. Leichman, "Turkey PM Meets with Religious Minority Leaders; Promises Reforms," *The Christian Post*, 17 August, 2009, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/turkey-pm-erdogan-promises-equality-for-religious-minorities-40313/>

10 Bülent Arınç, "Turkey's Nation of Faiths," *Project Syndicate*, 2 March 2012, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/turkey-s-nation-of-faiths>

ment's scapegoating of minorities. As the protests were unfolding, the Turkish president alluded to a treacherous "interest-rate lobby" working behind the scenes, echoing classical anti-Semitic tropes from European history.¹¹

Scapegoating of minorities intensified with Turkey's failed coup attempt in 2016. Although the religious leaders of the Armenian, Greek-Orthodox, Jewish, and Syriac communities denounced the putschists the day after the abortive attempt, and representatives of the Alevi and Shiite faiths joined them shortly after,¹² these religious communities still became victims of a wave of hatred and violence for their supposed complicity in the coup.¹³ Since then, the Erdoğan government's demands from religious minority communities for joint statements of allegiance and for participation in government-choreographed spectacles of tolerance have skyrocketed.

In July 2018, when a Turkish court refused to release U.S. Pastor Andrew Brunson, detained for 21 months on trumped-up charges of terrorism, espionage, and coup plotting, it triggered

11 Piotr Zalewski, "Protocols of the Interest Rate Lobby," *Foreign Policy*, 27 June 2013, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/06/27/protocols-of-the-interest-rate-lobby/>

12 Tek çıkış yolu demokrasi" [Democracy is the only way out], *Cumhuriyet*, 16 July 2016, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/568631/Tek_cikis_yolu_demokrasi.html; "Halkın İradesine Darbeye Hayır" [No to coup against the people's will], *Caferi ve Ehl-i Beyt Derneği*, July 21, 2016, accessed 27 August 2021, <http://www.ehlibeytder.com/kursumuz/halkin-iradesine-darbeye-hayir-h3712.html>, <https://archive.is/So7tC>; "Religious leaders stand together against coup attempt in Turkey," *Hürriyet Daily News*, 16 July 2016, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/religious-leaders-stand-together-against-coup-attempt-in-turkey-101690>

13 Aykan Erdemir, "Coup Attempt Sparks Backlash Against Turkey's Minorities," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, 19 August 2016, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2016/08/19/coup-attempt-sparks-backlash-against-turkeys-minorities/>

a flurry of criticism from the United States, including statements from the president, the Congress, the U.S. Helsinki Commission, and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.¹⁴ To deflect growing criticism, the Turkish government arranged for leaders of Turkey's religious minorities to issue a joint statement claiming that the communities are not under pressure and that they can practice their faith freely. Turkey's semi-official news agency Anadolu publicized the statement in a news article with the title, "Minority communities refute allegations of pressure."¹⁵ This statement led to reactions from members of religious minority communities, including a sarcastic headline in Turkey's Armenian weekly *Agos*, "Lo and behold, we have been free but we didn't know it."¹⁶

The Turkish president has also used spectacles of tolerance to improve relations with the European Union. In 2018, after a seven-year restoration project, and only a week after Bulgaria had assumed the six-month rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union, Erdoğan unveiled Istanbul's Bulgarian Orthodox Sveti Stefan Church togeth-

14 Aykan Erdemir, "Turkey's Refusal to Release American Pastor Elicits Strong Bipartisan Reaction," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, 19 July 2018, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2018/07/19/turkeys-refusal-to-release-american-pastor-elicits-strong-bipartisan-reaction/>

15 Hanife Sevinç and Murat Paksoy, "Azınlık cemaatlerinden baskı iddialarına yalanlama" [Minority communities refute allegations of pressure], *Anadolu Agency*, 31 July 2018, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gunun-basliklari/azinlik-cemaatlerinden-baski-iddialarina-yanlanlama/1218773>

16 Sibel Hurtas, "Turkey's Christians divided over 'freedom' declaration," *Al-Monitor*, 13 August 2018, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2018/08/turkey-christians-divided-over-a-declaration.html>; Nesi Altaras, "Özgür müymüşüz?" [Have we been free?], *Avlaremoz*, 31 July 2018, <https://www.avlaremoz.com/2018/07/31/ozgur-muymusuz-nesi-altaras/>

er with then-Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov.¹⁷ Although Erdoğan stated during the ceremony that “it is the responsibility of the state to ensure everyone can worship freely,” Turkey’s state-run media noted that “the church had been restored under so-called rules of reciprocity” in exchange for Sofia’s green light for the restoration of the mosque in Bulgaria’s second-largest city, Plovdiv.¹⁸ While the Erdoğan government instrumentalized Turkey’s Bulgarian Orthodox community and its religious heritage for a cynical barter with Bulgaria, it also showcased its spectacle of tolerance to improve its image in the eyes of other EU member states.

The Turkish president has instrumentalized Turkey’s Greek Orthodox community in similar ways. When Erdoğan elicited worldwide criticism for converting Istanbul’s Hagia Sophia Museum into a mosque on July 10, 2020, the Turkish government rushed to finish the restoration project at the Sumela Monastery in northeast Turkey in order to hold mass after a four-year hiatus, a development publicized by Turkey’s semi-official news agency Anadolu.¹⁹ Although the Turkish government expected Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, the spiritual leader of some 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide, to lead the ceremony only a month after Hagia

Sophia’s conversion and at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, he turned the offer down, citing health concerns.²⁰

Turkey’s dwindling Jewish community also receives frequent demands to demonstrate its loyalty and shield the Turkish president from accusations of anti-Semitism. When Erdoğan attacked Israel in May 2021 by saying that Israelis “are murderers” who “only are satisfied by sucking [Palestinian children’s] blood,” the U.S. House Bipartisan Task Force for Combating Antisemitism issued a statement saying his comments were “tantamount to blood libel against the Jewish people.”²¹ The task force called on Erdoğan to “retract and renounce his remarks, which only serve to fuel the dangerous rise in global antisemitism and increase the threat to the Jewish community.” The U.S. State Department also called out Erdoğan for his “antisemitic comments,” referring to his remarks as “reprehensible” and “incendiary.”²² However, the leadership of Turkey’s Jewish community tweeted that it was “unfair and reprehensible to imply that President Erdoğan is antisemitic,” adding, “he has always been construc

20 “First religious service to be held in Sümela Monastery after 5 years,” Bianet, 11 August 2020, <https://m.bianet.org/english/religion/228785-first-religious-service-to-be-held-in-sumela-monastery-after-5-years>

21 Laura Kelly, “US condemns Erdoğan comments as antisemitic,” The Hill, 19 May 2021, <https://thehill.com/policy/national-security/554277-us-condemns-erdogan-comments-as-antisemitic>; “US lawmakers slam Erdogan’s antisemitic remarks: ‘Tantamount to blood libel,’” The Times of Israel, 20 May 2021, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/us-lawmakers-slam-erdogans-antisemitic-remarks-tantamount-to-blood-libel/

22 “Turkish President Erdogan’s Anti-Semitic Remarks,” State Department Spokesperson Ned Price’s Statement, 18 May 2021, accessed 27 August 2021, <https://www.state.gov/turkish-president-erdogans-anti-semitic-remarks/>, <https://archive.is/wwWm5>

17 “Historic Iron Church in Istanbul reopens after restoration,” Associated Press, 7 January 2018, <https://www.apnews.com/5eb2a43a98e14e1b80cf28d49ff6560f>

18 “Istanbul’s ‘Iron Church’ re-opens after seven years,” TRT World, 7 January 2018, <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/istanbul-s-iron-church-re-opens-after-seven-years-13983>

19 Tugba Yardimci, “Sumela Monastery ready for Litany of the Blessed,” Anadolu Agency, 14 August 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/culture/sumela-monastery-ready-for-litany-of-the-blessed/1942380>

tive, supportive & encouraging towards us.”²³

The Syria Crisis and Turkey’s Minority Communities

The Erdoğan government’s cross-border military operations into northern Syria since 2016 targeting the Syrian Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, partners of the U.S. forces in the fight against the Islamic State, have led to Ankara’s demands for Turkey’s minority communities to declare their support for the government’s policies and help demonstrate Turkey’s tolerance. In 2018, when Erdoğan announced yet another one of these military operations, both the Syriac Military Council and the Syriac Union Party stated that these attacks could lead to the destruction of their communities.²⁴

In the United States, Syria watchers and human rights advocates raised concerns that the proposed American pullout from Syria – and the subsequent arrival of Turkey’s Islamist proxies – could endanger minorities, including Syriac Christians and Yazidis, in the region.²⁵ Shortly

23 Cnaan Liphshiz, “Turkish Jews defend Erdogan against antisemitism charge by US,” *The Times of Israel*, 19 May 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/turkish-jews-defend-erdogan-against-antisemitism-charge-by-us/>

24 Sanharib Barsoum, “Open letter from Syria Christians to US Christians: Do NOT allow Turkey to destroy us!,” *Christian Post*, 27 December 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/voice/open-letter-from-syria-christians-to-us-christians-do-not-allow-turkey-to-destroy-us.html>; “URGENT CALL by MFS: #Syriac Christians on NE - Syria are at risk of extinction.” *Twitter*, December 27, 2018, accessed 27 August 2021, <https://twitter.com/SyriacMFS/status/1078262042602205184>, <https://archive.ph/1b-Cq9>

25 Tom Gjelten, “U.S. Evangelicals Push Back Against Trump’s Syria Pullout Plan,” *NPR*, 16 January 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/16/685651799/evangelicals-dont-like-trumps-syria-pullout-plan>; Wladimir van Wilgenburg, “Christians fear Turkish attack could end Christianity in northeast Syria,” *Kurdistan 24*, 5 January 2019, <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/deeea6a9-a23a-40bf-95ab-4094a1d924f7>; Amy Austin Holmes, “US withdrawal from Syria will endanger Kurds, Arabs, Christians,” *The Hill*, 27 December 2018, <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/422990-us-withdrawal-from-syria-will-endanger-kurds-arabs-christians>

after these criticisms, the Turkish government announced its decision to issue the first permit in the history of the Republic of Turkey to build a new church. Coincidentally, the permit was for a Syriac Christian church, a project that the Turkish authorities had been stalling since 2013.²⁶

The demonstration of benevolence toward Syriac Christians at home, however belated, was an attempt to disavow fears that Turkey and its proxies would pose a threat to Syriac Christians in Syria. Ironically, the Istanbul plot of land that the Turkish authorities allocated for the Syriac church was a Catholic cemetery that the state had earlier seized. The resolution of the ensuing tensions between Catholic and Syriac communities required the intervention of Pope Francis.²⁷

In 2019, the Erdoğan government organized a joint prayer ceremony at the Syriac Orthodox Mor Hananyo Monastery in Mardin province near the Syrian border, which Turkey’s pro-government media publicized with the claim that “all minority communities” participated to support Turkey’s military opera-

[npr.org/2019/01/16/685651799/evangelicals-dont-like-trumps-syria-pullout-plan](https://www.npr.org/2019/01/16/685651799/evangelicals-dont-like-trumps-syria-pullout-plan); Wladimir van Wilgenburg, “Christians fear Turkish attack could end Christianity in northeast Syria,” *Kurdistan 24*, 5 January 2019, <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/deeea6a9-a23a-40bf-95ab-4094a1d924f7>; Amy Austin Holmes, “US withdrawal from Syria will endanger Kurds, Arabs, Christians,” *The Hill*, 27 December 2018, <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/422990-us-withdrawal-from-syria-will-endanger-kurds-arabs-christians>

26 “Pope Francis confirms construction of Syriac church in Istanbul,” *Daily Sabah*, 15 November 2017, <https://www.daily-sabah.com/minorities/2017/11/15/pope-francis-confirms-construction-of-syriac-church-in-istanbul>

27 Sibel Hurtas, “Landmark church project stirs mixed sentiments in Turkey,” *Al-Monitor*, 18 January 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/01/turkey-landmark-church-project-stirs-mixed-sentiments.html>

tions in northeast Syria.²⁸ For its report on the event, Anadolu Agency used the title, “Minority community representatives pray for Turkish soldiers.”²⁹ The following year, Turkey’s Directorate of Communications sent religious minority communities a draft letter for them to issue in support of Turkey’s military operations in northwest Syria’s Idlib province.³⁰

In July 2021, following human rights activists’ persistent criticism of Turkey’s attacks that targeted or displaced vulnerable religious minorities in northern Syria, Turkey’s Ministry of Defense launched a campaign to restore churches in the region, which led Syrian minorities to accuse Ankara of cynically aiming solely to improve its image.³¹ Ayman Abdel Nour, the president of the nonprofit Syrian Christians for Peace, said, “Turkey will not be able to change this image, which requires assiduous work, not just empty gestures. Religious freedoms are not limited to building and renovating churches, but rather require guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of those who have no religion and not only those who

28 “Barış Pınarı’na bir destek de azınlık cemaatlerinden,” [Yet another support for the Peace Spring from minority communities], Haber 7, 19 October 2019, <https://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/2907782-baris-pinarina-bir-destek-de-azinlik-cemaatlerinden>

29 Halil İbrahim Sincar, “Azınlık cemaatleri temsilcilerinden Mehmetçik’e dua” [Minority community representatives pray for Turkish soldiers], Anadolu Ajansı, 20 October 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/baris-pinari-harekati/azinlik-cemaatleri-temsilcilerinden-mehmetcike-dua/1620144>

30 “İletişim Başkanlığı Bahar Kalkanı Harekâtı’na destek için azınlık vakıflarına hazır metin gönderdi,” [Directorate of Communications sent minority foundations a draft text to support Operation Spring Shield], T24, 4 March 2020, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/iletisim-baskanligi-bahar-kalkani-harekati-na-destek-icin-azinlik-vakiflarina-hazir-metin-gonderdi,864570>

31 Mohammed Hardan, “Turkey accused of cynical motives for restoring churches in north Syria,” Al-Monitor, 25 July 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/07/turkey-accused-cynical-motives-restoring-churches-north-syria>

are non-Muslims.”³²

The Precarity of Neo-Ottoman Benevolence

The generosity and benevolence that Erdoğan has shown to Turkey’s religious minority communities as part of the neo-Ottomanist paradigm have replaced constitutional rights, which earlier governments failed to uphold, with occasional financial and administrative concessions presented at the discretion of the president. These favorable acts, however, require not only frequent expressions of loyalty to the Erdoğan government at home and abroad, but also active participation in spectacles of tolerance choreographed by the Turkish authorities in the form of ceremonies or statements of support.

Ironically, the Erdoğan government’s benevolent acts go hand in hand with the increasing scapegoating and targeting of religious minorities in official discourse to deflect blame for Ankara’s policy failures and mismanagement. Hence, minority communities find themselves in an increasingly hostile public environment, where they need greater access to and support of the Turkish president to survive everyday challenges to their existence and survival. Following 19 years of rule by the AKP, Turkey’s neo-Ottoman mode of domestic rule appears to have succeeded in replacing the bureaucratic indifference and systematic discrimination of nominally secular administrations

32 Ibid.

with a more personalized rule that oscillates between benevolence and wrath, echoing centuries of arbitrary rule and sultanistic domination under the Ottomans.

Turkish-Islamist Synthesis 2.0: Continuity and Change in Turkey's National Project and Foreign Policy

Dr. Nora Fisher-Onar

Turkey has undergone significant economic, political and cultural transformation over the past two decades under President Erdoğan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi AKP). Defenders and detractors of the government differ dramatically on whether this journey, on balance, has been beneficial to the country. Yet, both the architects of transformation and their critics tend to agree that the older, secularist order has been displaced by a new regime which celebrates public religion. In this piece, I offer a corrective to this perception, arguing that while public Islam has indeed gained salience, much of what appears to be novel is actually reappropriation of a project that dates back forty years to the post-1980 coup regime. At that time, the putatively secularist military endorsed a Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (TIS) as national project. The TIS was and is: an anti-pluralist alignment of ethno- and ethno-religious nationalists who seek to inscribe the power of the state over society in the name of Turkish-Muslim

values and unity. The TIS is associated, moreover, with antagonism towards those deemed to be “Other,” both domestically and internationally.

Today's TIS 2.0, I will show, emerged in 2015 out of the AKP's contingent electoral alliance with the right-wing Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi MHP). This marriage of convenience nonetheless informed key outcomes like the switch from a parliamentary system to an executive presidency, and a revisionist foreign policy. I will then identify the core ideological features of the TIS 2.0 and their domestic, cultural and foreign policy implications. Next, I excavate antecedents in the TIS 1.0 of the 1980s, and the authoritarian, ethno-nationalist regime of the early 1940s. Recognizing such continuities, in turn, opens the eye to an important historical pattern and the key takeaway from this piece: the ascendance of assertive Turco-Muslim nationalism also engenders oppositional coalitions across the heterogenous country which, given the

right conditions, reinstate more pluralist policies.¹

Rise of the TIS 2.0

The TIS 2.0 began to coalesce in 2015 when government negotiations with Turkey's Kurdish movement collapsed, and the AKP pivoted to an alliance with the MHP.² There were at least two catalyzing factors. The first was structural and geostrategic: mounting anxiety within the security sector at rising, transnational Kurdish mobilization in a Middle East where the civil war in Syria was blurring borders. The brewing possibility that an independent Kurdish state might emerge from these conditions—especially with US backing of Kurds in the fight against the Islamic State—hit a nerve in Ankara which has long feared that Kurdish self-determination will come at the expense of Turkey's territorial integrity. This perception was exacerbated when the militant wing of the Kurdish movement (mis)interpreted national election results in 2015 as support for heightened regional autonomy.³ Sending radical youth in restive southeastern cities to the barricades, Turkey's on-and-off Kurdish conflict reignited, spiraling into significant confrontation with the state, and the re-securitization of official and popular

1 For a full elaboration of this argument see, Nora Fisher-Onar, *Pluralism in Turkey: Islam, Liberalism and Nationalism* (Cambridge UP, 2022).

2 For analysis of public opinion at the time of the pivot see, John Halpin, Michael Werz, Alan Makovsky, and Max Hoffman, "Is Turkey Experiencing a New Nationalism?" February 11, 2018, Available at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2018/02/11/445620/turkey-experiencing-new-nationalism/>

3 Ezgi Başaran *Frontline Turkey: The conflict at the heart of the Middle East*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

discourse.

A second, personalistic and political factor which may have spurred President Erdoğan to scuttle the peace process (which he had initiated) was the realization that Kurdish voters were unlikely to support his bid to convert the country to a presidential system. This became clear when Selahattin Demirtaş, a telegenic leader of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi HDP), mobilized sufficient votes on an anti-Erdoğan platform from within—but also beyond—the HDP's traditional constituency to carry the party over the country's high electoral threshold (10%). In so doing, Demirtaş prevented an AKP long accustomed to electoral predominance from even forming a government, much less gathering a quorum for constitutional change on a presidential system. Erdoğan responded with a series of maneuvers that culminated in recapture of parliament by the AKP via a coalition with the MHP whose leader, Devlet ("State") Bahçeli, helped pave the way for a presidential transition.

Turkish-Islamist Synthesis 2.0: Core Ideas

To frame these moves and sustain a coalition which gathered just over half of the electorate behind the presidential system, the AKP and MHP drew on the overlapping—but by no means identical—ideological reservoirs of religious

and ethnic nationalism.⁴ Thus, emerged the TIS 2.0 narrative which has at least seven, core tropes:

an organic notion of the Turkish nation as unitary or indivisible (with the AKP story underscoring unity in religion, and the MHP emphasizing purity in blood); a reading of Sunni Islam, secularized or otherwise, as constitutive of the nation; the attribution of an intrinsically martial (and hypermasculine) character to Sunni Muslim Turks; the presumption that as heirs to the Ottoman (AKP emphasis), but also prior Turkic empires (MHP emphasis), Turks' military prowess must be channeled to defense of a unitary state; demonization of allegedly "foreign elements" within society as a threat to state and societal cohesion (i.e., non-Sunnis, non-Turks, and non-Muslims, with non-practicing Sunni Turks also suspect in the AKP but not the MHP narrative); a view of Western engagement—and critique—of Turkey as neo-imperialism; solidarity with Turkic and Muslim peoples across the former Ottoman geography, especially those perceived to have been wronged by non-Muslims (e.g. Azeris vis-à-vis Armenians; Palestinians vis-à-vis Israelis).

4 For overlap and divergence in these repertoires see: Jenny White, *Muslim Nationalism* (Princeton UP, 2014); Tanıl Bora, ed., *Türk Sağı: Mitler, Fetişler, Düşman İmgeleri*. (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016); Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2018).

The TIS 2.0: Domestic Politics, Culture and Foreign Policy

The AKP-MHP alliance leveraged this discursive repertoire in the aftermath of the 2016 failed coup and the build-up to a referendum on a presidential system the following year. This context allowed for a clampdown prior to the referendum on not only the rival Islamist sect that Ankara blamed for the putsch (Gülenists), but also Demirtaş and the Kurdish political leadership. In this same period, the purge came calling for the traditional *bêtes noires* of the MHP—liberals and leftists⁵—with whom Erdoğan likewise was incensed due to these cadres' involvement in nationwide "Gezi Park" protests against his rule in 2013.

With the political opposition neutralized and the state of emergency extended, the referendum was held in April 2017. In keeping with the TIS 2.0, the AKP-MHP's "Cumhur" alliance (a discursive allusion to the presidency), presented the bloc in binary terms as heroic defenders of the Turco-Muslim homeland against malevolent forces within and beyond. As Erdoğan put it, the choice was between "those who are native and national and those whose reins are in the hands of other quarters."⁶ The campaign secured a slim majority: 51.41

5 Many, but by no means all, leftists in Turkey, are associated with Kurdish and/or Alevi activism.

6 Quoted in Zulfikar Dogan, "Turkish Civilians Arm Themselves ahead of Crucial Polls," *Al-Monitor*, 18 January 2017, Available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2018/01/turkey-civilians-arm-themselves-ahead-crucial-2019-polls.html#ix-zz72htjPys9>

percent of the vote.

The TIS 2.0 also informs nodes of domestic culture production which take their cue from the state. Of particular interest is the ways in which history is reimagined via the Turkish-Islamist synthesis,⁷ with at least three periods receiving greater attention since the launch of the Cumhur alliance. One is the medieval age of Turkic gazi warrior penetration of Anatolia—a staple of the MHP historical imaginary—which was celebrated in a swashbuckling show about a progenitor of the Ottoman dynasty, *Resurrection: Ertuğrul*.⁸ Produced by TRT, the state channel, the series ran from late 2014 to 2019 and featured burly, ax-wielding actors who also performed frequently on the stages of AKP public events. Plotlines emphasized the intrinsically interwoven nature of “Turkic warrior-ness” with “pious-son-of-Islam-ness,” an ethno-religious addition to the many variants of neo-Ottoman nostalgia which have been articulated since the mid-2000s⁹ (including versions that, unlike the TIS 2.0, are open to Europe and non-Muslim neighbors across the former Ottoman geography.¹⁰)

7 For a theoretical framework to trace how historical facts are uploaded to reservoirs of collective memory, then selectively appropriated by wide-ranging actors to support contemporary agendas see, Nora Fisher-Onar, “Between Memory, History, and Historiography: Contesting Ottoman Legacies in Turkey, 1923–2012.” In Kalypso Nicoalidis, Berny Sebe and Gabrielle Maas, eds., *Echoes of Empire: Memory, Identity and Colonial Legacies* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015): 141–154.

8 *Diriliş: Ertuğrul*

9 Other variants include liberal cosmopolitan nostalgia for the late Ottoman Belle Epoque and Muslim multiculturalist nostalgia for Ottoman-era religious pluralism. For more on these conceptions, see Fisher-Onar, N., 2018. *Between Neo-Ottomanism and Neoliberalism: The Politics of Imagining Istanbul*. In Fisher-Onar, NF, Pearce S. and Keyman, F. eds., *Istanbul: Living with Difference in a Global City*, (pp. 1–22). Rutgers University Press.

10 Nora Fisher-Onar and Max Watson, “Crisis or opportunity? Turkey, Greece and the political economy of South-East

A second period in which interest has grown is the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century when pan-Islamism and then pan-Turkism began to be articulated by Ottoman modernizers. By way of explanation, historically, these ideologies emerged in a context where the traditional Ottoman method of granting trading privileges to non-Ottoman subjects or “Capitulations” was exploited by European interlocutors. These external powers read the measures as conferring extra-territoriality on their agents, who tended to be non-Muslim, Ottoman subjects. The result was a complex, unwieldy regime for economic and diplomatic affairs in which loyalties and sovereignty were muddled.¹¹ The traditional Ottoman Muslim ruling classes (and peasants) also suffered economically relative to the non-Muslim merchant classes who thrived with the Empire’s integration into the European-dominated global economy. These experiences, in turn, spurred attempts to stem the Empire’s ebbing sovereignty, adapt to economic and political modernity, and manage the tide of separatist nationalisms which all of the above was engendering. For some modernizers the answer was Ottomanism—multicultural citizenship for the Empire’s diverse subjects. But the bitter experience of Capitulations, and the later imposition of the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres (which authorized Ottoman dismemberment in the wake of WWI),

Europe in the 2010s.” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 13.3 (2013): 407–420.

11 See, for example, Turan Kayaoğlu. *Legal Imperialism: Sovereignty and extraterritoriality in Japan, the Ottoman Empire, and China*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

furnished key tropes of Turkish nationalism: suspicion of minorities, and distrust of European advocacy for minorities as a cover for imperialism.¹² This interpretation is evident in the recent rehabilitation of a key figure of the late Ottoman empire: the authoritarian modernizer and pan-Islamist Sultan Abdülhamid II. Like Erdoğan, Abdülhamid reigned for decades (1876-1908/9) and sought to build a signature mosque and infrastructural work in every town. Celebrated in good TIS 2.0 form in the hit miniseries *Imperial Capital: Abdülhamid*,¹³ the sultan is (inaccurately) venerated as a paragon of Turco-Islamic virtue¹⁴ who cleverly thwarted the machinations of European Great Powers on behalf of their non-Muslim minions.

This uptick in popular fascination with the early and late Ottoman periods is arguably an innovation of the TIS 2.0. However, a third site of “memory work”—World War I and the 1919-1923 “War of Independence” (*Kurtuluş Savaşı*)—reprises key themes of the original, post-1980, TIS. Largely ignored in AKP historiography until the *Cumhur* alignment, the period is invoked as a foundational moment of proto-nationalist—but pre-secularist—Turkish-Muslim unity against alien invasion. Erdoğan made the analogy with the present ex-

12 For more on how imperial legacies—and perceptions thereof—continue to shape the EU’s relations with its southern and eastern neighbors see, Nora Fisher-Onar and Kalypso Nicolaidis, 2015. *Europe’s post-imperial condition*. In Hartmut Behr and Yiannis Stivachtis, eds., *Revisiting the European Union as Empire* (pp. 115-133). Routledge.

13 *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*

14 The real sultan opposed nationalism by calling for loyalty to the caliphate across the empire’s ethnically diverse Muslims. No fundamentalist, he also privately enjoyed aspects of Western cultural production from Sherlock Holmes novels to the occasional sip of champagne.

PLICIT by repeatedly alluding to the period in speeches like his January 2018 address to parliament when he declared “we are waging a new War of Independence against those who want to fracture our people and divide our country.”¹⁵ By thus foregrounding the “the anti-imperialist, anti-Western, and militaristic aspects”¹⁶ of early Turkish nationalism, the AKP also seeks to appropriate the enduring resonance of Mustafa Kemal Paşa (later Atatürk) and his soldiers’ heroism at the Battle of Gallipoli (1915-1916) while ignoring the founding father’s subsequent secularist revolution (which is problematic within the pro-religious imaginary). As Maksudyan argues, by focusing on the battlefields of western Anatolia, such celebrations also occlude the contemporaneous mass deportation of eastern Anatolia’s Armenians by the Young Turk triumvirate.¹⁷

These discursive elisions helped the *Cumhur* coalition to secure the otherwise counterintuitive support of “Atatürkists” within the security establishment and civil society (a constituency which also contributed to the original, post-1980 coup’s Turkish-Islamic synthesis by reinterpreting the leader’s legacy through the prism of the junta). Attesting to the ways that Turkish ideological configurations tend to disrupt Western

15 “Milletimizi Parçalamak ve Ülkemizi Bölmek İsteyenlere Karşı Yeni Bir İstiklal Savaşı Veriyoruz,” Presidency of the Turkish Republic, Available at: <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/89023/milletimizi-parcalamak-ve-ulkemizi-bolmek-isteyenlere-karsi-yeni-bir-istiklal-savasi-veriyoruz.html>

16 Alev Çınar and Hakki Taş. “Politics of nationhood and the displacement of the founding moment: Contending histories of the Turkish Nation.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59.3 (2017): 657-689, 667.

17 Nazan Maksudyan. *Centenary (Turkey)*. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 2019.

expectations (e.g. the limited heuristic traction of the left-right spectrum due to specificities of Turkey's experience), several personalities associated with this faction are also advocates of an unreconstructed leftist nationalism. Associated with the newspaper *Aydınlık* (Enlightenment), the leftist ideologue Doğu Perinçek is exemplary of this small but vocal group who endorse the TIS 2.0's stance against perceived Western imperialism. Instead, they vaunted a Eurasian vocation (which comes in pro-Russian and pan-Turkic variants). Retired admiral Cem Gürdeniz is another figure who has argued from the pages of *Aydınlık* and other media perches for closer relations with Moscow and assertive policies in the Mediterranean and Caucasus. While it is doubtful that these calls have shaped decision-making directly,¹⁸ the Eurasianist thrust of such punditry has helped to rationalize muscular external action. Examples include support for Azerbaijan's takeover of Nagorno-Karabagh—a move in sync with the pan-Turkic sympathies of the ultranationalist tradition. Gürdeniz's call, moreover, for a greater, maritime Turkey via the "Mavi Vatan" ("Blue Homeland") doctrine bolstered at least two major policies: Ankara's maneuvers to support its interests and proteges in Libya (at the expense of Greece's maritime corridor), and expansive claims in the Aegean which are hotly disputed by Cyprus and Greece alike.¹⁹

18 Erdoğan's close working relationship with Putin, for example, arguably draws more on personalistic rapport between strongmen and geostructural preogatives.

19 Gingeras, G. Blue Homeland: The Heated Politics behind Turkey's New Maritime Strategy, 2 June 2020. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue-homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/>

In conjunction with border closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing refugee politics, these policies have shut down linkages between Turkey's western coast and adjacent Greek islands. Thus, a space whose peoples enjoyed over a decade of fraternization in the context of Turco-Greek détente appears to have shrunk, if not vanished altogether.²⁰

Ghosts of Turkish-Islamic Syntheses Past

If the TIS 2.0 and its domestic and foreign policy expressions induce a sense of déjà vu, this is because, as I have argued, they emanate from a long tradition of ethnicized, religious nationalism whose proponents intermittently capture the state. The most recent antecedent is the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis of the post-1980s coup when the military intervened in a context of intractable violence between right- and left-wing radicals. At this critical juncture, the generals appointed a constitutional committee including figures from the ultranationalist "Hearth of the Enlightened"—a font of MHP ideology.²¹ The committee proceeded to embed in the constitution an ethnic definition of Turkishness along with recognition of the "sacred religious feelings" of the indivisible Turkish nation. This formula contrasted with the

20 The potential for renewed conflict was latent in persistent asymmetries in the relationship, even at the height of détente. Fisher Onar, N. and Anastasakis, O., 2013. Sustaining engagement? On symmetries and asymmetries in Greek-Turkish relations. *Journal of South Eastern European and Black Sea Studies*, 13(3): 401-406.

21 Yavuz, M.H., 2020. *Nostalgia for the Empire: The Politics of Neo-Ottomanism*. Oxford University Press.

more civic and voluntaristic definitions of citizenship featured in the earlier constitutions (1961 and 1924). The centering of Turkish (Sunni) Muslimness was accompanied, as with the TIS 2.0, by criminalization of the political opposition, repression of civil society in general, and suppression of Kurdish public identity in particular. Turkey's small remaining, non-Muslim communities were stigmatized as alien fifth-columns for antagonistic neighbors like Greece and Armenia. And European criticism of the country's minority rights record was read as neo-imperialist in thrust. Both the original TIS and version 2.0, moreover, celebrate Turks' martial prowess: the earlier project belittles groups like Kurds, Alevis and leftists as effeminate; the latter further designates feminist and LGBTQ activism as a threat to the purity of the nation.

When it comes to Islam, however, there are some important differences. In the former, as Batuman has argued, the generals aimed to co-opt and diffuse religious energies which were percolating in society.²² Today, however, the AKP's civilian leadership seeks not to contain but to cultivate an Islamic consciousness in all aspects of public life (hence my characterization of the original program as Turkish-Islamic and today's as Turkish-Islamist). Another nuance is the prominence of nostalgia for the Ottoman past in today's TIS which, while present in the original TIS, was more muted (because a cornerstone of now

22 Batuman, B., 2017. *New Islamist Architecture and Urbanism: Negotiating Nation and Islam through Built Environment in Turkey*. Routledge.

eroded Kemalist historiography was that the republic represented rupture from the empire). There is overlap, nonetheless, in the vision and methods of the 1980s and today. In both iterations, for example, extensive resources have been channeled to religious education, and professional pathways forged for graduates of schools with theological curricula. Both projects also have used expansive mosque-building programs to inculcate a sense of continuity with Turco-Islamic grandeur.

Finally, the TIS 1.0 and 2.0 differ in terms of the broader context in which they have been deployed. The shifting international balance of power, after all, induces continuous adjustments to a country's policies which, in time, can compel harder swings in orientation.²³ During the 1980s and 1990s, for example, there was no question that Ankara viewed its interests as aligned with the hegemonic Western bloc. Today, however, in a regional environment characterized by multipolar jostling between great and medium powers (and several transnational movements capable of playing spoiler), Turkey's strategic calculus has shifted, perforce, to a search for flexibility. And if pursuit of greater autonomy is celebrated by anti-Westernist proponents of the TIS 2.0, it is viewed as a grim imperative by many geostrategists in general.²⁴

23 Altunışık, M.B. and Martin, L.G., 2011. Making sense of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East under AKP. *Turkish Studies*, 12(4), pp.569-587.

24 Fisher-Onar, N., 2020. Making Sense of Multipolarity: Eurasia's Former Empires, Family Resemblances, and Comparative Area Studies. *Qualitative and Multi-Method Research*, 17(1), pp.15-19.

Last but not least, it is worth noting that both iterations of the TIS have antecedents in earlier, corporatist attempts to impose a unitary Turco-Muslim state and society onto the diverse population. These include the dominant coalition of the early 1940s when prime ministers Recep Peker and Şükrü Saraçoğlu embraced a hardline ethno-nationalism that envisaged secularized Sunni Turks as constitutive of the nation. Seeking to amplify the powers of the authoritarian, one-party state, they accelerated Turkification of the economy at the expense of the country's non-Muslim communities via measures like the punitive 1942 "Wealth Tax."²⁵ Such ideas, in turn, had roots in aspects of the Young Turk program of the late Ottoman empire which pursued economic and political modernization by adopting to the Ottoman Muslim context proto- and pan-nationalist ideas then current in international society.

Lessons Looking Forward

As this schematic survey has shown, today's Turkish-Islamist Synthesis 2.0 is hardly harbinger of a "new Turkey" but rather the most recent iteration of a long tradition of anti-pluralism, which

²⁵ The arbitrarily assessed tax, which was intended to finance the army, fell disproportionately on non-Muslims, with some 5,000 of those who could not pay deported to labor camps in harsh winter conditions. All the deportees were non-Muslim and over 20 perished. For an assessment of the impact of the tax on the economy in general, and non-Muslim economic wherewithal in particular see, Ağır, S. and Artunç, C., 2019. The Wealth Tax of 1942 and the Disappearance of Non-Muslim Enterprises in Turkey. *The Journal of Economic History*, 79(1), pp.201-243.

today emphasizes a fusion of religious and ethno-nationalism. Advocates of this tradition have succeeded in capturing the state at several junctures. As my survey also should suggest, there is nothing inevitable about these coalitions' ascendance. All iterations of the TIS to date formed in response to contingent pressures; all likewise dissipated or collapsed as new actors, ideas and alignments arose across heterogenous Turkey in response to evolving circumstances.²⁶ In the case of the TIS 1.0, for example, Turgut Özal, a charismatic politician who would become prime minister and then president, came to power parallel with the installation of the TIS, and proved to be a bridge-builder across more moderate constituencies. Mitigating the resonance of the TIS, he helped paved the way for re-pluralization of governance. Similarly, in the mid-1940s, President İsmet İnönü, a consummate political and diplomatic player, maneuvered figures like Peker and Saraçoğlu into a position where they were compelled to renounce hardline nationalism, laying the ground for the transition to multiparty politics and Turkey's alignment with the liberal, democratic West.

Today, too, actors, ideas and conditions are coalescing in ways to suggest that the TIS 2.0 has run its course. This is evident in at least five facts: (i) the recapture of key cities like Istanbul and Ankara by the political opposition; (ii) the emergence of charismatic new op-

²⁶ Fisher-Onar, N., Liu, J.H. and Woodward, M., 2014. Critical junctures? Complexity and the post-colonial nation-state. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 43, pp.22-34.

position leaders, some of whom speak an inclusive language; (iii) the fall from favor of figures like Gürdeniz and the Eurasianists;²⁷ (iv) diminishing returns for the Cumhur alliance in public opinion polls with the MHP unlikely to clear the current parliamentary threshold in the event of elections;²⁸ and (v) exploratory talks between Erdoğan and Baykal on lowering the parliamentary threshold, possibly to 7%)²⁹. Such a change would serve the immediate purpose of a maintaining the MHP's electability. Yet, like so many contingent decisions in the past, it could generate unintended consequences by changing the playing field for a wide array of political actors who are fed up with being Otherized. And, if the history I have briefly canvassed in this piece offers lessons for the present, such groups may well forge expedient alliances which, ultimately, favor more pluralistic domestic and foreign policies.

27 The precipitating event was a public letter Gürdeniz and 100 other retired admirals signed in April 2021 urging the government to maintain the 1936 Montreux Convention which governs the Istanbul and Dardanelle straits in the context of a debate about opening up the Bosphoros to a major developmental project. Arguably, it was the move rather than the substance of the letter which raised red flags for an AKP that has more than once been on the receiving end of military maneuvers against civilian leadership.

28 Support has flagged. A May 2021 poll found that if elections were held the next Sunday, the AKP-MHP alignment would garner only 35.8, with the MHP coming in under the parliamentary threshold at 8.4 percent. [Metropoll, Türkiye'nin Nabızı, May 2021].

29 Sayın, A., "AKP ve MHP'nin seçim yasaı deęişiklięi görüşmelerinde 'masadan eksiklerle kalkıldı,'" BBC, 15 September 2021. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/58567004>

Turkish Kaleidoscope: Fractured Lives in a Time of Violence

Book Review

“We’d better keep this conversation to ourselves,” a leftist undergraduate tells his beloved in *Turkish Kaleidoscope* (Princeton University Press), the recently published graphic novel by Ergün Gündüz and Jenny White. “Being in a leftist group is like being in an Islamic lodge,” he muses. “You do whatever the sheikh wants. You think what he wants you to think. Don’t let anyone know you have these questions... Remember the saying, ‘Do as I say. If not, you’re a traitor.’” It’s the 1970s but could well have been the 2020s; Marxist parlance that wouldn’t look out of place between AKP members. This epiphanic dialogue, which appears inside a speech bubble, so effortlessly reveals a central crux of Turkish politics that one may overlook it’s the fruit of years spent in Ankara in the 1970s when White, a noted cultural anthropologist, was a graduate student at the city’s Hacettepe University, and of months-long-trips in Turkey over the 2010s when she did fieldwork to capture Turkish nationalism’s more recent amalgamations. “Fractured Lives in

Kaya Genç

a Time of Violence,” the book’s subtitle, is sadly a fitting description of our own fractured lives in AKP’s New Turkey.

In 1975 White traveled from the East Coast of the US to Hacettepe’s corridors to study for an MA degree in social psychology. Over the next half-decade, she would witness a religious devotion to political ideals and leaders among Marxists and nationalists alike, a symmetry that has informed White’s work ever since. From 1994’s *Money Makes Us Relatives* (a study of women’s labor in Turkish cities in the 1980s) and *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey* (a 2002 monograph on the rise of Turkey’s Islamic politicians in the 1990s) to her magnum opus, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (2012), the most convincing analysis of Turkish Islam and secularism’s transformations in the 2000s, White’s central subject has remained unaltered: the religiosity of Turkish politics.

But back in the pre-Internet days of the 1970s, White “had no idea that the country (and my university) was embroiled in

what might be called a civil war,” she recalls in the book’s introduction. “I learned quickly enough.” Between 1976 and 1980, five thousand citizens would be murdered in Turkey’s streets in the name of idealism. *Turkish Kaleidoscope* interrogates this violence with a laser focus.

Historians of Turkey tend to romanticize the 1970s. Some frame it as a decade of independent-minded, local-rooted political struggle curtailed by the foreign-based neoliberal interventions of the 1980 coup and the subsequent Turgut Özal years. Others consider this era of committed radicalism as the swan song of authentic politics in Turkey. As she attended classes at Hacettepe, White observed something different: “armored personnel carriers, bullets, bombs, and other dangers... This violence accompanied tremendous economic hardship and political dysfunction.” These years of fragility, a “kaleidoscope of ideologically opposed coalition governments,” showed the extent of Turkey’s polarization and often resulted “in a wholesale swap from leftist to rightist and back again in every linked institution” with each change in the political landscape.

Turkish Kaleidoscope’s cast of characters experiences this rift to their personal detriment. Faruk, born in Erzurum, is the son of a pious tinsmith. His family believes “deeply in the importance of family, respectful behavior, kindness, and prayer.” He considers Turks “a nation of warriors who beat back every threat by outsiders.” The sympathetic framing of

this nationalist’s family background is symptomatic of *Turkish Kaleidoscope*’s perceptive analysis of Turkey. Faruk is a dutiful son who refuses to disobey his father, and when he wins a place at Hacettepe to study medicine, he fantasizes of “being a warrior for the nation by joining the Gray Wolves youth group and fighting communists.” On the other end of the political spectrum is Nuray. To make sure she has a shot at a good education, her family settles in Eskişehir, where the young Marxist pores over books on oppression and revolution, joins in a revolutionary youth organization, and enrolls at Hacettepe’s medicine faculty. Her lover, Yunus, is the book’s third protagonist, and he also comes from Eskişehir. The son of working-class parents (his father is an imprisoned teacher, his mother makes a living through sewing), Yunus is a Marxist bookworm. Upon returning from France, Yunus’s uncle tells him of the New Left, a different mode of socialism that is not built on hatred and violence but incremental change. This allows Yunus to keep an open mind about more fluid forms of leftist thinking.

Finally, we have Orhan, a timid idealist who comes from a conservative Erzurum family who isn’t “particularly religious but held strongly to traditional values.” Unlike the hardliner Faruk, Orhan represents a milder shade of nationalism, and his ideal vision of himself is “as a physician doing good in the world.” In a clever dramatic turn of events, Orhan falls in love with Nuray. In revealing this mismatched affair, White and Gündüz reference the folk

song Mihriban about an Anatolian youth who is too shy to tell his beloved that he loves her. (She marries another man years after waiting for the shy guy.) This helps set the scene for a graphic novel about different types of unrequited love: socialist, racist, romantic.

Ergün Gündüz is one of Turkey's pioneering graphic artists who began his career with a stint at the legendary *Gırgır* cartoon magazine. Published from 1972 to 1993, *Gırgır* was among Europe's best-selling cartoon magazines, with a weekly circulation of 450,000. He lovingly depicts the 1970s, a milieu defined by performative politics. With skill and panache, Gündüz and White extract fine distinctions between political factions into their book's pages. For Yunus, "being a nationalist doesn't make me against anyone." Instead, it is "a positive thing," a way of belonging. Faruk finds such claptrap naive. Faruk's extremism, in the context of the 1970s, is perhaps more realistic. "You idiot," he says. "Then both sides will beat you up. Who's going to protect you?"

Fortunately, Turkish Kaleidoscope refuses to depict Hacettepe of the 1970s as a Manichean world of good and evil. Alongside complex theorizing, White and Gündüz pore over quotidian details, finding precious golden nuggets of life in the humdrum of their protagonists' lives. "These people are pouring gas on our country and we're the fire brigade," says Faruk, convinced of racists' potential to bring peace to Turkey. Marxists are equally violent. They block entry to Hacettepe,

bomb shops, kidnap company executives, and kill each other.

Contrasted with this violence are flashbacks to edenic, carefree childhoods. Nuray spends her teenage years at weddings, dancing, and singing. "The men drank alcohol and sometimes there was a belly dancer... The village teachers were enlightened nationalists. They taught all the students, even girls, to get used to reading." A voracious reader of world classics Nuray savors stories about peasants oppressed by landlords: the Saga of *Köroğlu*, Yaşar Kemal's *İnce Memed*, and poems by Namık Kemal are among her favorites.

Mapping Turkey's political scene in the 1970s realistically for the lay reader and producing a page-turner is a tall order. Factions provide the main difficulty. Nuray's sister is a member of TDK. Yunus works for IGD, the Progressive Youth Association. Then there is the IKD, where one character does research and prepares brochures. Readers also learn about DISK, the confederation of revolutionary unions. Next comes violent Marxist organizations: THKP-C and THKP, who excel at killing cops and right-wingers. There's also the Cypriot Turkish IGD, whose members part ways with the Cypriot Turkish Dev-Yol. Their subtle differences are explained away in footnotes.

Immersion in this intensely politicized scene comes with its own pleasures. "We visited the homes of some factory workers. It was like something out of George Orwell," one character recalls. "The

smell was bad... Their relationship with us was an artificial, calculated thing... There was little communication with the folk. We didn't know them or speak their language. We had other concerns." What brings young activists is a sense of *cemaat*, a yearning for a close-knit community they can fall back on. "The feeling of congregation is very powerful. You do everything together. You root for your guy, always clap at what he says. You support him, even if you don't like him." This devotion risks the prospect of violence between brother and sister, not only among leftists but also between Islamists (just consider AKP's recent fight with the Gülen movement). "Everybody wants their version of history to be supreme," Yunus says at one point, distilling their fascination with making history and the undimmed desire to write it.

Another problem Turkish Kaleidoscope unearths is moralism. "Aren't you ashamed in front of our people? It goes against the people's values," a member of DAZ, Revolutionary Morality Police, warns Nuray and Yunus after spotting them holding hands. Those who oppose "communist morals" are accused of "raping our values." Hatred among those who deviate from norm rattles Yunus: "This wasn't just about a simple political difference, there was something incredible about such enmity. What could continually reproduce such a sickness?"

That question can't be easily answered, but Turkish Kaleidoscope tries its hand and points to the notion of honor as a

possibility. "We can't complain about a leftist to the police," Yunus informs Nuray after a rival communist shoots him in the hip. Despite coming close to being paralyzed, he can still proclaim: "It's not done. It would be shameful, as if we were the police."

Fear also plays a role. Revolutionary courts of the 1970s terrified young activists. "People claim there are police spies and then there's a trial. Not even a proper trial, just some kids in a classroom. They tell the kids they're guilty of betraying us and then they're taken somewhere and beaten up or executed." These scenes wouldn't look out of place in Dostoyevski's *The Possessed*. Stavrogin, the charismatic leader of the revolutionary cell at the centre of this 1871 novel, would fit well at Hacettepe. Upon informing his IGD faction's leader, he wants to "rest" for a time, Yunus receives a harsh response: "So, are we going to say now that Yunus went on holiday? While the movement struggle goes on, we can't say that Yunus wants to rest. We can't do that." Marxists and nationalists of the 1970s and today's Islamists share the same mentality: "If I turn my back, shoot me too." But Yunus eventually manages to free himself from socialism, "flunks" for a while, and finally admits: "The romanticism of the left is dead for me."

Cultural signifiers of the 1970s—from rehearsals of Brecht plays to Dev-Genç forums—come alive on these 116 pages. My favorite moment concerns *Birikim*, the socialist culture magazine founded in

1975. After leaving a boring Dev-Genç forum, Yunus runs into a student leader outside; the leader hands him a copy of *Birikim* and says: “Here, read this. In *Birikim*, they write about things we don’t talk about here—European communism, the libertarian left. For me, reading it is like breathing...” Instead of joining “some shit group and getting killed,” he believes, leftists should read *Birikim*.

Who can disagree? After graduating from Hacettepe, violence continues to dominate Yunus, Orhan, Nuray, and Faruk’s lives. When Nuray and Yunus get married, only a small number of friends can attend their wedding. “None of the guests wore jewelry in case they were held up and robbed on their way.” People drive around with a club in their cars to defend themselves, and a doorkeeper says her son only has a primary school education because it’s too dangerous for him to go to school.

September 12, 1980, reconfigures this state of affairs. Marxists begin burying their books. Nationalists complain of being victimized by the Turkish state. Torture reigns in police stations, and soldiers in Diyarbakır traumatize Kurds, perhaps beyond return. Only Orhan survives the chaos, becoming a doctor with a small practice in Üsküdar. His friend Faruk lives on a small pension by the 2010s, describing his life as “revolving around the tarikat now.”

The story gently pivots to Gezi Park circa 2013. As activists gather to stop AKP

from tearing down the park’s sycamore trees, the prime minister warns, his “patience is at an end.” While turning into an authoritarian party, the AKP adapts to the radicalism of social movements of the 1970s. But in the 2000s and early 2010s, most people had become weary of that violent language. When government officials use the language of martyrs, heroes, revolutionaries, traitors, degenerates—“one nation, one language, one flag, one state”—in newspapers and on Twitter these days, their extremist tone terrifies many.

Using the graphic novel form to capture Turkey’s polyphony is a risky bet. But Gündüz and White pull it off nicely. “When doing the interviews, I had no specific agenda and allowed myself to be surprised by people’s stories and motivations,” White writes. “People’s memories of the time were vivid and often they seemed to relive their experiences in the telling. It occurred to me that academic analysis flattened these stories as it folded them into discussions of abstract issues, like factionalism. Perhaps I could make the same points by allowing people to tell their stories themselves in graphic form and thereby retain the nuances and contradictions of history as it is lived.”

This meticulous excavation of “history as it is lived” produces an engaging narrative, “a work of graphic fiction based on true stories.” By asking universal questions about sacrifice, violence, and the leader’s cult of personality, *Turkish Kaleidoscope* joins the flourishing genre of fictionalized

personal testimonies in Turkish studies. In 2015 Özge Samancı's graphic memoir *Dare to Disappoint* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) reckoned with AKP's authoritarianism by telling personal stories about the 1980s, when the artist grew up, and the 1990s-2000s when she studied at Istanbul's Bosphorus University. Christopher Houston's 2020 study *Istanbul, City of the Fearless* (University of California Press) covered similar terrain, reconsidering the Istanbul of the 1970s through testimonies of revolutionaries. Rejecting the temptation to offer clichéd bullet points on the 1970s, these books do the legwork, locate witnesses, extract their histories as they are lived, and distill for us readers further views of Turkey's conflicted soul.

The Remaking of Republican Turkey: Memory and Modernity Since the Fall of the Ottoman Empire

Book Review

Reilly Barry

“‘To God belongs the East and the West,’ I said in Arabic like the late Enishte.

‘But East is east and West is west,’ said Black.”

My Name is Red, Orhan Pamuk

Turkish foreign policy is often studied under the rubric of two major periods: the Kemalist period, which executed policy with an unflinchingly western orientation (1923-2000s), and the new, Davutoğlu-engineered and Erdoğan-executed period which suddenly remembered and embraced Turkey’s Islamic identity and decided to engage in the Middle East, reconnecting after decades with its Ottoman legacy. Nick Danforth’s *The Remaking of Republican Turkey* definitively puts this rupture in periodization to rest.

The Remaking of Republican Turkey not only reevaluates popular narratives of the trajectory of Turkish foreign policy oscillating strictly between two polarities, that of staunch Western ally or of emboldened leader of the wider Muslim world, but also disentangles what US involvement and

modernization efforts in the 1950s meant domestically for Turkey.

We are taken to the mid-twentieth century as readers, the book using the ascendancy of Turkey’s first democratically-elected party (the Democratic Party, or DP) as a springboard to explore the debates between Turks about what being ‘western’ or ‘Middle Eastern’ meant for national identity. Nuanced arguments ensued. Danforth shows that while the US modernization efforts that took place in Turkey under the Cold War threat aimed to socially engineer the nation into a reliable American ally, Turkey was not a passive participant in such campaigns and continually pushed back in redefining what modernity meant in any given context. Indeed, when Turkish domestic politics wavered from American expectations, US

policymakers would themselves redefine exactly what they meant by modernization in the first place: it was not a static concept to be accepted or rejected by the Turkish state. This section is reminiscent of journalist Suzy Hansen's forays into American involvement in Turkey in the Truman Doctrine era.

Danforth unearths viewpoints that are rarely evaluated when discussing the trajectory of Turkish political succession. For instance, historiographically the election of the Democrat Party has evoked the perception that it was the first "popular resistance" turning point against the top-down Kemalist establishment and that Atatürk's party, the CHP (Republican People's Party), was the gatekeeper of modernity, reinforcing that straying from this party's policies would initiate a lapse back into Ottoman backwardness. However, the DP linked itself to modernity, making alternate but equally valid claims on the concept: "the DP's criticism of the CHP and its mentality consistently conflated the CHP's mistreatment of the Turkish villager with the neglect and abuse the villager suffered at the hands of the Ottoman Empire during its centuries of decline."¹ Perceptions of the CHP's ideology in comparison to more nationalist parties at the time is predominantly equated with the twin notions of modernity and a linear historical progression, prior to Danforth's work to disassemble these notions. His use of correspondence, speeches, and newspaper articles with DP officials shatters the illusions that Atatürk's party was the

only 20th-century group who could make claims to modernity and progress using the break from the Empire as their rationale.

The Remaking of Republican Turkey continues to build on his work in previously published articles such as "Multi-Purpose Empire: Ottoman History in Republican Turkey" (2014), which emphasizes the secular nature of celebrations in 1953 of the 500th anniversary of Fatih's conquest of Istanbul from Byzantine hands. The nature of what "Ottoman" can mean, Danforth illustrates, at any given time in Republican history regardless of which party is in control, is indeed multi-purpose, contrasted with the nature and attention that public "Ottomania" displays get today. In highly viewed Ottoman shows like *Diriliş: Ertuğrul*, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, and *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*, watched widely beyond Turkey's borders and even beyond the Middle East, the Ottomans are cast in a definitively Islamic and pious reputation. During 1953 celebrations of Fatih, however, "the students also hosted a soirée, a garden party and a ball, the last of which involved re-decorating the Taksim Casino in the style of a fifteenth-century madrasa and hosting a fashion show with dresses inspired by Ottoman costumes."² The newspaper *Cumhuriyet* remarked, "Among the Ottoman Sultans, Fatih was undoubtedly the most secular minded."³ Danforth expertly weaves the multi-faceted ways that do not come to mind today in contemporary media of what claims could be made about Ottoman legacy.

¹ Danforth, Nicholas L. *The Remaking of Republican Turkey: Memory and Modernity since the Fall of the Ottoman Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 27.

² Danforth, *The Remaking of Republican Turkey*. 107.

³ *Ibid.* 110.

What Danforth accomplishes in his first book is not only a major contribution to scholarship on Modern Turkey but has real implications and lessons for policy practitioners dealing with Turkey today. Media, government officials around the world, and think tank establishments at certain junctures have portrayed Turkey as a bellicose nation taking unjustified and ahistorical measures veering from its inherent path toward Western civilization, all in the quest for regional hegemony. These characterizations are simple, reductive, and dangerous. They ignore the history that Danforth painstakingly pieces together from a massive number of documents incorporating diplomatic correspondence, Turkish parliamentary records, and other archival sources.

As he puts it:

Recent scholarship has often implied that the Islamism of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) represents the contemporary manifestation of a popular religiosity suppressed by the authoritarian modernization of the Kemalist regime. In doing so, it explicitly contrasts an ‘alternative modernity’ emerging from the late Ottoman period with the deterministic narrative of Western modernization implicit in Kemalist historiography. This approach to Turkish politics and history relies on the idea of a “popular” Islamic sentiment or practice in Turkey that Kemalist modernizers sought to extinguish, but that subsequently found expression in grass-

roots resistance to Kemalism. Thus the triumph of the Democratic Party (DP) in 1950 was a first step toward the contemporary emergence of this repressed religious consensus.

Yet this argument is itself dangerously deterministic and also misrepresents the extent to which Kemalists or Western historians ever believed in the vision of modernity they are now said to embody. Taking the religious debates of the 1950s on their own terms forces us to confront the fact that many people writing at the time thought society had already moved past simplistic binaries pitting religion, particularly Islam, against modernity. If some of Turkey’s early Westernizers truly believe that “Islam and modern life could not be reconciled,” this was a minority view in postwar Turkey. Today, when we contrast “alternative,” “Islamic,” or “non-Western” visions of modernity with a crude form of outdated high modernism, we are merely rediscovering an insight that already seemed obvious to many self-proclaimed modernizers more than half a century ago. Reading postwar scholars wax optimistic about Turkey’s emerging form of authentic religious modernity, it is hard not to look back with discouraged humility and wonder what went wrong.⁴

The Remaking of Republican Turkey goes a great way to disabuse the notions Pamuk’s characters in *My Name is Red* es-

4 Ibid. 190.

pouse. In Turkey, considering the debates and policy maneuvers which take into account the wider scale of Turkish identity, culture, history, and geography and the debates that illuminate the malleability of them in various amalgamations, West is not West and East is not East. East and West are synthetic components of hundreds of years of Ottoman rule and legacy-shaping relations with Turkey's neighbors, and also twin components of the legacy of Atatürk's victory against Western imperialism and adoption of Western institutions which continued to build on, not rupture from, Ottoman precedent.

The greatest strength of Danforth's book is perhaps that he does not try to make a grand claim. From the outset, he says: "This book, then, explores the historic legacy of the 1945-1960 period in more modest terms. I argue that the debates of this era helped consolidate the idea of democratic modernity in Turkish political discourse. But these debates also revealed how flexible this idea could be," and that "recognizing how easily Turkish thinkers reworked their relationship to all facets of Western modernity in the middle of the twentieth century remains crucial to understanding how so many people continue to do so today."⁵

Overall, while Danforth puts forth that his book is a "modest" contribution to understanding the malleability of how both Turkish and Western policymakers shaped the very notions of modernity and what Turkey having an Eastern or Western identity at any one particular time

could mean, it is anything but modest in its impact. *The Remaking of Republican Turkey* stands out as a breakthrough in the field due to Danforth's excavation and masterful presentation of the nuanced debates of the Turkish people, government officials, and their foreign counterparts between that took place between 1945-1960 on the very notions of progress and modernity, pushing back on the reductive understandings of Turkey's place in the contemporary world and its twentieth-century history as either a Kemalist, Western ally to the U.S. or Turkish Gaullist threat to the stability of the region.

5 Ibid. 37.

