



The Republic of Turkey and its Unresolved Issues

100 Years and Beyond

Edited by
Pınar Dinç
Olga Selin Hünler

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“As you read this book, I can almost hear you asking: why, when the founding values of the Republic of Turkey are being trampled, is there a need to focus on problems that have remained unsolved since the republic’s early years? Yet now is exactly the time to ask why, after more than a century of republican history, these issues remain unresolved and continue to reproduce themselves. Covering a wide range of issues – from the country’s exclusionary political economy to its minority policies, from its dark nationalism to its failure to confront its violent history, from urban and educational policies to gender inequality – this book is a reference work that highlights the importance of critical social movements and participatory democracy in building a different future.”

—Mine Eder, *Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Boğaziçi University*

“This book analyses the first century of the republic from a critical perspective, addressing a field dominated by political sensitivities in the context of key issues. It evaluates the process of the construction and consolidation of the Turkish Republic as both an ideal and a set of practices in time and space, drawing attention to its relationship with actors and structures. In this respect, the book’s main contribution to the field is to evaluate the historical background of unresolved internal and external issues while offering a solid perspective on the second century of the Republic and a future vision of possible grounds for struggle.”

—Füsün Üstel, *Professor*

Pınar Dinç · Olga Selin Hünler
Editors


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*Çağın en karmaşık yerinde durduk
biri bizi yazsın, kendimiz değilse
kim yazacak*

*[At the knottiest point of our age we stood
let someone write us, for it we don't
who will] ¹*

Gülten Akin, Leke

*I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to
me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it
bruised or misunderstood.*

Audre Lorde, The Cancer Journals

¹ Translation by Neil P. Doherty.

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Ethics Approval An ethics note has been added to the relevant chapters, while for the remaining chapters, it was deemed not applicable.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction by the Editors

Pınar Dinç^{ORCID} and *Olga Selin Hünler*^{ORCID}

The inspiration for this book emerged in June 2023, as the centenary of the Republic of Turkey approached. While it was not uniformly celebrated, numerous individuals, ranging from politicians to academics, artists to public intellectuals, produced works reflecting on the centenary of the Republic of Turkey. The displayed festive mood had all the pageantry but at its core, the “founding issues” that had persisted since the beginning of the republic remained unaddressed, increasingly neglected, as if further fading into the background amid all the pomp and ceremony. This absence of critical reflection and genuine evaluation of the republic’s first century provided the impetus for the initial conception of this book.

In its first century, the Republic of Turkey has not only failed to resolve the issues that have existed since its foundation, but it has also continued to be shaken by new social, political, economic, and cultural

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turmoil. Today, there are largely acknowledged differences and continuities between the “old” and the “new” Turkey (Christofis, 2021, 2022). While the “old Turkey” refers to the Kemalist regime, and the “new Turkey” explains the current regime under Erdoğan. One group—mostly Kemalists—remembers the “old Turkey” with nostalgic and melancholic sentiments, fondly looking back on this period and praising the past political regime for its accomplishments. Although the seeds were sown by various right-wing governments in different periods, the victimhood narrative, which has been heavily promoted during the AKP’s 20 years of rule, portrays an ambiguous group—mostly Islamists—who blame Kemalism for their perceived suffering. Today, they are praising and promoting the idea of a new Turkey under Erdoğan’s rule, cherishing the end of the Kemalist period that they see as responsible for the secular state structures that marginalised them for decades while also engaging in neo-Ottoman fantasies that yearn for the glorious imperial past that can be revived under the AKP. Those who are satisfied with the “new” Turkey have legitimised their position by turning a blind eye to the abolition of the separation of powers and the country’s transformation into a mafia-like state through the destruction of the rule of law. As a reaction to the country’s increasing authoritarianism and growing Islamisation, the group identifying as Kemalist or social democrat has felt duty-bound to defend the republic without question. They interpret the legal and human rights violations, the judiciary’s transformation into a tool for protecting the ruling elite, and the regime’s growing authoritarian, nationalist, and religious character as the results of the past 20 years. Consequently, they have avoided critically reflecting on the previous 80 years and have even condemned those who propose such critiques. In this book, we wanted to explore the possibilities beyond this dichotomy, elucidate the pivotal issues, pitfalls, and challenges of the republic throughout its first century under both Kemalist and Erdoğanist regimes, and think collectively on democratic, fair, and peaceful avenues for advancement in Turkey’s future by considering its first 100 years in their totality.

Amid the tensions mentioned, many were curious about how the republic’s centenary celebrations would unfold. However, just before the celebrations began, in February 2023, two major earthquakes struck several provinces in southern Turkey, resulting in over half a million fatalities. In the wake of the government’s inability to provide sufficient rescue services and support to the millions of people affected by the earthquakes,

the political discourse swiftly shifted toward the general and presidential elections held in May 2023. The elections resulted in the re-election of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and his Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) remained the leading party in the parliamentary elections, leaving opposition supporters, almost half of the voters, utterly disappointed. By the time the centenary arrived on 29 October 2023, the official celebrations for the 100th anniversary of the Republic of Turkey were markedly less enthusiastic than even what had been anticipated. The Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), which is fully controlled by the government, had already postponed the entertainment-oriented concerts and shows to a later date in response to the “alarming human tragedy” in Gaza (*TRT 100’üncü Yıl Özel Etkinliklerini ileri bir tarihe erteledi*, 2023). The elaborate flight of 2023 drones and the illuminating display held in Istanbul did not evoke the anticipated level of enthusiasm.

During Turkey’s centennial celebrations, some citizens chose to abstain, driven by anger or resentment towards the first hundred years. Others, despite seeing a significant gap between the current republic and their idealised vision, sought to honour the republic to which they aspired through sombre commemorations and modest civil initiatives. For the latter group, the 100th anniversary of the republic was experienced as a state of limbo. They could not celebrate its existence because its current state fell far short of their ideals, nor could they mourn it since it was not quite dead. While both mourning and melancholia relate to the loss of things people love and value, melancholia differs from mourning in that the individual cannot fully comprehend or consciously recognise the loss. Thus, the 100th anniversary of the republic was experienced as a melancholia rather than a festive celebration, as this state of limbo revealed citizens’ inability to internalise their connection with the lost object—the republic. Towards its centenary year, citizens of Turkey appeared among the angriest (Gallup, 2024), with the lowest positive experiences (Gallup, 2022) in emotional indices, and Turkey has become a country that its youth wish to leave, as is shown by the sharp increase of asylum applications from Turkey in Europe (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2024). The republic, which was established on the premise of protecting the “downtrodden”, has historically exhibited exclusionary and discriminatory policies towards various minority and subaltern groups. This has

occurred alongside it simultaneously defining and enforcing a set of standards or norms that are deemed acceptable, ideal, or desirable for its citizens (e.g. Üstel, 2004; Yilmaz, 2021).

The value of examining the past century of Turkey's history extends beyond the boundaries of regional or area studies. Turkey represents a compelling case study for social scientists of various disciplines on an international level as one of the few countries in which neither democratic institutions have taken sufficient hold, nor autocratic regimes were able to establish themselves completely. The repeated waves of slight democratisation followed by authoritarian backsliding—if not complete autocratisation—provide valuable insights into the fortunes of democracy and autocracy elsewhere in different parts of the world, from India to Brazil, and from Russia to Egypt. Turkey's extensive history of human rights violations, including disappearances under detention, torture, unjust arrests, censorship in the media and academia, and violations of the rights to strikes and protests, serves as a cautionary example for other countries in which the judiciary has lost its independence, democratic principles have eroded, and institutions that should remain independent have come under government control. Acknowledging the long list of atrocities and pogroms against non-Turkish and non-Sunni groups in Turkey may provide an opportunity to gain insight into the nature of prolonged human rights violations and contribute to the evolving discourse on issues of recognition and transitional justice. In light of the accelerated debate on gender and misogynistic, homophobic and transphobic political discourse on a global scale, the powerful and persistent resistance of women and LGBTI+ in the context of increasingly authoritarian Turkey merits particular attention for research purposes. The complex and intertwined issues that have persisted since the establishment of the republic—the deterioration of democratic institutions, shifts towards authoritarianism, violations of minority rights, erosions of the rule of law, and repeated violations of the constitution—are likely to exert a significant influence on Turkey's trajectory over the next century.

THE BOOK PROJECT

The initial and most pivotal factor in facilitating the transformation of our concept into a tangible book project was the project entitled “Turkey Beyond Borders: The Critical Voices, New Perspectives”.¹ We initiated the project in March 2020 with the aim of establishing a platform for scholars from Turkey, whose academic freedoms have been either indirectly or explicitly constrained and violated, to disseminate their knowledge and expertise on Turkey freely. Between 2020 and 2024, the advisory board(s) of the Turkey Beyond Borders project invited 45 colleagues to prepare open-access video lectures, all of which are available with either Turkish or English subtitles. In addition, each lecture was complemented by suggested readings on the topics covered. The topics, too numerous to enumerate in full here, included the Armenian Genocide, the Kurdish question, the feminist movement, the environmental movement, Alevism, LGBTI+ movements, civil–military relations, rising populism, the rule of law, and rising authoritarianism. The Turkey Beyond Borders lectures demonstrated the importance and necessity of continuously addressing Turkey’s taboo issues from different angles, fields, and perspectives.

The second factor was our intention to present an alternative interpretation of the first 100 years of the republic, focusing on issues that have been either overlooked or trivialised. A substantial corpus of new literature (in English as well as Turkish) on Turkey’s centenary has emerged in 2023 and 2024 (e.g. Atılğan, 2024; Balci & Monceau, 2023; Işık et al., 2023; Kubicek, 2024; Özerdem & Öztürk, 2023; Özkeçeci-Taner & Akgül Açıkmeşe, 2023; Yenen & Zürcher, 2023). While all these contributions aim to provide an overview of Turkey’s first 100 years, they have different approaches to accomplishing their aims. Some have specific topics of interest, such as the Kurds (Işık et al., 2023), foreign policy (Özkeçeci-Taner & Akgül Açıkmeşe, 2023), or key ideologies (Bora, 2023) of the republic, while others opt for a chronological timeline (Yenen & Zürcher, 2023) or broader overviews of the politics, economy, society, and culture in Turkey (Balci & Monceau, 2023, Özerdem & Öztürk, 2023; Atılğan, 2024). Although we share the objective of providing an overview of the past 100 years, our approach is issue-based, with a particular focus on events, themes, and topics that have been largely neglected in the

¹ www.turkeybeyondborders.org

majority of recent literature on Turkey's centenary. Rather than focusing on the progress, transformation, or continuities and ruptures in the past 100 years, we identify particular events, themes, or examples that facilitate a more profound understanding of the subjects addressed in this book. This structure enables us to emphasise the intertwined nature of Turkey's key issues and the structural factors that have enabled these recurring and unresolved problems to persist over the past hundred years.

With the then-ongoing Turkey Beyond Borders project and our objective to offer a new perspective on Turkey on its 100th anniversary and beyond, we started the preparations for this edited book in the summer of 2023. As this book was planned as the final product of the Turkey Beyond Borders project, we invited contributors from among those who had already been involved in the project, either in an advisory capacity or as an invited speaker. In January 2024, we organised a two-day workshop in Stockholm with the authors to discuss and debate the main framework of the book in a collective endeavour. Reminding us of the injustices and the structural inequalities we endure, a number of our colleagues were unable to attend the workshop in person due to the confiscation of their passports, the rulings of the Constitutional Court to suspend their return to their academic positions (Bianet English, 2024) and the difficulties imposed on Turkish citizens to obtain Schengen visas. However, they participated in the event virtually, enabling us to engage in thought-provoking dialogue on Turkey's past, present, and future, to provide each other feedback, and collectively establish a framework to discuss Turkey's first 100 years and future. Furthermore, the interactions during the workshop facilitated the identification of common points and dialogue between the topics covered in the individual chapters, highlighting the repetitive and intertwined nature of Turkey's diverse issues.

The book that has emerged from these discussions is deeply rooted in a critical (neo-)Marxist, socialist, and feminist analysis of societal power structures. This approach shapes the themes chosen, emphasises the plight of the marginalised and excluded, and views the state as a violent entity often controlled by and serving the interests of powerful groups and alliances. Consequently, our focus is on subaltern groups, the marginalised, the discriminated against, and the oppressed. We are interested in covering topics that have often been sidelined, undermined or silenced, including but not limited to the Armenian and Dersim genocides, xeno-racism, feminist approaches to sexual morality, queer resistances, environmental movements, ecocide, and the right to the city.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge that our volume is incomplete in that it lacks dedicated chapters on several topics, including animal rights, labour unions, secularisation, freedom of the press, and femicide. It is our sincere hope that these topics will be addressed in future volumes dedicated to modern Turkey.

During the preparation of this book, we invited Aslı Alpar, a gifted artist and dedicated animal rights advocate, to create illustrations for each chapter. Aslı's illustrations have been reviewed by the editors and the authors of the respective chapters. The dialogue between the contributors did not begin or end with the workshop; rather, it continued throughout the entire process of book production. In this edited work, each author also served as a peer reviewer for at least one chapter, thereby facilitating a meticulous and constructive internal review process. We are particularly pleased that the book has been the result of such a collective and collaborative effort.

*The Republic of Turkey and Its Unresolved Issues: 100 Years
and Beyond*

Rather than adhering to a chronological timeline, we opted for a thematic approach and structured the book into four sections. In each section, we focus on the different facets of the foundational problems of the republic. The thematic approach provided valuable insight into how the foundational problems, which remain unresolved, are intertwined and how they will shape the country as it enters its second century. Each chapter and section focuses on a different topic, yet each is also part of the whole book and in dialogue with one another, creating a cohesive narrative.

In the first part, we search for an answer to a very central question: who owns the Republic of Turkey? Since its establishment, the answer to this question of who truly owns the republic has never been inclusive, as the essential characteristic of these “owners” was their belonging to the Turkish and Muslim majority. The new republic's aim of creating a nation-state resulted in the alignment of all ethnic elements in line with “One Nation, One Flag, One Homeland, One State”—the motto of Erdoğan's election campaign. In the years that followed, successive pogroms, massacres, and efforts to Turkify and Islamise evolved into various mechanisms of violence and control targeting different minority groups. Following our introduction, Kerem Öktem examines the evolving dynamics of minority–majority relations in Turkey over the past century

in Chapter 2. Öktem's analysis reveals that the republic has deliberately fostered the growth of a Sunni-Turkish Muslim middle class while simultaneously subjecting non-Muslim minorities and non-Turkish Muslim communities to processes of assimilation, violence, discrimination, and genocide. In Chapter 3, Nazan Maksudyan analyses the role of the Armenian Genocide and its denial as a key element of the structural violence perpetrated by the Republic of Turkey against non-Muslims and non-Turks. Maksudyan argues that the Armenian Genocide is not merely a historical event; rather, its denial serves to perpetuate the victimisation of Armenians, both during periods of massacres and in the context of deceptive peace. In Chapter 4, Pınar Dinç turns her attention to another instance of persistent state-sponsored violence, namely the Dersim Genocide of 1938 and the ongoing state-led destruction of the non-Sunni and non-Turkish communities in Dersim. Dinç's analysis is particularly focused on three key episodes of physical, cultural, and environmental devastation in Dersim, occurring during the 1930s, the 1990s, and the 2010s. In Chapter 5, Bahar Şimşek presents a critical epistemological re-examination of the "Kurdish question" in Turkey and examines the production of counter-hegemonic knowledge about Kurdish lives in Turkey, with a particular emphasis on the concepts of resilience and gender politics. By critically re-examining the interplay between moments of crisis and the corresponding academic and emergent publics, Şimşek proposes a rethinking of the epistemologies of Kurdish lives in light of a non-masculine subject of the Kurdish question. In Chapter 6, Hayal Hanoğlu adopts a transnational perspective in her analysis of Alevis and Alevism. In addition to analysing the oppression, marginalisation, and exclusion of Alevis, Hanoğlu presents an overview of the efforts made by the Alevi diaspora to gain recognition as well as transnational activism in European countries. In Chapter 7, Lülüfer Körükmez presents a challenge to the argument that racism does not exist in Turkey by arguing that racism against non-Muslims and Kurds has been a persistent feature of Turkish society. Körükmez shifts our attention to the rise of xenophobia against refugees in Turkey in the 2010s that is directed not only against Syrians but also against the broader groups of refugees in Turkey.

Part II focuses on understanding how we remember the past and how this changing memory regime(s) shape (re-)imagining the future by exploring how memory is remembered, fractured, and included in the claims for transitional justice and within various social and political movements. The authors of this section highlight the absence of

practices of remembrance and recognition, which are expected to be foundational in a democratic country. In doing so, they also stress the various ways in which denial has been actively reinforced by the state. While underlining the dangers posed by practices of forgetting and denial, this section makes important reminders about the emancipatory power of confronting, witnessing, and remembering, as well as the need to challenge singular narratives of the state's memory regime. In Chapter 8, Göze Orhon opens the section and provides an analysis of the transition of Turkey's memory landscape from monolithic and exclusionary to vibrant and dynamic in the 2000s. Orhon illustrates how memory activism in Turkey has contributed to the emergence of diverse narratives, challenging the dominance of the former monolithic accounts and fostering a shift in perspective. In Chapter 9, Nisan Alıcı shifts the focus of her analysis to encompass not only the remembrance of the Armenian Genocide but also the potential for transitional justice. Alıcı addresses the challenges of comprehensive reconciliation efforts in the context of strong denialism and authoritarianism in Turkey, while also emphasising the persistence of civil society mobilisation, grassroots activism, and international pressure that continue to work towards implementing truth recovery and transitional justice mechanisms. Özgür Sevgi Göral, in Chapter 10 addresses the complex relationship between the state apparatus and the activities, aspirations, and actions of the Kurdish, feminist, and LGBTI+ movements. Göral emphasises the significance of the interactions between these movements, their internal disputes, and the interconnections between the state apparatus and the emancipatory space the movements established.

Part III centres on resistance, exploring a range of examples, from physical spaces of political and social activism to digital struggles. Turkey's history of democracy, often shaped by authoritarian interventions and practices, interrupted by repeated military coups, and transforming into a state of emergency in the last decade, has witnessed numerous resistance movements. In this section, the authors describe the different struggles and their specific characteristics and place them in a broader historical perspective. The discussions of this section highlight the ways these acts of resistance transcend boundaries and generate new forms of struggle. Chapter 11 by Aslı Zengin opens this section by analysing the changing dominant discourses surrounding sexual morality and the cisheteropatriarchal conceptions of "honour". Zengin compares two campaigns by feminist, queer, and trans movements in Turkey to gain insight into the discursive shift towards common morals and decency. In Chapter 12,

Deniz Erkmén analyses the continued perception of protests in Turkey as illegitimate and unacceptable forms of political expression and claim-making. In this context, Erkmén identifies the Gezi protests of 2013 as a pivotal point in the lengthy and intricate history of protests in Turkey. In Chapter 13, Yener Bayramođlu analyses the emergence of queer activism in Turkey, with a particular focus on the post-Gezi protests and the digitalisation of the queer struggle. Bayramođlu puts forth the argument that digital spaces present a novel avenue for the queer movement to raise awareness and forge connections with other groups yet cautions that these spaces are exploited by anti-LGBTI+ groups. In Chapter 14, Cem İskender Aydın and Ethemcan Turhan examine the evolution of environmental conflicts and resistance movements in Turkey. Aydın and Turhan posit that environmental politics is becoming increasingly antagonistic and intersectional, which they argue may be a means of articulating broader societal dissent. The concluding Chapter 15 of this section is authored by Mert Arslanalp, who analyses the governance of large-scale informal urbanisation, which has been pivotal to Turkey's modernisation, to investigate how diverse forms of politics of exception have shaped the relationship between the state and society. Arslanalp scrutinises various state policies and argues that grassroots mobilisations in reaction to Turkey's urban politics have facilitated continued negotiations over the distribution of property.

Part IV focuses on the key structural problems of the republic. In this concluding section, the authors critically examine issues including political economy, higher education, militarism, and foreign policy. This section also offers a unique insight into deep-rooted continuities and transformations in the last hundred years. In Chapter 16, Bengi Akbulut's analysis of the political economy of modern Turkey focuses on recent developments and analyses the developmental regime through the lens of accumulation by dislocation. Akbulut devotes particular attention to the ascendance of extractive industries, including construction, energy, and mining. In Chapter 17, İsmet Akça analyses the manifestations of militarist policies at the outset of the second century of the Turkish Republic. In this chapter, Akça directs attention to the war industry, the militarisation of the Kurdish question, foreign policy, and ideological-cultural militarism, while underscoring the pivotal position of the military within the state structure. In Chapter 18, Serdar Tekin illustrates how emergency powers can serve as pivotal moments for accelerated autocratic transformation, while also elucidating the persisting elements and novel developments

within the present state of the country. Tekin analyses the particular modality of autocratic change over the past decade and, by extension, the structure of the regime that it tends to establish. In Chapter 19, Olga Selin Hünler provides an in-depth analysis of the recurrent purges in higher education since the establishment of the first modern university in Turkey. The chapter elucidates how educational reforms were employed as a means of removing scholars who did not espouse the regime's mainstream ideology. In the final chapter 20, Mühdan Sağlam presents a summary of Turkey's foreign policy during the republic's first century and an analysis of the general dynamics of Turkey-Russia relations from 1923 to 2023. Sağlam analyses the key turning points in the relationship between Turkey and Russia and offers insights into the future trajectory of their bilateral relations.

Because of its stormy political history, Turkey is not always an easy case study for social scientists to discuss and draw clear conclusions about. Often, it is possible to encounter contradictory assertions made for ten-year periods. When trying to understand Turkey, using binaries such as secular-modern versus Islamist-conservative is generally insufficient for analysing the complexity and interweaving of events in the country. In particular, the rapid transformations the country has undergone complicate the arguments on the nature of the regime, democratisation, and fundamental rights, freedoms, and their violation. However, stepping back reveals how these problems have recurred over the past century. At times, as scholars studying Turkey and observing the recurrence of problems such as rising authoritarianism, democratic backsliding, and escalating nationalism and Islamism, we find ourselves grappling not only with theoretical or empirical difficulties but also with emotional challenges like discouragement, hopelessness, and sorrow. Perhaps our way of resisting these sentiments, which are intensified by the oppression and violence surrounding us, lies in our commitment to conducting research and amplifying our voices through both academic and non-academic endeavours. By engaging in rigorous inquiry and fostering discussion, we not only contribute to a deeper understanding of Turkey's complexities but also find prospects for challenging the status quo. This is precisely why we deemed it important and necessary to publish a critical book on the 100th anniversary of the Republic of Turkey and its future. The issues highlighted and emphasised in this book represent only a fraction of a much longer list that needs to be tackled, not only in the context of the past but also in relation to ongoing realities.

There is nevertheless an inspiring resistance in Turkey, with people fighting bravely against the most terrifying oppression and injustice, even in the darkest times, even under the unacceptable and unlawful conditions to which they are subjected. This resilience provides us with a glimmer of hope amid the prevailing gloom. We hope all these persistent efforts serve as a form of resistance against despair, allowing us to transform our frustrations into collective action, advocacy, and hope for a more just and democratic future for all, without leaving anyone behind this time.

Instead of a traditional epilogue, we leave you with an illustration by Aslı Alpar paired with a few lines from Birhan Keskin's poem *Kargo*. This is a fitting final note for the unknown future of the Republic of Turkey, where art and verse meet.

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In *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990, p. 215) bell hooks writes, “true resistance begins with people confronting pain, whether it’s theirs or somebody else’s, and wanting to do something to change it”. We dedicate this book to all the remarkable people who, with admirable determination, resilience, and unwavering integrity, continue their struggle for change and a more just and equal future.

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PART I

Who Owns the Republic of Turkey?



CHAPTER 2

Turkish Supremacy and Its Discontents: Minorities and Majorities in the Turkish Republic

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INTRODUCTION

The Turkish Republic's centenary witnessed several commemorative exhibitions by public and private actors, ranging from the official centennial exhibition of the presidency to the multi-media show "Traces from the Cultural Revolution" of a private foundation. Despite their different ideological points of departure, they had one thing in common: they depicted the Turkish Republic as a secular political regime built on some form of civic nationalism, concurring with Aytürk and Esen's (2022) call for a reckoning with the critical examination of Kemalism that shaped debates about modern Turkey since the 1990s. Yet, Turkish secularism has been selective and uneven in its implementation, while Turkish nationalism, like many other European nationalisms, has been shaped by ethnic, racial, and religious concerns as much as by seemingly more inclusive civic ideas expressed in first-order discourses like the constitution or citizenship laws and in pronouncements geared towards international audiences, where a language of inclusivity belied differential strategies of inclusion and exclusion (Yeğen, 1999). Together with nationalism, secularism in Turkey has served as the foundational discourse of domination that allowed for the almost complete excision of the three officially recognised non-Muslim "Lausanne" minorities (Oran 2003), the Greeks, the Armenians, and the Jews,¹ as well as the forceful assimilation, the colonialist domination (Zeydanlioğlu, 2008), and at times the differentiated ethnic cleansing of non-Turkish Muslim communities. As a consequence, Turkey has been from its inception, and is today, an "ethnocracy" (Anderson 2016, Yiftachel, 2006), i.e. a regime of government or rule by an ethnic group over others, in which the dominant group is privileged in terms

¹ The Süryani or Assyrian Christians of the Tur Abdin region in Southeast Anatolia were not mentioned explicitly in the Lausanne Treaty and the related literature, yet they were subjected to a comparable policy mix of discrimination and destruction. During the war against the Kurds in the 1980s, many community members were killed and most Süryani villages were evacuated, while their residents fled to Istanbul and Europe, particularly to Sweden and Germany, establishing what have now become influential diaspora communities. A return movement since the 2000s has led to the resettlement of some of these villages with Süryani families.

of access to positions of state power and the rights of citizenship are distributed very unevenly.²

In this chapter, I examine the larger political and discursive context of the ethnocratic regime that has governed minority policies in the Turkish Republic. My focus is on state policies toward those groups and individuals that have been considered outside the boundaries of Turkishness since the republic's inception. Looking at minorities and the state policies towards them allows us to engage with a range of issues from the inclusivity of a political regime and the provisions and limits of citizenship to the repertoires of contestation and resistance in Turkey. It tells us as much about minorities as about the self-understanding and power of those who consider themselves as the majority, and as owners of the state. Hence, it gives us clues about where and among which ethno-religious groups political power is located and where state power lies. Finally, it allows us to grasp how notions like race, class, and gender intersect with projects of nation-building and nation-state policies. While the case is Turkey, many of the themes discussed here are relevant for more or less all nation-states, and particularly for countries like Germany and Israel where, as in Turkey, a larger genocidal framework complicates the past, present, and future of minorities, democracy, and inclusivity.

To engage with these questions, I first posit Turkishness, in the sense employed by Barış Ünlü (2018), as the core dispositive that creates majorities and minorities and regulates the relations of supremacy and alterity between them. I then examine state policies towards non-Muslim minorities (and their contestation) in more detail, which intended, above all, to bring to an end their presence within the Turkish Republic, starting with the Lausanne Treaty and the exchange of populations, and with the Armenian Genocide as a continued condition operating just below the surface (see Maksudyan's chapter in this book). I then focus on communities that are considered Muslim, at least in principle, but are not identified as Turkish, and inquire into their differential experiences ranging from conditional inclusion through assimilation to denial and ethnic cleansing.

² While Yiftachel's extensive work on ethnocracy deals specifically with Israel, comparable exclusive arrangements based on race, ethnicity, and culture (if less on gender) are at work in all European "liberal" democracies and, of course, in the racial power structures of the United States.

REMEMBERING ATATÜRK AND AYIA EFIMIA

To illustrate the issues at stake, I begin with two ethnographic vignettes, one from the centenary celebrations of the Turkish Republic in October/November 2023 and another from fieldwork carried out in the Greek community of Kadıköy, a central district of metropolitan Istanbul, around the same time. The Commemoration Day of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, held on 10 November annually, constituted the culmination of a packed calendar of events celebrating the Turkish Republic's centenary on 29 October 2023. These celebrations took place in an environment of deepening autocratic consolidation and Islamist neoliberalism that is paradigmatically opposed to the tenets of the secularly connoted Kemalist Republic. The AKP regime therefore tweaked their commemorative events towards the future and notions of Turkish military strength (see Akça's chapter in this book), emphasising the continuity between republican and AKP rule as the "Century of Turkey" (*Türkiye Yüzyılı*). Yet, celebrations and especially commemorations of Atatürk were also planned by the (Turkish) opposition. Festivals, marches, and vigils organised by municipalities governed by the Republican People's Party (CHP) hence served a double goal and were as much about celebrating the achievements of the republic as they were manifestations against the Erdoğan regime. In Istanbul alone, hundreds of thousands showed up to vigils and human chains led by the CHP.

TV channels of the mainstream opposition dedicated their entire day's programming to the commemoration of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The breakfast programme of Halk TV (People's TV), one of the most influential opposition outlets, ran the Twitter/X hashtag "*Mahcubuz*", i.e. "We are embarrassed/ashamed..." Ismail Küçükkaya, the host and celebrated media anchor, suggested that the Turkish Republic was a major historical achievement that laid the foundations of modern Turkey and "made us what we are", but that the country's current state under the AKP was an embarrassment and an insult to the memory of Atatürk. He then encouraged viewers to use the hashtag to share with the audience what they longed for concerning republican Turkey. Later in the show, he read out some of the tweets he found most appropriate for the occasion. Many viewers tweeted about how they cherished the achievements of the republic and its policies based on what they referred to as "scientific decision-making", "rational thinking", and "humanity" as opposed to the Islamist policies, nepotism, and corruption of the AKP regime.

They expressed that they longed for more democratic politics, a better education system, a more equal distribution of wealth, and generally a less polarised society, in which “people trusted and could rely on each other”. Others simply indicated that they were longing for Atatürk, his genius, and his leadership, and for the “better times”, which they specifically associated with his term in office and more generally with the years before the AKP’s rise to power in 2002.

The second vignette is an excerpt from an interview with the board member of the “Foundation of the Churches, Schools, and Cemetery of the Kadıköy Rum Community” (*Kadıköy Rum Ortodoks Cemaati Kiliseleri Mektepleri Ve Mezarlığı Vakfı*) Yorgos Stefanopoulos, which I conducted in August 2023 at the Aya Efimia church. A Professor Emeritus of Electrical Engineering at Bosphorus University and former chair of the same Foundation, Prof. Stefanopoulos is arguably the most prominent member of the Greek community of Kadıköy. The community has around 300 members, most of whom are well above retirement age. Throughout his life, he has witnessed and survived several acts of anti-minority policies, mass violence, and atrocities orchestrated by the Turkish state, from the September Pogroms of 1955 to the expulsion of Greek passport holders in 1964. Since then, he has been at the forefront of organising Greek community life in the district and reaching out to the Muslim majority.

He emphasised that the community has much suffered from state policies, but that now, it has ceased to attract scrutiny from the authorities:

So few of us are left, they [i.e. the Turkish state] have finally stopped bothering us. We have become so few that we are too insignificant to be considered even as enemies. It is almost like we don’t exist anymore.

These two vignettes lead us to two insights that are central to the question of how majorities and minorities have fared in the Turkish Republic. The Twitter users on the morning show of Halk TV may be wary about the prospects of further autocratisation and Islamisation under President Erdoğan. Still, they uniformly and proudly claim a republican history, which they believe was better, more hopeful, and more inclusive for women, secular Muslims, and Alevis, and also for sexual minorities. They, and the hundreds of thousands of participants of the anniversary events—many of them staged in Kadıköy—expressed their views by waving Turkish flags, proudly intoning the “Hundredth-year march” by

rapper Norm Ender,³ or by solemnly visiting the Atatürk Mausoleum in Ankara. They could mobilise the entire repertoire of Turkey's Kemalist nation-building project and its symbols, even if some of them, including the Turkish flag, have now become contested and redefined as symbols of the AKP's Islamist nation-building project. This is why many Turkish flags waved at these manifestations were slightly modified and sport an integrated portrait of Atatürk. In this way, supporters of the Kemalist Republic distinguish themselves from the current Islamist "owners" of the Turkish state, who imagine a republic legitimised by Islamic references and purged of its secular-modernist Kemalist heritage.

The crucial observation here is that the commemorating secular Turks have something to look back to which they believe belongs to them, which is benign and welcoming, an era in which they were in control, in short, a secular "golden age". At the same time, of course, they also mourn the loss of their status as privileged owners of the Turkish state. People who identify with the AKP regime believe that the same symbols and the institutions of the state now finally represent them, after decades of perceived exclusion from state power. Now, they have the confidence to act as the owners of the Turkish state. In contradistinction, Prof. Stephanopoulos looks back to a history of state-orchestrated repression, and structural and manifest violence that has reduced his once-thriving community of hundreds of thousands of Greeks in Istanbul to a couple of thousand mostly elderly survivors, and barely 300 Greeks in Kadıköy.

³ There were several centennial marches, one commissioned by the state after a national competition, and several individual efforts by singers and songwriters. The highly eclectic composition "Shine" (*Parla*) by rapper Norm Ender turned out to be the most listened to, followed by a work of the pop icon of the 2000s, Tarkan, and the official march commissioned by the Presidency. Another was a composition by Fazıl Say, a performer and composer of classical music. All marches mimic the musical conventions of early republican Turkish marches and celebrate Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and an abstract idea of the "republic" as a transhistorical good. What they also have in common, however, is that they have failed to inspire much enthusiasm. The two official videos of Ender's *Parla* had about 10 million combined YouTube viewers, while Mabel Matiz, a queer songwriter and singer released his single "*Karakol*" (Police Station) on a gay love story in the same year to a YouTube audience of over 45 million.

THE TURKISHNESS CONTRACT AND NON-MUSLIM COMMUNITIES AFTER THE LAUSANNE TREATY: GENOCIDAL FRAME AND STRATEGIES OF SURVIVAL

How can we explain these two opposed trajectories of memory? And more importantly, how can Turks remember the republic as a mostly positive achievement, while Greeks or Kurds cannot? Barış Ünlü gives one obvious answer in his important 2018 book on the “Turkishness Contract”. His approach is shaped by his engagement with post-colonial and whiteness studies and the central “dispositive” of “white privilege” in organising societal power in the United States and Europe as well as in their former colonies. In the Turkish case, he argues, the equivalent of the “whiteness contract” is the “Turkishness Contract” with its precondition of “Muslimness”. During the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and especially in the decade ranging from the Balkan Wars to World War I and the Greek-Turkish War, a consensus emerged among Muslims in today’s Turkey.

In the entirety of this consensus and partnership were two basic provisos that, though unwritten, were known to all: (1) to live a secure and privileged life in Anatolia, one had to be a Muslim; and (2) no one is to tell the truth about what was done and will be done to non-Muslims, no one is to sympathize with them or engage in politics on their behalf (Ünlü, 2023, pp. 95–96).

The Lausanne Treaty, which stipulated the exchange of “Muslims in Greece” with “Orthodox Christians in Turkey” is a case of the first proviso. Aslı Iğsız (2018) refers to the Greek-Turkish population exchange as a case of “segregative biopolitics”—a policy of conflict resolution and nation-building based on the racial and cultural unmixing of peoples (cf. Hirschon, 2023)—thereby also reminding us of the ideological and factual proximity of Muslim/Turkish nationalism with the Middle East’s second “European nationalism”, i.e. Zionism and its quest to create an exclusively Jewish state in Palestine. The denial of and the refusal to sympathise with the fate of non-Muslims in the late empire has been most pronounced concerning the Armenian Genocide. Fatma Müge Göçek (2016) shows how this denialism and inability to empathise with the suffering of their non-Muslim compatriots preceded the formation of a Muslim-Turkish political identity by a century.

After the foundation of the Turkish Republic and its preference for secular ethno-racial definitions of Turkishness, this arrangement was transposed into a “Turkishness Contract”, where both provisos were sustained: Muslimness remained the precondition for becoming a Turk, and for gaining full citizenship rights as “owners of the state”. This meant that non-Muslim groups were categorically denied the right to equal citizenship. They were subjected to a range of state policies—often involving mass violence mobilising local populations (Astourian & Kévorkian, 2020)—that reminded the non-Muslim minorities of the larger genocidal frame within which their existence in the Turkish Republic was sometimes tolerated and sometimes not.

Structural violence against non-Muslim communities—Greek, Armenian, and Jewish—was very much built into the legal and administrative apparatus of the Turkish Republic and its minority regimes (Akgönül 2013). Members of these communities were denied equal access to education and employment opportunities, and they were subjected to discrimination by state agencies. Everyday interactions with the “majority society” were also fraught with inequalities and discriminating behaviour. Non-Muslims were constructed as Turkish society’s definitive “others” and “internal foreigners” but never as equal citizens (Millas, 2004). From the perspective of Turkey’s political elites, whether Kemalist or, after the 1950s, right-wing nationalists, Islamists, or Socialists, non-Muslims did not belong in Turkey. This implicit state paradigm was all the more relevant, as the project of a homogenous Turkish Muslim nation had not fully materialised after the collapse of the empire and the War of Independence. Due to the provisions of the Lausanne Treaty, Greeks in Istanbul and the two Aegean islands of Imbros and Tenedos (Gökçeada and Bozcaada) in the Northern Aegean were exempted from the population exchange. Armenian communities that had survived the genocide still existed in Anatolia. Jewish communities were thriving in the Aegean as well as in all major cities until 1948 and to a lesser extent also after the foundation of the State of Israel. As in Israel, where after the Nakba—the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in the same year—significant Palestinian communities remained in what was to become Israel proper, historical contingency made the creation of a purely “Muslim state” in Anatolia unachievable in the short run. The objective of minimising the non-Muslim communities to the point of erasure, however, became one of the unwritten if foundational objectives of the republic.

These structural conditions of discrimination and exclusion were further aggravated in times of crisis when non-Muslim communities were physically targeted by state policies and sometimes by mass violence orchestrated by agents or collaborators of the state. The pogroms in 1934 against the Jewish communities of Thrace that led to their mass emigration to Istanbul are the first in a long list of instances of violence against non-Muslim minorities. The wealth tax followed in 1942 with the outward aim of preventing war profiteering but was in reality launched to transfer non-Muslim property and capital to the emerging Muslim-Turkish bourgeoisie. The September Pogroms of 1955 were initially connected to the Cyprus conflict and directed at the country's Greeks, but they quickly turned against all non-Muslim communities and led to widespread sexualised violence, as well as the loss of lives, livelihoods, and property (Güven, 2005). The Greek community was further devastated by the expulsion of Greek passport holders in 1964, which led to the exodus of more than 60,000 Greeks with their roots in Istanbul (Özer, 2023; Grigoriadis 2021; Örs, 2018; Yücel, 2016).

The combined effect of these conditions and policies effectively reduced Turkey's non-Muslim communities. Today, the Greek community can barely keep open their more than 80 churches and dozens of cemeteries and schools. The arrival in Istanbul of Arabic speakers of the Greek Orthodox rite from Hatay has only led to a limited reinvigoration of community life (Rigas, 2018). The Armenian community of Istanbul counts almost 50,000 members, with many more who claim Armenian origin but who have been raised as Turkish or Kurdish Muslims. Yet, precisely due to these larger numbers and their relative visibility in the Turkish political field, Armenians continue to be targets of discrimination by state agencies as well as by right-wing nationalist groups collaborating with the state. One particularly brutal culmination of this implicit regime that governs relations between the Turkish state and the Armenian community was the murder, in broad daylight, of the prominent journalist and civil rights activist Hrant Dink in 2007, whose longing for a more inclusive country at peace with itself and its people reached well beyond the confines of his own community. Turkey's Jews went through comparable experiences of discrimination and migration, with the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948 constituting the most important rupture. Today's community consists of less than 20,000 members in Istanbul and Izmir and has to negotiate a virulent anti-Semitism (Öktem & Yosmaoğlu,

2022) that has been further aggravated by Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the genocidal destruction of Gaza in 2024.

Despite this context of relentless discrimination, Armenians, Greeks, and Jews were never solely the victims of the Turkish state, but also resistant and resilient actors who invested in the cultural and spiritual lives of their communities. Lerna Ekmekçiöğlü (2016) reconstructs how Armenian Feminists continued to shape their communities even after the genocide. The Greek community's dedication to its institutions and to the idea of ensuring the survival of a "*polites*" (i.e. residents of Constantinople) identity that establishes a symbolic link with the founders of the city has already been mentioned. Hrant Dink's activism for a more inclusive future of Turkey as a country of its citizens during the relatively hopeful years of Turkey's accession negotiations with the European Union in the early 2000s was probably the most daring example of non-Muslim subjecthood in Turkey. That it ended with his assassination in 2007, by a young man with obvious connections to Turkey's security apparatus, reminds us of the razor-sharp limits of non-Muslim subjecthood in Turkey.

NON-TURKISH MUSLIM MINORITIES AND THEIR TRAJECTORIES TOWARDS TURKISHNESS: ASSIMILATION AND INCLUSION VS. DENIAL AND ETHNIC CLEANSING

For non-Turkish Muslim communities, the "Turkishness Contract" worked differently, and at times in a more benign fashion. It offered a trajectory of inclusion, albeit narrow, by assimilation. Muslim refugees from the Balkans or the Caucasus were generally welcome and eventually considered Turks, as long as they demonstrated their acceptance of the narrative of Turkishness including the denial of violence against non-Muslims. As many brought with them the experience of mass violence inflicted on them by Christian nation-states and empires, opting for the foundational narrative of the Turkish nation-state was an almost natural choice, particularly as many arriving Muslim refugees benefited from the dispossession of the indigenous non-Muslim communities. This assimilationist inclusion also applied to smaller non-Turkish Muslim communities, particularly in the Black Sea region, which were able to hold on to their language and customs at home while they performed a robust version of Turkishness in public. Sağlam (2022) and Dönmez (2022)

examine the Greek-speaking communities of the Eastern Black Sea region that continue to speak *Romeyka*, a Pontic Greek dialect, in intimate settings while embodying an often virulently Turkish nationalist and statist identity in public.

Assimilation was much less of an option for the two largest, and partly overlapping, indigenous minorities of Alevis and Kurds. Turkish-speaking Alevis, despite widespread religious prejudice among the Sunni Muslim majority and waves of state-led Sunni proselytism, especially since the 1950s, could benefit from the republic's ideological framework of relative secularism. The highest echelons of administrative and military decision-making remained, however, mostly inaccessible to them. By contrast, Turkey's Kurds were forcibly denied as a group and subjected to a colonial regime of subordination. With the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925 and the Dersim Genocide of 1937–8 (Dargin, 2023; Dinç, 2021, see Dinç's chapter in this book), anti-Kurdish racism was incorporated into the foundations of the early republic. Racist frames structured official Turkey's interaction with Kurds throughout the republic, coupled with assimilationist pressures and selective integration (see Körükmez's chapter in this book). However, despite state denial, oppression, and assimilation, Kurds never ceased to be the majority population in most of the country's eastern and southeastern provinces. In consequence, the Turkish state failed to completely subdue Kurdish identity-based political movements. In the 1980s, this resilience took the form of a military uprising with the guerrilla war launched by the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK, *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*), and in response, large-scale ethnic cleansing, war, and destruction by the military and the state's security agencies. Many Kurds, especially after migration to western Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s, were forcibly assimilated, but many others resisted. The use of Kurdish in the family continued and many refused to be fully subjected to the provisions of the Turkishness Contract. More recently, young Kurds born in the cities of western Turkey have been rediscovering their Kurdish origins and language, and are frequently politicised through the Kurdish movement and because of enduring anti-Kurdish racism and violence (Alemdaroğlu and Göçek 2023).

Meanwhile, in the 2000s, municipalities governed by pro-Kurdish mayors became, for the first time in Turkey's history, the stage of a counter-hegemonic political project of autonomy in which a compelling alternative was offered to the "Turkishness Contract". In Diyarbakır's Sur

district, Mayor Abdullah Demirbaş introduced a policy of multiculturalism and multilingualism, providing municipal services in Kurdish and Turkish, and making the city's historical languages like Armenian and Syriac visible in the public space. Considering the genocidal history of Turkey and the Kurdish-populated provinces, the appearance of Armenian letters on street signs and the town hall of Sur was nothing short of revolutionary. It was also in this period that Turkey's only memorial for the victims of the Armenian Genocide was inaugurated in the same district. Together with the movement represented by Hrant Dink and the *Agos* newspaper for more inclusive political arrangements for Turkey's minorities and majority, the Kurdish movement's municipalities in the 2000s emerged as inspiring alternatives to the hegemonic ideology of Turkishness and its by then Islamist-nationalist reincarnation. But just as with Dink's claim for equal citizenship, this Kurdish experiment of an inclusive counter-hegemonic proposal was brutally terminated with the removal from office and incarceration of most Kurdish mayors after the coup attempt of 2016 and the subsequent re-securitisation of the Kurdish movement in 2019. Today there is no trace of Armenian or Assyrian in the public space of Diyarbakir and only very little Kurdish.⁴ The genocidal fame has been re-established successfully.

IS THERE A FUTURE BEYOND TURKISHNESS?

So far, I have explored the “dispositive” that governed the regime of assimilation or exclusion of minorities who were either subsumed under the rubric of Turkishness or excluded from the right to live in Turkey unharmed. This citizenship regime was shaped by the arrangements, existing communities, and conditions of the first century of the Turkish Republic and its place in the global order. Many of these structural factors have changed in the meantime. The Turkishness Contract in its original version may be facing its expiry date.

First, the Islamist political elites of the Justice and Development Party (AKP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) have systematically re-interpreted Turkishness through the lens of political Islam and made autocracy and conservative social politics core values of their political project. While

⁴ Abdullah Demirbaş, the architect of the non-Turkish renaissance of the Sur district, was removed from office in 2009 and imprisoned due to his support for the Kurdish movement. He was released for medical reasons but had to leave the country.

the beneficiaries of the Turkishness Contract used to be the secular and Kemalist middle classes and partly members of the Alevi community, today full membership in the body politic requires not only nominal but more or less publicly visible membership in the congregation of Muslim believers. The new contract, in line with equivalents in Russia for instance, also excludes non-religiously oriented women and members of LGBTI+ communities who are dismissed as non-national, with the “national” here signifying not so much the ethnic community of Turks but the imagined ummah of all Muslim believers. Notwithstanding Turkishness remaining a central and preferred category within this arrangement, the re-orientation towards Islam as a central organising category for society has made it somewhat easier for conservative Kurds and members of other minorities to feel accepted and share in the spoils of the AKP power project without having to deny their ethnic background, while it continued to exclude forcefully secular socialist sections of Kurdish society. At the same time, this re-orientation has deeply unsettled the secular Turkish middle classes, who face a massive loss in social and cultural capital and experience as a major humiliation their progressive exclusion from the privilege of Turkishness.

Second, some communities have now almost disappeared while new ones have arrived. In the urban landscape of metropolitan Istanbul, with more than 16 million inhabitants, the old non-Muslim communities have become numerically, politically, and to a large extent also culturally insignificant (cf. Fisher-Onar et. al., 2018; Kaymak, 2017). The historic core of Istanbul is still home to hundreds of churches, synagogues, schools, and examples of the vernacular architecture of Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, as well as their cemeteries, and the *Aghiasma/Ayazma* (Holy Springs) of the Greek Orthodox Church. Yet increasingly, they have ceased serving the needs of their original communities and instead cater either to the needs of newly arriving Orthodox communities or serve as canvasses for multicultural *mis-en-scènes* aimed at culturally interested cosmopolitans. To give an example, a young woman I met in the small chapel of a former Greek restaurant in Moda (a neighbourhood of Kadıköy) was in the process of lighting a candle, which she justified by referring to a “multicultural past”: “Whenever I come to Koço, I also go down to the Ayazma here, and I always light a candle. It’s nice to be here, it’s mystical. It’s part of Istanbul’s multicultural past”.

Istanbul’s (and Turkey’s) multicultural present and future are indeed different, shaped by the large movements of flight and migration of

communities especially from Syria and the Muslim Middle East, but also from Africa, from the Turkic republics of Central Asia, as well as from Russia and Ukraine. Yet neither the Islamist elites of the AKP, nor the different opposition parties nor the Post-Post Kemalists for that matter, have elaborated serious propositions on how to think about citizenship and the relationship between minorities and majorities that could reach beyond the narrow confines of the Turkishness Contract and its devastating effects on Turkey's society. The sole exception here is the political wing of the Kurdish movement, currently represented by the Party for the Equality of People and Democracy (DEM), which stands in the tradition of an inclusive and secular model of equal citizenship and minority rights but is securitised by the state and selectively marginalised by Turkey's political establishment.

It would not be unreasonable to expect that Muslim immigrants are the more likely candidates for assimilation into the Turkish body politic, while non-Muslims will face much higher burdens, yet this is not an incontrovertible fact. The former tacit agreement that Muslim immigrants could become Turks as long as they demonstrated a willingness to assimilate was limited to refugees from the Balkans and the Caucasus and may not be extended to Muslims from Africa, the Middle East, or Afghanistan. Their rising numbers are now widely seen as a threat to social peace in Turkey. Existing discriminatory arrangements of inclusion and exclusion for "old" non-Muslim minorities will fade away only very slowly and may even outlive some of the communities in question. There are also no indications that equal citizenship is a prospect for Kurds and Alevi in the foreseeable future. Yet societies are never quite as foreseeable and legible as states would like them to be, and new immigrants may eventually question the definitions of Turkishness from within. In multicultural neighbourhoods in the margins of metropolitan Istanbul like Beylikdüzü, as well as in all other larger cities in Turkey, the identity proposal of Muslim Turkishness is only one among many other communities ranging from Syrians to African and Central Asian communities. For now, however, Muslim Turkishness continues to be the only identity proposal tied to state power and the privilege of the majority, coupled with a lack of policies of inclusion and integration on the one side and rising anti-immigrant sentiment expressed through racist idioms on the other.

CONCLUSION

Mobilising insights from debates on “ethnocracy” and Barış Ünlü’s “Turkishness Contract”, I discussed why the Kemalist middle classes, who have celebrated the centennial of the republic in 2023 and their intellectual representatives, the Post-Post Kemalists, have a history to look back to with nostalgic longing (as well as a present that they face with trepidation). In contrast, Yorgo Stefanopoulos is overseeing the final demise of his community while Kurds and Alevi have to endure a state that continues to disenfranchise them and a majority society that withholds from them recognition and shows them little sympathy. The minority regime that emerged out of the late Ottoman Empire, the War of Independence, and the early republic was unforgiving and meant to be genocidal for non-Muslim minorities (Öktem, 2020). For all others, it opened differentiated if narrow gateways into Turkishness which, if taken, allowed Kurds, Laz, Bosniaks, Albanians, and others to live as more or less respected Turkish citizens. Any resistance to this assimilationist model, however, led to immediate retribution and repeated episodes of state violence that can only be understood within the framework of the larger genocidal constitution of the Turkish Republic.

The nation-state almost anywhere is based on arrangements that apportion power to a privileged ethnic or religious group. The specific arrangements may differ, but at a closer look converge in their determination to keep certain groups in power and others in submission, always also intersecting with other structures of domination like class and gender. They range from the assimilationist calls for a “*Leitkultur*” of ethnic Germans with a Christian heritage in Germany,⁵ to the “values of the Republic” in France that are reserved almost exclusively for White French speakers, to the requirement to be ethnically and religiously Jewish in Israel to enjoy full citizenship rights. The extent to which “others” in a given polity are treated decently depends—in addition to the severity of such arrangements—on the depth of democracy, the autonomy of institutions, and the level of human rights. Turkey has never fared very well on any of these indicators, but like many other nation-states, it combined

⁵ Throughout the genocidal destruction of Gaza in 2024, another aspect of this “leading culture” emerged: to be German, one now needs not only to be part of the white German nation and acknowledge German guilt in the Holocaust but also deny the genocidal destruction of Gaza and the oppression of the Palestinian people.

inclusive policies allowing for assimilation into the privileges of Turkishness for some with exclusionary policies ranging from ethnic cleansing to genocidal destruction for others. The Turkish case resonates with countries like Israel and Germany, where the self-aggrandisement of the majority and the exclusion and inclusion of minorities occurred within a larger genocidal context and where alterity has been handled with a frame of governance that ensured the power of the privileged group. There is little doubt that the contestation over this privilege will be at the heart of societal struggles in Turkey as well as in other nation-states that are now witnessing the shattering of the myths of their imagined homogenous nations.

Note on Ethics Informed consent was obtained from research participants for their participation and the publication of their statements, either anonymously or, if specified, with their name and institutional affiliation.

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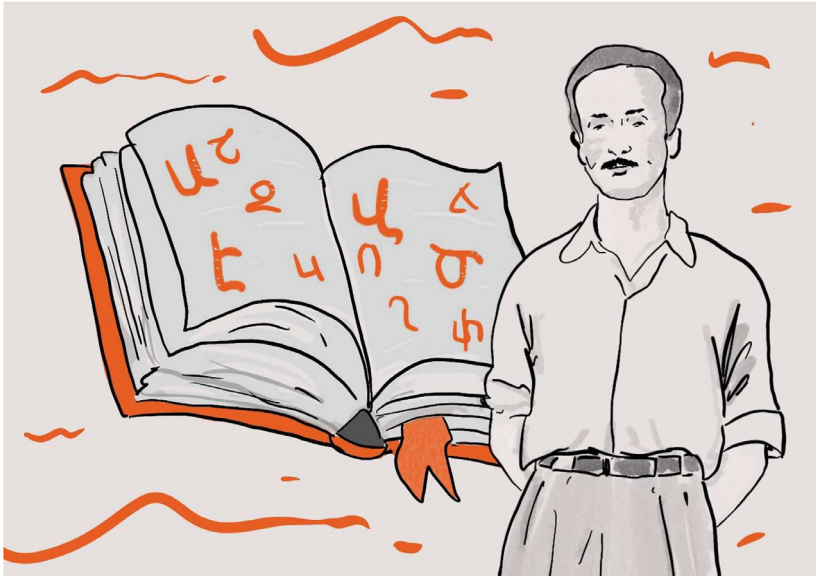




CHAPTER 3

Crime and Non-punishment: Legacies of Genocide and Denial in Turkey

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INTRODUCTION

The Armenian genocide and its denial is the element by which one can best define the “spirit” of the Republic of Turkey. The living and permanent spectre of a terrible crime against humanity, and the fact that the perpetrators went unpunished (that they “got away with it”), shaped the future role of communities as a code of (un)ethics in society (Maksudyan, 2018, 2021). In this framework, the Muslim Turks re-established their status as the “ruling nation” (colonisers) of the country, while the “indigenous peoples”—namely Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, and others—were massacred, expelled from their homes, forced to leave the country, dispossessed of their property, or remained as unequal and unwanted citizens of the new republic, constantly victimised by denial. This chapter discusses how the last hundred years of post-genocide republican history are full of re-enacted moments of structural violence against non-Muslims and non-Turks, both in deceptively peaceful times and when routine relations break down during massacres and pogroms.

I base my analysis on three novels by Zaven Biberyan (1921–1984), written around the fiftieth anniversary of the Armenian genocide (1965), which provide an invaluable account of structural injustices in post-genocide Turkey.¹ Biberyan, born in Istanbul in 1921, was a critical Armenian intellectual and great novelist who resisted genocide denial and fought for the equality of non-Muslims in Turkey from the 1940s to the 1970s. In a famous article in the progressive newspaper *Nor Lour* (New News), “Enough is Enough” (1946), Biberyan confronted genocide denialism and attacks against Armenians. It should be noted that Biberyan’s fight against denial was unique at that time and was the first in the public arena. Aware of his bold and unique position, he wrote in his fragmented autobiography, written in French in the 1960s and 70s, that one could not find “a freer Armenian than himself in this country” (*un Arménien plus libre que moi dans ce pays*) (Biberyan, 2019b, p. 117). This led to his imprisonment, after which he went into exile in Beirut for several years. In the following four subsections—the hostage situation, dystopic state surveillance, palimpsests of violence, and anticipated

¹ *The Slut* [Lgrdadze] (Armenian, 1959, Istanbul); *Penniless Lovers* [Angoudi Siraharner] (Armenian, 1962, Istanbul); and *The Sunset of the Ants* [Mrchiunnerou Verchalouyse] (Armenian, serialised, 1970, Istanbul).

catastrophe—I address the legacies of genocide and denial in Turkish Republican history through a non-exhaustive overview of both historical and contemporary cases.

HOSTAGE SITUATION

State strategies of institutional and legal eradication meant the transformation of once autonomous Ottoman *millet*s into mere “minorities” in the 1920s. Just like all other non-Muslim communities, the Armenian community was deprived of their previously acquired organisational and representative rights. Participatory and autonomous community structures were completely undermined by republican regulations and policies, such as the abolition of the Constitution (*Nizamname*) of 1863 and the enforced renunciation of the communal rights originally granted by the Treaty of Lausanne. The community also lost control over its administrative and financial means as a result of certain articles of the Settlement Law (*İskan Kanunu*) and the Law of Pious Foundations (*Vakıflar Kanunu*). Juridical injustices took many forms when Armenians wanted to obtain permission to repair damaged buildings, to open schools, and to reclaim their occupied (so-called “abandoned”) properties.²

The republic was not only reluctant to safeguard ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences, it deliberately attacked the physical, cultural, and political existence of non-Muslims and non-Turks (see Öktem’s chapter in this book). The official victory of the Turkish forces and the Smyrna Disaster renewed genocidal fears and forced the non-Muslims (most of them survivors) to leave the country immediately (Maksudyan, 2023, p. 237). Between October and December 1922, approximately 50,000 non-Muslims fled Istanbul in a state of terror (Alexandris, 1992, p. 82; Ekmekçioğlu, 2016, pp. 82–83; Suciyan, 2016, p. 47). Those who could not leave, or who half-heartedly decided to stay, were effectively hostages (Suciyan, 2016, Maksudyan, 2023). The Armenians who remained in Turkey were well aware that they were entirely unwanted and merely “step-citizens” (Ekmekçioğlu, 2014). Silence was part of the “contract” that was agreed between the state and the Patriarchate in 1922. Absolute

² Ottoman and Turkish authorities and local Muslims summarily seized many non-Muslim properties during the First World War and in the course of the genocide, including hundreds of buildings and land owned by the patriarchates (monasteries, chapels, and churches), religious endowments, and private individuals.

and eternal submission to the authorities was the price Armenians agreed to pay for living under siege in their homeland. This “hostage situation” translated into the authority and superiority of the Turks vis-à-vis the powerlessness and inferiority of the Armenians (Björklund, 2003).

A typical case from the 1920s is the Turkish-Armenian Ascent Association (*Türk-Ermeni Teali Cemiyeti*), founded on 24 October 1922, with the essentially denialist goals of building “openness and friendship” between Armenians and Turks and supporting the activities of the Ankara government (Şekeryan, 2020). The association was quite active during the Lausanne Conference, sending telegrams to the Turkish delegation praising İsmet Pasha and publishing pamphlets that adopted the official denialist arguments that the mass deportation and murder of Armenians was legitimate in the face of Armenian treachery. These “Turkophile” or “loyalist” Armenians (Ekmekçioğlu, 2016), such as Berç Keresteciyan and Harutyun Mosdıçyan, became the first publicly visible hostages of the denialist state apparatus. Armenian businessmen and journalists also followed suit, supporting the view that Armenians remaining in Turkey must remain “loyal” to the Turkish state and distance themselves from demands for justice. Community leaders and religious authorities enforced and encouraged the silence and obedience of all Armenians through strategies of hiding their existence and becoming invisible in society at large. In other words, there was no way to exist in Turkey without being part of the denial (Suciyan, 2016).

Zaven Biberyan’s analysis of Istanbul’s Armenian community in the 1950s and 1960s reflects these communal dynamics at play. A harsh critic of Armenian community leaders and spokespersons throughout his literary and journalistic career, Biberyan argued that the recognised leadership of the community was a puppet in the hands of the government, regardless of who was in power (Biberyan, 2019a [1970], p. 362). Progressive politics should therefore challenge not only the denialism of the state but also the internalised subordination of the community. Both Sur in *Penniless Lovers* (1962) and Baret in *The Sunset of Ants* (1970), two young men representing the first generation of Armenians born after the genocide, criticise the enforced indifference, silence, reclusion, and incapacity of their parents and their community in the face of continued violence, discrimination, and denial. In all Biberyan novels, Armenian families are defined by intergenerational strife, serious disagreements, and mistrust. The younger generation despises the older generation for their pettiness, cowardice, docility, and complicity, while the older generation

fears the boldness of their children. In *Penniless Lovers*, Sur is very critical of his father, whom he thinks is as bad as any uniformed officer. While the officers look for the slightest reason to target him, his own father would undoubtedly side with the state rather than his own son (Biberyan, 2017 [1962], p. 167). The younger generation's right to resist, to criticise, and not to abide was not only curbed by the state but also by their silenced parents and community.

There are countless examples of the Armenian community's continued "loyalty" to the state in the 2000s as well. For example, in 2001, while the French parliament was discussing a resolution on the recognition of the Armenian genocide, the highest representatives of Armenian religious authorities in Turkey issued a statement criticising the initiative and emphasising that the Turkish National Assembly was the only place to decide on issues concerning Armenians (Tchilingirian, 2016, p. 132). The sermon of Archbishop Aram Ateşyan, the Patriarchal Vicar, on the centenary of the genocide on 24 April 2015 also expressed the importance of "loyalty" to the authorities and the state above all else.

A DYSTOPIC SPACE OF STATE SURVEILLANCE

The hostage situation also had a mirror image in the form of extensive state surveillance of Armenian community organisations, the Armenian press, and ordinary individuals. As part of its pervasive surveillance regime, the state enforced the internal migration of Armenians from the countryside to Istanbul, where they were concentrated, if not cornered, in certain neighbourhoods (Güven, 2011; İçduygu et al., 2008). The ideological and symbolic dominance of a Turkish Muslim "majority" nevertheless prevailed in these neighbourhoods and constantly surveilled non-Muslims. For the "minorities", the mechanisms of the surveillance regime created a pervasive climate of suspicion, intrigue, and being watched. There was always an uneasiness and paranoia that stayed awake and disturbed. People warned each other to behave properly in public, to become invisible, and to avoid trouble. Non-Muslims were vigilant in public spaces, such as on buses, ferries, and in the streets, as well as in their private spaces, such as front yards and balconies. They always checked to see if anyone was watching or listening because speaking in their native language was dangerous and they could do so only with extreme caution (Aslan, 2007). Armenians therefore developed a permanent and strong

sense of self-discipline and self-censorship, which made them aware that they were being watched and that they should behave accordingly.

Biberyan discerned the extent of this constant stalking and the alertness of the human senses of people living under siege. From a Foucauldian perspective, the world Biberyan narrates is a dystopian space of surveillance, it has the structure of a panopticon in which everything is constantly available to the controlling gaze of the other (Foucault, 2012). In a perfectly written passage in *The Slut*, the sense of being watched, of acting accordingly, and the overwhelming fear of being marked (*mimlenmek*) is revealed. As the Armenian family sits in the front yard of their house, a group of young boys and girls appear at the door and begin a memorised discourse about the future of Turkish youth, nationalism, and patriotic behaviour. It turns out that they are collecting donations to support poor students. Krikor becomes very tense and nervous and quickly donates five liras (the smallest amount possible) and closes the door. His brother-in-law, Garo, scolds him, saying that he was deceived and that these people were collecting money for fake associations.

Garo: These would also come to us [our house], I drove them away. They never go to Turks, they only come to us [Armenians]. Turks do not give a penny to these beggars.

Krikor: Turks don't give. If we don't give, they mark us (*mimlerler*).

Garo: Who will mark us, man? (*Kim mimleyecek ulan!*)

Yeranik: Oh it's nothing, for 5 liras. If you don't give, they say *gavurs* are not giving, better be cautious (*neme lazım*) (Biberyan, 2016 [1959], p. 175).

The sensory intelligence of the young protagonist, Sur, in *Penniless Lovers*, who immediately notices when voyeurs are watching the two lovers, is a metaphorical representation of this feeling of being under constant surveillance (Biberyan, 2017 [1962], p. 23). The lovers in the novel, Sur and Norma, always look for a secret corner to have a little bit of intimacy, but they never find that “safe place”. From the beginning of the novel to the end, they encounter a phantom-like, spy-like figure that follows them, watches over them, and intimidates them. This eternal and frightening conflict between the lovers and the voyeur is “a complex, vague, repressed, but rather strong fear” (*karmaşık, belirsiz, bastırılmış ama hayli kuvvetli bir korku*) (Biberyan, 2017 [1962], p. 27). Later in the novel, the

figure of the voyeur and the figure of “the uniforms” become intricately intertwined as a united bloc against love, justice, and freedom.

Although Armenians sometimes wondered if they were being paranoid, recent research has revealed that they were indeed under surveillance. An “unofficial security unit” consisting of representatives from the General Directorate of Foundations (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*), the Ministry of the Interior, the Undersecretary of Intelligence, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was established by the state in the 1930s specifically to monitor non-Muslim communities. The unit supervised the properties owned by minority foundations and their commercial transactions (Tchilingirian, 2016, p. 125). The activities of the Minorities and Property Department (*Azınlıklar ve Emlak Dairesi Reisliği*, AZEM), which was established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1967, clearly show that the Turkish state’s surveillance even extended beyond national borders. AZEM’s principal task was “investigation and research on minorities” and it reflected the main obsession of the state in the second half of the 1960s: the commemoration activities organised in (and around) 1965 for the 50th anniversary of the genocide. The director of AZEM, Nihat Dinç, declared that its goal was to “identify the centres of agitation in a collective way” (AZEM, 1968, p. 1). The countries and cities in which Armenian commemorative activism was most intense, as well as the institutions and actors involved, were to be identified (AZEM, 1968). In 2013, it was also revealed that the Turkish state had been profiling its citizens by using secret “race codes” since 1923. These were assigned based on a person’s ethnic identity: Greeks with “1”, Armenians “2”, Jews “3”, Syriac “4”, other non-Muslims “5”. The codes were used for admittance to minority schools, when performing military service, and during applications for public service positions. Taner Akçam also recently noted that the state keeps records of Islamised Armenians (Akçam, 2023).

PALIMPSEST OF INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCE

The Armenians in Istanbul were neither geographically far away nor historically disconnected from the mass violence they faced only a few decades previously. Furthermore, Ottoman imperial legacies of injustice, inequality, labour battalions, extra taxation, and dispossession targeting Armenians were well-inherited and re-implemented by the new republic. Policies of segregation, discrimination, and violence against non-Muslims

and non-Turks in the past hundred years are, therefore, inherently linked to the foundational violence of the Armenian genocide (Biner, 2020; Suni, 2023). The Turkish state has re-enacted historical practices of expropriation and dispossession; intimidation, threats, and demonisation; and physical attacks and murder. In the form of everyday discrimination, banal racist attacks (both verbal and physical), forced labour in military camps, additional taxes, unjust accusations of “denigrating Turkishness” (*Türklüğü tabkir*)—all forms of structural, symbolic, and physical violence—continued as a lived experience for the Armenian community throughout the twentieth century (Akar, 1992; Bali, 2008a, 2008b; Güven, 2011; Koçak, 2005; Suciyan, 2016). Multiple palimpsests of inequality and violence inhabited their world for which they had no “official frame of recognition or compensation” (Moghnieh, 2017). The novels of Biberyan portrayed both the heaviness of the “Catastrophe”, the implicit expression of genocide and its continuation, in everyday life, along with the omnipresence of the real-time suffering of his contemporaries from a multidirectional and intergenerational perspective (Rothberg, 2009).

A constant and effective form of structural violence throughout the history of the republic has taken the form of hate speech in the press targeting non-Muslims. Using racist, hostile, and threatening language, the newspapers of the time produced endless false accusations that the non-Muslims were internal enemies, spies, a fifth column, and traitors. As exemplified by several characters in Biberyan’s *The Slut*, these stereotypes were embraced by society at large, which saw non-Muslims as parasites or leeches, “sucking the blood” of (Muslim) society.³ Throughout republican history, Armenians were constantly intimidated by threats of denaturalisation, deportation (“the hospitality and patience of the Turks may come to an end”) and outright violence. In a verse published in the satirical magazine *Akbaba* in 1923, a vulture threatened the Armenians with pecking at their dead bodies if they did not behave.⁴

³ “They are robbing the country. That construction in our street ... would be worth half a million. What -yan did they say?”

“He is Jewish.”

“They are all the same” (Biberyan, 2016 [1959], p. 98).

⁴ “İsmet Paşa’nın kaşı, yüz bin Ermeni başı,

sonra şunu bilin ki, para etmez göz yaşı.

İsmet Paşa gökte ay, kendine gel baron Hay!,

In the late 1980s, there was a heated public campaign in the media and the courts against the religious leadership of the Armenian community. A month after the 1980 military coup, a young Turkish-born priest from Jerusalem, Manuel Yergatian, was falsely accused of “anti-Turkish activities”. His arrest and trial made sensational headlines for months. The public was fed misinformation that demonised Yergatian and all Armenians along with him. The later Patriarch, Mesrob Mutafyan, was also accused of supporting “terrorist acts against Turks” in this period. In 1986, the Turkish prosecutor accused Mutafyan of sending two Swedish “spies” to Anatolia to collect stories from old people about the Armenian massacres (Tchilingirian, 2016, pp. 144–145). The contemporary press and the statements of political figures are still full of countless examples of hate speech in which the word “Armenian” is used pejoratively as a curse word (Okten, 2022).

Publicly voiced threats often translated into actual cases of structural, legal, and physical discrimination and violence, most clearly crystallised in the 1940s in the examples of compulsory military service for all non-Muslim males in labour battalions (1941) or the wealth tax (1942). *The Sunset of the Ants*, Biberyan’s most famous novel, starts with the return of Baret from forced military service in a labour battalion. After being suddenly drafted in 1941 and spending painful 42 months in the Anatolian countryside, Baret returns home as a different person. Yet, no one in the family asks a thing about the three and a half years he spent away from them. As he considers speaking to his beloved uncle, Dırtad, the latter puts words into his mouth by saying that he also served in the labour battalions during the First World War. Biberyan therefore immediately draws our attention to the continuity of Ottoman practices in the republican era: this was not the first time that non-Muslims were rounded up and sent to work battalions, where working and living conditions were atrocious (Zürcher, 2002). The units were used both as a form of concentration camp and as death traps during World War I and in the context of the genocide (Martirosyan, 2022). Therefore, their reincarnation in the 1940s, again amid a World War, was a dreadful reminiscence for the non-Muslim communities. The murder of the conscript Sevag Balıkcı on

biriniz yan bakarsa, topunuza çıkar pay.

Size ihtar ederim, şimdi uçar giderim,

uslu durun vallahi, leşinizi diderim!”.

“Akbaba’nın Notası [Akbaba’s Note],” *Akbaba* (17 May 1923), no. 47.

24 April 2011 by a fellow soldier during his military service in Batman was another unpleasant palimpsest of the same memories from a hundred years ago. From a longer-term and intergenerational perspective, the post-genocide Armenian community in Turkey lived through intersecting histories of inequality and violence, resulting in “layered incarnations of wounds” (Dewachi, 2015).

ANTICIPATED DISASTER

Azniv said, “we need to persevere, all kinds of catastrophe (*felaket*) can befall on us.”

The word catastrophe woke Baret up. Madam Azniv Saraygil, just like his mother or just like Haybeden was expecting a catastrophe. Yesterday the Wealth Tax, today Cyprus, and tomorrow something else. But certainly “a catastrophe” that will “befall on us” (*başımıza patlayacak*). Something that will come out of something. (...)

“We are used to it Digin Arus... Catastrophe...”

They were not comfortable without a catastrophe. One element of their lives was missing. They were waiting for something. Because they could not imagine a life that is monotone and without a catastrophe. (Biberyan, 2019a [1970], p. 476).

Given their internalised hostage situation and experience of constant state violence, for the non-Muslims in Turkey, violence was not a thing of the past and it was not over. Violence was something to be prepared for, read, and assessed. Acutely aware that they were still living in the same geographical area as the perpetrators, Armenians struggled with the feeling of being on the verge of an attack. Anticipated disasters haunted everyday life with the spirit of the past “catastrophe” and the looming threat of future ones that became reality in the following decades. Fear for their lives and liberties was an embodied and “chronic” condition that was exacerbated in non-Muslim neighbourhoods as part of their everyday existence. As Yael Navaro notes, the “political culture of fear and unknowing is embodied, to the point when the state is carried in the bodies, habits, and internalized reactions of its subjects” (Navaro-Yashin, 2002, p. 181).

On 6 and 7 September 1955, this anxious but impatient anticipation was justified during government-instigated pogroms against Istanbul’s non-Muslims (Güven, 2011). According to relatively conservative state reports, 4,214 houses, 1,004 workplaces, 73 churches, 1 synagogue, 2

monasteries, 26 schools, and 5,317 other establishments (factories, hotels, bars) were attacked. The number of reported injuries ranged from 300 to 600. In cases of attacks on homes, many Greek Orthodox women were raped. The extensive destruction of property, businesses, and churches terrorised the Greeks, Armenians, and Jews into leaving, reducing the city's non-Muslim population by at least half.

The Istanbul pogrom of 1955 must be historicised in the context of the genocidal policies of the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century that destroyed, uprooted, and annihilated non-Muslim communities throughout Anatolia. The republic took over where the empire had left off. Beginning in the 1920s, Anatolian cities were “cleansed” of remaining Christians and Jews, who were forced and terrorised into leaving their hometowns and migrating to Istanbul or abroad (Güven, 2011; Suciyan, 2016). In the 1930s, Thracian Jews were forced to leave the country as a result of personal attacks and the destruction of their movable and immovable property (Bali, 2008a, 2008b). In a 1946 report, the government signalled the need to cleanse Istanbul of non-Muslims to further reduce their numbers (Akar, 1998). These were the precursors of the pogroms of 1955, and other waves of intimidation and attacks were to follow.

Both *The Slut* and *The Sunset of the Ants* are set just before 6–7 September 1955, and the climate of violence and the build-up to an anticipated disaster are present throughout the novels. Yet Biberyan refrains from writing about the pogroms themselves and instead turns his attention to less visible catastrophes. Krikor, a forty-year-old miserly bachelor who still lives with his mother, goes for a walk in the neighbourhood on a Saturday night. He sees the neighbourhood butcher, Ali, a recent immigrant to the city, also a bachelor, living in his butcher shop. Krikor is suddenly terrified, as if Ali is about to “start a fight”, “rob him”, or “hit him on the head with a stick” (Biberyan, 2016 [1959], p. 89). Although Ali respectfully says, “Good night, *Müsü* [Monsieur!],” his inner voice calling him “*Gavur oğlu gavur!*” (infidel son of an infidel) shows that Krikor actually had reason to be afraid. After they are a few steps away, Ali says to the boy next to him in an audible voice, “These were worth nothing during the war [in labour battalions] in Yozgat. Who would spit on them? They [non-Muslims] were all under my feet then” (p. 89). The boy asks Ali why the state still allows non-Muslims’ presence in the country and why “the enemy” has not been “kicked out”. Full of trust

and complicity, Ali says, “There is a time for everything, and the state knows better” (p. 90).

Ali ultimately spares his *gavur* neighbour, but his hatred of non-Muslims leads to the murder of Fatma/Gülgün, or the so-called “slut” (*sürtük*), the fostered servant girl (*besleme*) of a wealthy household in the neighbourhood. The butcher Ali, who represents the resentment of the Muslim-Turkish discourse, is rejected by this destitute but beautiful maid, Fatma/Gülgün, who is probably a hidden Armenian, even though Biberyan tells her story in a rather clandestine way. Unable to bear the rejection, Ali brutally kills her, stabbing her to death and then dismembering her body with his knife (Biberyan, 2016 [1959], pp. 167–169), vaguely alluding to the genocide and the sword. In this sense, the murder symbolises the continuity of violence for genocide survivors living in Turkey. This brutal killing of a woman who said “no” to a man is followed by another murder. An Armenian boy, Aret, who is a handsome and popular basketball player, is attacked by Erol and his gang of Turkish youths. The discourse of these snobbish youths throughout the novel is full of anti-Armenian and anti-Semitic elements. After seeing Aret with the neighbourhood’s most popular girl, Sevim, they follow him and corner him in a dark cul-de-sac, ironically named “March 18 Street” after the date of the Turkish “victory” at the Gallipoli front. Aret was not “weak, ugly, cowardly, and ridiculous” as all Armenians should be, so they beat him to death (Biberyan, 2016 [1959], pp. 199–203).

The assassination of Hrant Dink on 19 January 2007 was the anticipated disaster of the 2000s in Turkey. Dink, the first figure after Biberyan who dared to speak about genocide denial and who also opposed Armenians’ hostage situation in the country, had received serious threats from Turkish nationalists. He considered one of the hate messages that he received as an imminent threat and submitted it to the Public Prosecutor’s Office, but the case was not pursued. Shortly before his assassination, he wrote openly about his anxieties and fears for his life. In his last column in *Agos* on 10 January 2007, Dink wrote that the state propaganda against him led to his lynching by the media, causing the majority of the country to consider him an enemy of the state.

CONCLUSION

There was only one thought in his head; it was of no use to escape. There was harm in it. It was giving himself away. It was necessary to resist and to *deny* (*inkâr*). To *deny*. To *deny*. Aret could not prove it. Even if he talked. To *deny*. Even if Sevim blames himself. To *deny*. (Biberyan, 2016 [1959], pp. 217–218, italics mine)

When Erol sees police cars in front of his house, he decides that the best thing to do is to deny that he/they killed Aret. Zaven Biberyan uses the verb “deny” five times in this very short paragraph. He clearly links the murder of an Armenian boy by a Turkish gang, and Erol’s cold-blooded denial of his guilt, to the Turkish state’s denial of the Armenian genocide. Writing 50 years after the genocide, Biberyan observed that the country had been built and governed on the foundations of unpunished crimes and by perpetrators who had evaded justice. The violence was therefore spiralled and continually reproduced by what Ayda Erbal calls “the post-cleansing state” and its “internally colonizing, ethnoreligiously extractive and distributive capabilities” (Erbal, 2015).

Armenians in post-genocide Turkey have struggled to live a life without equality and without justice—surviving as hostages without the guarantee of their right to life and liberty, under constant surveillance and with the constant anticipation and occurrence of symbolic and physical attacks. The main legacy of genocide and denial in the history of the republic has been the constant flight and emigration of non-Muslims and non-Turks from the country over the past hundred years. In the case of the Armenians, while the community made up more than 20 per cent of the country’s population in 1923, their number is currently less than 50,000 (0.06%) as a result of a “perpetual exodus” (Suciyan, 2016).

In the context of the centenary of the republic and unresolved problems of modern Turkey, I would argue that it would be a euphemism to treat the Armenian genocide as an “unresolved problem”. The genocide (and its denial) is not merely a “problem” as the official state discourse and NGO activism call it. It is a defining moment in the life (or rather the birth) of the country and it is beyond resolving. It is a birthmark that can only be acknowledged, but not erased.

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CHAPTER 4

Dersim: A Century of State-Led Destruction and Resistance

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INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the Republic of Turkey celebrated its centenary with a series of activities that focused on the country's progressive and transformative path over the past 100 years. However, the unresolved issues of modern Turkey were glossed over with silence. The Dersim Genocide of 1938, a state atrocity in the early republican period, was barely mentioned even in the academic works published in English for the republic's centenary (Kubicek, 2024; Özerdem & Öztürk, 2023). A search for the keyword "Dersim" in the existing works on Turkey's centenary reveals a complete silence or, at best, a lack of focus on the genocidal violence that took place in Dersim in the 1930s and in the decades that followed. A unique example that breaks this tendency is a four-page chapter in *A Hundred Years of Republican Turkey*, which includes an English translation of the Lament of the Laç Valley in Dersim as an example of "testimony to the genocide of 1938" (Üngör, 2023, p. 117). This lament is an oral account of past and present, as it remembers the Armenian Genocide of 1915 (see Maksudyan's chapter in this book) while attempting to explain the state violence of 1938 by saying that the army "will do to us what it did to the Armenians, now the army will kill us". For over a century, the people of Dersim (*Dersimli*, *Kirmanç*) have defined the Armenian Genocide of 1915 as *tertele viren*, *tertele* meaning a state of inversion, often translated as massacre, and *viren* meaning "first" in Kirmancki/Zazaki. Following this terminology, they have called 1938 *tertele peen*, which means the last (next, later) massacre.¹

Although Dersim 1938 is one of the most horrific examples of state violence in the region's history, it was not the last episode of violence in Dersim, or Tunceli as it was officially renamed by the republic in 1936. The chapter presents more than 100 years of state violence in Dersim, focusing on three episodes in the republic's history when violence intensified significantly: the 1930s and the 1938 Dersim Genocide, the 1990s and village burnings and forced displacement, and the 2010s and post-2015 period of escalating political repression coupled with environmental destruction. The chapter concludes with a summary of the people of Dersim's demands for reconciliation with the past and the preservation of their culture and nature. In doing so, the aim of this chapter is

¹ Also written as *Terteleýé Verén/ Tertelyé Peyén, Tertelu Viren/Tertelu Peen, Terteleo Viren/Terteleo Peen*.

twofold: first, it reveals the continuity of state violence in Dersim against its inhabitants, culture, identity, and nature; and second, it invites readers to consider Dersim as an important case that allows us to understand Turkey's modus operandi in dealing with identities that fall outside of Turkishness.

EPISODE I: THE 1930S

Since the late Ottoman Empire, Dersim has been considered an “outlier” (Goner, 2017) by the central administrations. This was arguably due to its autonomous structure and its Alevi/Kizilbash² identity, which was outside the dominant Sunni identity that defined the Ottoman rule. The Turkish Republic inherited Dersim from the Ottoman Empire as an unresolved “problem” that needed to be solved by using the means of military action, repression, violence, exile and assimilation (Akpınar et al., 2010). This time, however, it was not Dersim's Alevi identity that was seen as problematic (see Hanoğlu's chapter in this book), but its heterogeneous ethnic and linguistic (Kurmanci and Kirmancki/Zazaki) identities.³ During both the Ottoman Empire and the early republican period, dozens of reports were written on how to “discipline” Dersim, and numerous military operations were carried out in the region (Bayrak, 1994; Bilmez et al., 2015; Bulut, 2013; Çalışlar, 2010).

In its early years, the Republic of Turkey implemented new policies (e.g. the Eastern Reform Plan, 1925) to “Turkify” the regions that were at risk of being “Kurdified”, while at the same time carrying out military operations in different parts of Dersim (e.g. Operation Koçuşağı, 1926; Operation Pülümür, 1930). In the 1930s, Turkish state officials began to differentiate between Turkish and non-Turkish ethnic groups with an increasingly discriminatory tone. In the 1934 Settlement Law No. 2510, Dersim was included in the third category of regions, meaning that it was to be evacuated and prohibited from settlement. The ultimate aim of this law was the forcible subjugation and assimilation of non-Turkish regions into Turkishness, which was reflected in the Turkification of place names. The name and provincial boundaries of Dersim,

² For more on Dersim's unique culture and belief system, see Deniz, 2012; van Bruinessen, 2017.

³ For a more detailed discussion of the contested definition of Dersim's ethnic identity, see Dinç, 2017; Sözen, 2019.

which was to be renamed Munzur Province and then Tunceli Province, were changed with the Tunceli Law of 1935, and the city centre was moved from Hozat (Xozat, Khozat) to Kalan/Mameki, now known as the centre of Tunceli. In 1936, the 4th General Inspectorate was established and General Abdullah Alpdoğan was appointed as the governor of the province with extraordinary powers. At the same time, the construction of roads, bridges, military barracks and government buildings continued, and the people of Dersim were ordered to surrender their weapons. The young Turkish Republic claimed to have a mission to liberate the people of Dersim from the oppression of the aghas and sheikhs with the aim of modernising and civilising society. Newspapers published during this period referred to Dersim as a backwards, uncivilised and tribal-dominated rebellious region and its prominent political and tribal figure Seyid Rıza as the leader of the “Dersim Rebellion”, promoting the idea that the state would liberate Tunceli from this backwardness and tribal oppression and bring it to civilisation (Baran, 2014).

Preparations for the Tunçeli (Bronze Hand) Operation, which had already imposed its name on the province, were completed under these circumstances. After the burning of the wooden bridge named Pax, the destruction of some telephone lines, and various armed clashes between the people of Dersim and soldiers in early 1937, the state launched military operations in the region with the decree of the Council of Ministers on 4 May 1937. On 15 November 1937, Seyid Rıza was executed in Elazığ Buğday Square along with six other comrades.⁴ The location of the bodies of Seyid Rıza and the six people executed with him (including his then 16-year-old son) has never been revealed.

THE DERSIM GENOCIDE

In 1938, military operations resumed with an intensity that reached a level that constituted genocide, as numerous scholars have so far underlined (Beşikçi, 1990; Deniz, 2020; Dinç et al., 2021; Goner, 2017; Öktem, 2011; Törne, 2015, 2020).⁵ The estimated population of Dersim

⁴ According to some, Seyid Rıza surrendered to state forces in Erzincan, while some others argue that he did not surrender, but was entrapped (Saltık, 2019, pp. 158–159).

⁵ With a slightly different perspective, Martin van Bruinessen (1994b, p. 167) argues that what had happened in Dersim would be “more appropriately termed ‘ethnocide’ rather than a genocide”.

in the 1930s was around 70,000. According to the documents of the Gendarmerie General Command, almost 14,000 people lost their lives. About 12,000 people were exiled to the western provinces of Turkey, breaking up their nuclear families (Aslan, 2010; Aygün, 2011). Girls were subjected to assimilation through boarding schools, adoption and marriage (Gündoğan & Gündoğan, 2012; Türkyılmaz, 2016). Dersim remained a closed military security zone, with no access for its inhabitants, until the amnesty of 1947. The traces of the physical, mental and psychological destruction suffered by Dersim can be seen in various sources, oral history studies and documentaries that resurfaced in the following decades (Dinç, 2017, 2021a).

The concept of genocide was coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1942 and recognised as a crime by the United Nations in 1951 (Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1951). According to this convention, an act of genocide can be identified when there is a specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group by killing members of the group, causing physical or psychological harm to members of the group, deliberately imposing on members of the group conditions tending to their physical destruction in whole or in part, enforcing policies prohibiting births within the group, and forcibly transferring the children of members of the group to another group. Much ink has since been spilled over the meaning and content of the concept of genocide (Bloxham, 2010). Shaw (2013, p. 25) acknowledges that the UN Convention is a convenient source, although he also invites scholars to adopt a critical stance as the UN Convention is also a “political compromise between the victorious powers of the Second World War”, which included genocidal states. Elsewhere, Shaw (2007, p. 77) suggests using the concept of genocide as a general framework—a master concept—that allows us to understand different types of violence against groups that have the same end result of the elimination of the group. In many ways, Dersim 1938 was a hidden genocide (Hinton, 2014), a case that has been ignored and more so, denied. Regardless of the concept we use to define Dersim 1938—an act of genocide or a crime against humanity—the state act of violence has not been forgotten, as knowledge from below has risen up with books, documentaries, memoirs, music albums, diaries, and other documents that serve as evidence (Dinç, 2021a). As I argue in the remainder of this chapter, Dersim 1938 was not the only instance of state violence in this era, as the people of Dersim

continued to be subjected to new acts of state violence in the decades following 1938.

EPISODE 2: THE 1990S

In his periodisation of the Kurdish question in Turkey, Bozarslan divides the republican era into four periods: The period of revolts between 1923 and 1938, the period of silence between 1938 and 1961, the period of revival between 1961 and 1980, and the period after the coup d'état in 1980 and the subsequent guerrilla war (Bozarslan, 2008). Dersim has been an important field and issue for armed leftist movements in Turkey since the late 1960s, including the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist (TKP/ML) (with its armed wing, the Liberation Army of the Workers and Peasants of Turkey (TİKKO), founded by İbrahim Kaypakkaya in 1972),⁶ and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK, founded by Abdullah Öcalan in 1978).⁷ The PKK waged war against Turkey in 1984, which led to the declaration of a state of emergency in 1987 in the southeastern part of Turkey, Turkey's Kurdistan (e.g. Bingöl, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Hakkari, Mardin, Siirt, and Van) and the appointment of governors with extraordinary powers. This was a policy that had already been introduced in the earlier republican period, as in the case of General Abdullah Alpdoğan's appointment to Dersim with extraordinary powers. In fact, various emergency regulations have been imposed and implemented in Turkey's Kurdistan since 1927 (Jongerden, 2010b).

According to van Bruinessen (1994a, p. 15), TİKKO was "the chief radical organisation with grassroots support" and then the PKK fighters began to appear in Dersim. By 1992, the PKK forces in the province

⁶ Kaypakkaya was one of the pioneers who voiced the Kurds' rights to self-determination in Leninist terms. By 1983–84, TİKKO had become a significant force in Dersim with 200 armed fighters (Ersan, 2013). Today, Kaypakkaya and the TİKKO tradition is still strong in Dersim. Until 2015, one could still see the names of Kaypakkaya and the TİKKO, and of partisans on banners not only in political activities, such as rallies or protest events, but also on the roads, in the city centre, and during social events, such as the Munzur Culture Festivals. Statistics show that 253 out of the 511 TİKKO militants who had died by 2007 as a result of various political actions, such as being killed in custody or dying from hunger strikes, were from Dersim, and 208 of them lost their lives in Dersim (Ersan, 2013).

⁷ People from Dersim also occupied important positions in the cadres of these and other guerrilla movements in subsequent decades (e.g. Hüseyin Cevahir, Bese Hozat).

were growing in strength and guerrilla commanders could confidently walk the streets of Dersim's Ovacik district during the day (Jongerden et al., 2007). In 1994, the Turkish armed forces responded by changing their military strategy, abandoning their defensive approach, doubling the number of its troops in the field, and increasing the number of state-backed Kurdish militias (village guards, *korucu*) with the ultimate strategy of “the destruction of the PKK's environment” (Jongerden et al., 2007, p. 4).

1994: THE “SECOND 1938”

During the 1990s, more than 3,000 villages were burned and/or evacuated throughout Turkey's Kurdistan, half of them in 1994 (Jongerden, 2010b). During this period, the population of Dersim halved as a result of forced migration and the burning of forests and orchards, agricultural fields, small and large livestock, and villages as a whole (Taş, 2007). In addition, the armed forces were not able to, or interested in, distinguishing between combatants and civilians, which led to the harassment and victimisation of the villagers (van Bruinessen, 1994a). Thus, the villagers were pressured to become state militias and if they refused, other village guards from nearby villages would start plundering their villages, stealing their livestock, damaging their crops and property, and eventually the villages would be forcibly evacuated and burned (with their livestock inside) by the army (Jongerden, 2010b).

The extent of destruction in Dersim during this period has been reported by human rights organisations, academic articles, and through victim and witness accounts (Etten et al., 2008; Human Rights Watch, 1995; Jongerden et al., 2007; Stichting Nederland-Koerdistan, 1995; Taş, 2007; Tekinoğlu, 2017; Tunceli Sendikalar Platformu, 1996). Using remote sensing and spatial analysis methods, researchers were able to show that forests were burned even in areas where forest burning was not reported in eyewitness accounts (Etten et al., 2008). Their findings also showed that “the proportion of burned forest areas was higher around settlement areas” (i.e. villages) and that village evacuations and forest burnings often happened after one another (Etten et al., 2008, p. 1796).

The mass destruction that took place in 1994 is often referred to by the people of Dersim as “the second 1938”. It is ironic that the Dersim Genocide of 1938 was already referred to as *tertele peen*, the last massacre, by the people of Dersim who remembered the Armenian Genocide of

1915. In a sense, then, this was the *third* genocidal violence that the people of Dersim could identify. In other words, a person born in 1915 would have experienced three acts of genocide/genocidal violence before reaching the age of 80.

EPISODE 3: THE 2010S

The extensive destruction and trauma depicted on the people of Dersim did not end with the “second 1938”. In the following period, Dersim continued to be a temporary military security zone at different times, under Turkey’s unchanged securitisation and militarisation approach. Over the years, countless military fortresses (*kalekol*) and military towers situated on the top of hills (*kulekol*) have been built on the mountains and hills of Dersim. Hydroelectric power plants, also known as “security dams”, have been constructed on the Munzur River (Orhan, 2013) as well as in other parts of Turkey’s Kurdistan (Bilgen, 2018; Jongerden, 2010a). The mountains, rivers, and nature of Dersim, which are sacred to its people (Deniz, 2021) have been deliberately expropriated, exploited, and destroyed, as have other parts of Turkey’s Kurdistan (Gurses, 2012). These policies continued during the glimpses of “openings” and conflict resolution talks in the 2000s. Even during the short-lived peace process that lasted from 2013 until the summer of 2015, the state’s so-called “development” and “security” policies were being implemented in Dersim, along with other parts of Turkey’s Kurdistan, through dam projects, mining activities, the construction of fossil fuel power plants, and the construction of fortress-military towers by the hands of the state and crony companies (Adaman et al., 2017; Borsuk et al., 2022).

POST-JUNE 2015: RELAPSE INTO INTENTIONAL DESTRUCTION

In the summer of 2015, when the solution process between Turkey and the PKK that had been underway since 2013 ended and the conflict resumed, Dersim once again faced increased repression through declaration of state of emergencies, temporary military security zones, and threats of village evacuations (Dinç, 2020). Different settlement areas, as well as valleys and creeks, experienced a simultaneous increase in the

number of conflict incidents and fires after the summer of 2015 (Dinç et al., 2021). These were also the sites of the genocide during 1938.

There were grassroots protests against environmental destruction in Dersim and social media campaigns to raise public awareness, including acts of resistance in which local armed groups on the ground hijacked vehicles carrying construction materials for the hydroelectric power plant or military fortress, kidnapped the drivers of the vehicles, and issued various statements warning the state and construction companies not to continue their activities that harm Dersim's environment and cultural heritage (Borsuk et al., 2022).

The concept of ecocide, which is argued to be the missing fifth crime against peace, is defined as “the extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been severely diminished” (Higgins, 2015; Higgins et al., 2013, p. 257). Ecocide fundamentally threatens the cultural and/or physical existence of social groups (Short, 2016, p. 194). Crook and Short (2014) use the concept of “ecologically induced genocide” to describe how capitalism and extractive industries become parts of ecological genocide that targets the lands and livelihoods of indigenous people. The neoliberal ecological destruction taking place in Dersim, as well as in other parts of Turkey's Kurdistan, can be defined as deliberate and systematic ecological destruction, also referred to as a (neocolonial) ecocide (Dinç et. al., 2021; Dinç 2021b; Türk, 2023; Yıldırım, 2024). The genocidal and developmental policies of the past seem to have converged into an ecocidal extractivism, coupled with the destruction of people's lifeworlds.

DERSIM IN TURKEY'S SECOND CENTURY

As the Republic of Turkey enters its second century, it is important to highlight the demands of the people of Dersim to confront the past and ongoing episodes of violence. Demands for recognition of past atrocities, reparation, and reconciliation include the return of the name Dersim; the uncensored opening of the state archives, including the Archives of the Turkish General Staff (ATASE); the disclosure of the lists of *Dersimli/Kirmanc* girls who were forcibly displaced and given up for adoption; the disclosure of the burial places of Seyid Rıza and his friends along with those who were massacred in Dersim and the permission to build

memorial graves for the dead; the removal of the names of the perpetrators of the planning and execution of the Dersim Genocide of 1938, such as Sabiha Gökçen, Fevzi Çakmak, Abdullah Alpdoğan, from the places where they were located (airports, schools, neighbourhoods, etc.); the freedom and recognition of the Kizilbash Alevi faith; the removal of obstacles to the mother tongues of the people of Dersim; and the cancellation of the Munzur dam project, which harms the culture and nature of Dersim.

In 2012, the *Dersim 37–38 Soykırım Karşıtı Komitesi* (Dersim 37–38 Anti-Genocide Committee) and *Dersim Yeniden İnşa Cemiyeti* (Dersim Reconstruction Society), both active in Europe, submitted an application to the International Criminal Court (ICC). On 27 November 2012, the ICC assigned the application a registration base number and stated that the application would be processed if the obstacle regarding the jurisdiction of the court is removed, i.e. if Turkey recognises the jurisdiction of the court at some point in the future and Turkey becomes a state party to the Roma Statute. One of the most important aspects of this application is its emphasis on the continuity of the crimes committed in Dersim. According to the application, the state is guilty of both the Dersim Genocide and the “continuing cultural genocide” that continued after 1938. The application to the ICC identifies both 1937–38 and 1994 as acts of genocide.

In response to the aforementioned demands, the only step towards the return of the name Dersim was the renaming of the Tunceli Teacher’s School to Dersim Anatolian High School in 2014. The decision by the Municipality Council to change the name on the signboard of the Tunceli Municipality to Dersim Municipality in May 2019 did not result in any change, and the signboard continues to read Tunceli. State archives are hypothetically open, but access to documents is subject to application, with no clear timetable or guarantee that documents will be shared with researchers. Official information on the families sent into exile and the girls given up for adoption has still not been shared with the public, and only limited information on the subject has been revealed by independent research. The grave sites of Seyid Rıza and his friends have not been disclosed, and no work has been carried out to build a memorial grave. The search for other mass graves in Dersim is being carried out not by the state but by the families’ lawyers. It is known that there are more than 100 mass graves in Dersim from the 1937–38 period. The names of the places named after the perpetrators of the Dersim 38 have not been

changed, and the natural environment of Dersim continues to be plundered not only by hydroelectric power plants, but also by forest fires and mining activities. The project to restore and reopen the 1930s military barracks in the city centre as the Dersim Museum, announced in 2014 by then Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, led to its opening as the Tunceli Museum in 2020. There has been no genuine apology for the past atrocities, no attempt to heal the wounds, no peace, and no confidence that new wounds will not be opened in the future (Ayata & Hakyemez, 2013; Efe & Forchtner, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Today, Dersim still carries the traumatic memory of past genocides and atrocities. The Armenian heritage in Dersim is evident in the ruins of the Armenian church in the village of Ergen in Hozat. The cliffs from which the people of Dersim were pushed to their deaths in Halvori in 1938 remain an important memorial site. Besides these traumatic memories, the people of Dersim also suffer from continuing stigmatisation, criminalisation, and state violence. The state is omnipresent, with military fortresses and checkpoints dotting the landscape and surveilling the people of Dersim, while the natural environment continues to be destroyed by forest fires, quarrying and mining projects, and hydroelectric power plant construction. Meanwhile, the central government continues to impose “national” symbols of Turkishness such as tulips and flags throughout the city. Zazaki is defined as a language that “must be regarded vulnerable at the minimum” (UNESCO, 2010, p. 40). The people of Dersim endure the annoyance of the *ezan*—the call to prayer—from mosques constructed in Alevi villages; and they also view the *Cem* houses, places of worship for Alevi communities, as sources of centralisation and dominance over Dersim’s unique belief system. As such, Dersim can be viewed as an important prism through which we can understand the past and present dynamics and structures of violence in modern Turkey. Dersim, as a case, not only reveals the entire repertoire of instruments of repression and destruction in Dersim itself, but in Turkey’s Kurdistan at large.

However, I feel it is important to emphasise that Dersim also remains a resistant and resilient province. Despite all the destruction and policies of state domination and oppression, the people of Dersim protect their unique identity, culture, and belief system. Dersim retains its beautiful natural landscape with mountains that surround the province, the

Munzur River that runs across it, sacred mountain goats, and various herbs and plants. The people of Dersim venture down to the Munzur River to gather with family and friends, they continue to write the names and slogans on the walls and hang posters praising their ideological leaders on lampposts and abandoned houses in the villages, they light a ritual candle (*çıra*) and candles and offer food (*lokma*) at their holy places (*ziyaret/jare*). The people of Dersim continue to exist, to produce, and to voice their demands for peace and justice with stubborn and admirable persistence in the face of relentless state violence.

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CHAPTER 5

The Scholarly Subject of the “Kurdish Question”: Knowledge, Resilience and Gender

Bahar Şimşek 

*dikenleri kopardığın yerleri bir bahar filan sanırsan
Kürdistan'da ve Muş-Tatvan yolunda bir yer kanar
Turgut Uyar, yokuş yol'a, 1970.*

*Not man or men but the struggling,
oppressed class itself is the depository of:
historical knowledge.*

Walter Benjamin, Das Passagen-Werk, 1927–1940.

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INTRODUCTION

In May 2009, a group of five male Kurdish intellectuals announced an opening in Turkish academia through a new book series/journal *Toplum ve Kuram: Lêkolîn û Xebatên Kurdî* (*Society and Theory: Kurdish Research and Studies*). The title was bilingual by design, both Turkish and Kurdish. Commonly known by its Turkish name *Toplum ve Kuram* (*Society and Theory*), the journal's Kurdish subtitle, *Lêkolîn û Xebatên Kurdî* (*Kurdish Research and Studies*), was explained, in the initiative's introduction, as an effort to manifest their "concern and colour":

In Turkey, one must confront a range of events beyond the intentions of the researcher when it comes to researching Kurdish people, the Kurdish question and a Kurdish region within the boundaries of the social sciences. For example, while working on this issue, they were excavating the bones of people who had been thrown into wells of acid *en masse* in the region, while young people who could very well be the children, relatives, or grandchildren of those in the well were being carried to the prisons in

bulletproof armoured police vehicles. Even these two cases alone coinciding with the preparation of this issue expose the extent of violence in the tangled labyrinth we have been trying to find our way out (*Toplum ve Kuram*, 2009).

Toplum ve Kuram ran for 12 issues between 2009 and 2017, with research articles and translations—from academics, but also from activists and journalists—on matters engaging Kurdish lives in contemporary Turkey. Between 2012 and 2014, I was on the editorial board of the journal, as a Kurdish academic and, at the time, a research assistant at Ankara University, interested in ethnic encounters in Turkish cinema. Not long after, in the middle of working on my dissertation on Kurdish cinema, I was dismissed from my academic position through a 2017 state decree. I and hundreds of other academics in Turkey, in fact, as signatories of the petition “We won’t be a party of this crime” (BAK, 2016; see Hünler’s chapter in this book) concerning violence against civilians in Kurdish cities under AKP rule. The violence described, a few years earlier, as a “tangled labyrinth” took yet another shape in the official response to a petition that put forth knowledge of a Kurdish reality that was sanctioned in mainstream media: including dismissal, removal, being banned from public service, suspension, police custody, and trials (BAK, 2024).

In other words, my experience as a researcher interested in Kurdish politics and aesthetics, both within the academy and beyond, started with the promise of the possibility, of a good intellectual life in which Kurdish social realities could be acknowledged in a local academic journal (albeit one not recognised by Turkish academic institutions, at least at the beginning of peace process). Quickly, that optimism—the possibility of peace and meaningful knowledge production and exchange—was dashed. The peace process dissolved, and violently. My dismissal, along with hundreds of Turkish and Kurdish academics, marked a moment of extended crisis in both political and academic circles around the very existence of Kurdishness.

It was such a personal—and non-personal, really—trajectory that started me thinking about epistemological questions about how Kurdish lives in Turkey are made sense of. More specifically, I wanted to try to rethink epistemologies of Kurdish lives through a repositioned lens: through a critical re-reading of the back-and-forth between a) crisis and b) corresponding, emergent publics, in the form of alternative journals for non-hegemonic knowledge production, petitions, courtroom defences,

and printed interviews. Inspired by Lauren Berlant’s work on cruel optimism (2011), I began to think about the possibilities for Kurdish agency beyond the traumatic subject so central to epistemologies of the Kurdish question. This also requires, as I develop below, an adjustment to the logic of the academic subject, and a greater understanding of how subjectivity works through “intuition as an archiving mechanism for the affects that are expressed in habituated and spontaneous behavior that appears to manage the ongoing present” (Berlant, 2011, p. 17).

In this chapter, through the dual lenses of resilience and gender politics, I explore the academic production of counter-hegemonic knowledge about Kurdish lives in Turkey. I begin by reterritorialising the Kurdish question through an examination of the experiences of three contemporary writers and thinkers whose works acknowledge the emergent forms of resilience in chronological order: İsmail Beşikçi, Mesut Yeğen, and Handan Çağlayan. This yields something of a map of resilience in the face of the Kemalist state apparatuses. These three Kurdish or Kurdi-fied academic subjects—subjects of intuition, in Berlant’s sense—appear as emergent agents of an ongoing present engaged in a struggle to “change, but not traumatically, the terms of value in which their life making activity has been cast” (Berlant, 2011, p. 27). Might a different lens on the lives, writers, and works analysed here help to radicalise epistemologies of the Kurdish question at the beginning of the second century of the Republic of Turkey?

SPEAKING FOR THE LAND

The “question” of Kurdishness invoked in *Toplum ve Kuram*’s call—a question, inseparably and at the same time epistemological and political, between Kurdish people and Kurdish regions, between the state and publics, between academics and non-academics—has its roots in aspects of intellectual and academic life in Turkey that can be heuristically pinned to the work of Mehmet Emin Bozarslan and İsmail Beşikçi. Both worked on the Kurdish question—beyond and within the academy, respectively—and wrote two of the earliest books on Kurdish sociology with pragmatic and spatial twists in their Turkish titles. Bozarslan’s book on the Kurdish history of Turkey, *Doğunun Sorunları* (*The Questions of East*, 1966) was shaped through discussion in a bookstore in Diyarbakır (*Şafak*, or “the academy”) in the 1960s, and is written from a developmentalist and social justice perspective (Yüksel, 2009, pp. 358–360). This same geographical

twist—referring obliquely, alluding, to the Kurdish question through the somewhat ambiguous “East”—occurs later in Beşikçi’s first book, based on his doctoral research, *Doğu’da Değişim ve Yapısal Sorunlar: Göçebe Alikan Aşireti (Change and Structural Problems in the East: The Nomadic Alikan Tribe, 1969)*. Here, then, are two early examples of the adjustment of the academic subject.

İsmail Beşikçi occupies a unique position within Turkish academia because of the distinctive depth of his at once personal and political intellectual commitment and the transformation of his epistemological politics since his earliest writings (Ünlü, 2012). Following the publication of his first book, as well as several journal articles stemming from his thesis, his presence sparked crisis and adjustment in the intellectual history of modern Turkey. He was first dismissed from his position at Atatürk University in 1970, and later imprisoned, for the first time, in 1971 based on his publications and statements about Kurdish realities in Turkey. In total, Beşikçi spent more than 17 years in prisons across Turkey around the time of military rule and two coup d’états on 12 March (1971) and 12 September (1980). He has published 36 books, 32 of which were banned in Turkey, shifting since 1969 from a focus on the social structure of eastern Turkey to methodological issues related to studying Kurdish lives and realities within the Turkish academy, to Kurdistan’s colonial and political situation, to the ethics of intellectual life in times of crisis. His doctoral thesis and first book, both of which embrace a Kemalist perspective on underdeveloped populations at the margins of national identity, are the only two works recognised by his Turkish colleagues (Ünlü, 2012). Beşikçi’s ideological transformation has its roots in the Eastern Marches organised by *Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları* (DDKO, The Revolutionary Eastern Culture Hearths), founded by Kurdish youth who split from the Turkish left at a time when the main oppositional voice, *Türkiye İşçi Partisi* (Worker’s Party of Turkey), began to recognise the Kurdish question. DDKO claimed and established autonomy for Kurdish politics in the 1970s (Bozarlan, 2009), and this had a major impact on Beşikçi’s epistemology during his imprisonment. Beşikçi also had the opportunity to exchange and refine ideas on methodological issues with major figures in Turkish and Kurdish leftist movements, with two main results: the book series *Scientific Method, Its Application in Türkiye* (1976–1992) and activism in the courtroom through a strategy

of so-called rupture defence in Kurdish languages (Ünlü, 2012).¹ Esra Sarıoğlu points to the politics of a rupture defence in making her case for Beşikçi as a pioneer in the analysis of the transformation of Kurdish women and towards another regime of gender in Kurdish society, building on both his methodological choices and sociological imagination:

Beşikçi points at two different views of women: on the one hand, the women described in Nazım Hikmet’s book *Human Landscape from My Country*, “Dying as if they have never lived, women whose place at the table comes after our ox”, on the other hand, the views we are familiar with from Newroz celebrations, Kurdish women who are dragging their husbands by the hand to fill the square. Relating this change in the landscape of women to the Kurdish movement, Beşikçi claims that his observation is more than mere political mobilisation. For Kurdish women are liberated from victimhood and become political subjects through participation in politics, on account of which the Kurdish movement was able to rattle traditional structures built on conservative and masculine dominance in the region (Sarıoğlu, 2011, p. 126).

In *Devletler Arası Sömürge Kürdistan (International Colony Kurdistan, 1990)*,² immediately banned upon publication in Turkey, Beşikçi underlines the political necessity of recognising Kurdish women’s participation in politics, particularly after the 1980s—a reference to Diyarbakır Military Prison and its place in the 12 September coup (Beşikçi, 1991, p. 193). This book has the status of *magnum opus* within Beşikçi’s oeuvre, in terms of both content and reception. The book is divided into two sections (first, Kurdish identity and Kurdistan, and second, the Kurdish ruling class) and covers a range of eras and themes (the late nineteenth century, traditional Kurdish social order, the twentieth century) to give substance to its claims about the colonial status, political and economic, of Kurdish lands (Beşikçi, 1991). Having situated Kurdistan within the colonial interests and conflicts between both Western colonial countries and the four nation-states ruling historically Kurdish lands, Beşikçi touches on the rich underground resources in Kurdistan discovered by colonial Britain and

¹ The edited volume *İsmail Beşikçi* (Barış Ünlü & Ozan Değer, 2012) provides a very detailed framework to place İsmail Beşikçi’s intellectual presence within its historical and political references through research articles, personal memories and historical documents. See for the names and organisations exposing politics of Beşikçi’s intellectual acts.

² From now on *International Colony*.

France in the early twentieth century (1991, p. 41, p. 223). Under the title of “Considering the Development of the ‘East’”, he emphasises military occupation in eastern Turkey as an important obstacle to economic development and proposes strategies to develop natural resources in Kurdistan (Beşikçi, 1991, p. 210).

Beşikçi’s remarks surfaced in formal politics years later, on 12 April 2014, in Gültan Kışanak’s response to a question related to the petrol resources in the region. Kışanak, elected 12 days earlier as the first woman mayor of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality together with co-mayor Fırat Anlı, noted some 24 years after the publication of the *International Colony*: “Of course we want our share [of petrol resources]. Local governments must have their share from all energy resources, financial estates, and underground and above-ground wealth in the region” (Milliyet, 2012).³ Gültan Kışanak, it is worth recalling, was among the Kurdish women political prisoners in the Diyarbakır Military Prison whom Beşikçi sought to draw attention to in the early 1980s. Kurdish and Alevi, Kışanak was imprisoned at the age of 19 in the Diyarbakır Military Prison while still a student at Dicle University in Diyarbakır. After her release, she continued her career in journalism, starting at the weekly *Yeni Ülke* in 1990. She worked in several capacities—as editor-in-chief, editorial coordinator, and news director—in all *Yeni Ülke*’s successor papers, beginning with its merger with the daily *Özgür Gündem* in 1992.⁴ From Ünlü’s work on Beşikçi’s intellectual and political references, we know that the

³ The discussion on the share of local governors in the region started by Kışanak was brought to the Turkish parliament in July 2014 by another Kurdish woman politician, Ayla Akat Ata (*Al Jazeera*, 2014).

⁴ After *Özgür Gündem* was closed in April 1994, *Özgür Ülke* started to publish and became the carrier of violent images of human rights violations between Turkish state and Kurdish party. The paper has been operating under several names to narrate Kurdish-related issues since the beginning of the 1990s. In the 1990s, there was really only one print newspaper, *Özgür Gündem*, that discussed, in columns and news by non-academic voices, Kurdish lives in the context of ethnicity, the nation-state, religion, or class inequalities, as well as questions of human rights violations in Kurdish regions of Turkey (Gürsoy Ataman, 2019; Hirschler, 2001). With mainstream Turkish media channels subjected to intense censorship and largely obedient to the hegemonic national discourse about Kurdish lives and realities, *Özgür Gündem* was the only medium to speak out about human rights violations against Kurdish people or about Kurdish politics in Türkiye (Karakaş, 2016). By the second half of the 1990s, however, this situation began to change as a new Kurdish urban subject, following mass migration with the evacuation and destruction of rural settlements across Kurdish Turkey, was more visible for a Turkish public, particular in the public spaces of Istanbul (Ahıska, 2006; Çelik, 2014; Jongerden, 2001; Pérouse, 2011).

newspapers to which Kışanak contributed in different ways served as primary resources for Beşikçi's thinking during his imprisonment in the 1990s (Ünlü, 2011, p. 39). It was Kışanak, among Kurdish administrators, who, echoing Beşikçi, demanded a people's share, Diyarbakır's share, in petrol resources (Beşikçi's call)—a call for Kurdish people, grounded in principles of democratic autonomy put forward by the pro-Kurdish parties she has represented since the 2000s. Kışanak's first book, *Kürt Siyasetinin Mor Rengi (The Purple of Kurdish Politics, 2018)*, was published from prison, following her arrest on 30 October 2016. The book was a collaborative effort by women political prisoners from Kurdish political parties. In it, Kışanak recalls her work for a Kurdish newspaper in the 1990s:

They were sending too many photographs, including “brutal” images, to the newspaper in the 1990s. Some of those were sent by victims to expose the brutality they were experiencing. Others were sent by the perpetrators themselves to frighten and terrorise, and to threaten us. Among them too were images showing sexual violence and torture towards women's bodies. We published the ones showing men's experiences, but we never considered publishing the women's. When they bombed the bureau of the newspaper in 1994, we lost all the photographs in our archive. [The photos of] sexual violence while in custody could only have been used in part by the newspaper. With the help of the Organisation of Human Rights and certain women lawyers, we were able to initiate legal proceedings about sexual assault and rape as torture (Kışanak, 2018, pp. 187–188).

As a young inmate of the Diyarbakır Military Prison and a Kurdish print journalist in the 1990s, well before her tenure as co-president of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in the 2000s and the co-mayor of the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality in 2016, before Ankara appointed a trustee in her stead, Kışanak's cruel optimism regarding the possibilities for a good life for Kurdish women, through journalistic, legal and political struggle, grows in ways out of Beşikçi's adjustment, contra the positivism of Kemalist sociology, to mount a challenge to Turkish nationalism in the areas of ethnicity, economy and gender.

Journalists working for the newspaper faced killings, forced disappearances, and prosecution due to the Turkish government's treatment of *Özgür Gündem* as a propaganda tool for the PKK (Özgür Gündem v. Turkey, 2000).

TALKING TO THE WALLS

In their seminal article on knowledge production in the Kurdish case in a thematic issue of the *European Journal of Turkish Studies* titled “Power, ideology, knowledge- deconstructing Kurdish studies”, the genealogy of the Kurdish question from the local to the global scale, proposed by Scalbert-Yücel and Le Ray (2006), underscores the translocal and exilic origins of the Kurdish question since the early twentieth century. In the same issue is Martin van Bruinnesen’s personal history, which speaks in terms of crisis and adjustment throughout. When asked about “the conditions of emergence of ‘Kurdish studies’ within Turkish academic field”, Bruinnesen’s pessimism receded before one “exception” who did not hail from the elite circles of Boğaziçi University: namely, Mesut Yeğen (van Bruinnesen, 2006).⁵ Yeğen is a Kurdish academic and a migrant who, alongside his family in the 1970s, relocated from the rural Kurdish district of Siverek to Ankara. The 12 September coup d’état caught him on the fourth day of his university life in 1980, at Middle East Technical University (METU). He graduated from METU with a master’s thesis, *The Political Alliances and the State: Land Reforms in the Republican Period of Turkey*, on the history of relation between Kurdish landlords and the Turkish state through the lens of twentieth-century land reforms in the east and southeast of the country (Yeğen, 1989). When *International Colony* was published, Yeğen was at the University of Essex working on

⁵ Van Bruinnesen, one may say, embodies some of the major tensions at the foundations of the geopolitics of Kurdish studies, in his personal experiences in exploring the Kurdish question across an extensive academic career (van Bruinnesen, 1999, 2004, 2016). In the interview, we learn that the imprisonment of İsmail Beşikçi, following the publication of his book on Kurdish sociology, was one of the main reasons behind van Bruinnesen’s interest in the anthropology of Kurdish people (van Bruinnesen, 2006). Here, he recalls an informative experience from his very first fieldwork in Turkey: “The first thing I did was I just crossed the border from Iran to Yüksekova. I went to Van and from Van, I went to the South and I walked all the way to Cizre. It was the spring and nomads were staying on the mountains. There was an earlier study about the nomads of that region that I had read, by the German geographer Wolfgang Hütteroth (1959, 1961). It is a very important study, very good. I wanted to see the place where he had been and some of these nomads he had written about. For the first time in my life, I slept in a nomads’ tent. It felt like there is no police, you are very free. It was long before the PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, Party of Kurdistan Workers), it was in 1975. But later I noticed that, after I had been there, the nomads were interrogated about me. The intelligence may not interrogate or imprison me but people I had talked to might be in danger” (van Bruinnesen, 2006)..

his doctoral research (1989–1994), which later evolved into his *magnum opus* in Turkish, *Devlet Söyleminde Kürt Sorunu* (*The Kurdish Question in State Discourse*, 1999).⁶ Since the mid-1990s, Yeğen has taught at several universities in Turkey as a doctor of sociology working on Turkey’s Kurdish question. He has also appeared in various print and visual channels and worked with several agents of politics in Turkey (Yeğen, 2016). In an important article on Turkish nationalism and the Kurdish question, Yeğen provides a localised account of the dynamism of the Kurdish question in Turkey sensitive to the different formations of Turkish nationalism, adding important texture to van Bruinessen’s (1999) argument on the internationalisation and deterritorialisation of the Kurdish question.⁷ According to Yeğen, Kurdishness emerges as a question in Turkish modern history only when it touches on reform or revolution, on the external and foreign or development, or on communism or globalisation – matters often imbricated in practice (Yeğen, 2009a).

Kurdish Question acknowledges, both methodologically and epistemologically, Beşikçi’s presence in Kurdish studies in Turkey. Yeğen’s critique of positivist methodology as a practice of Turkish nationalism informs his use of certain Foucauldian tools—discourse analysis and archaeology—in an attempt to let Kurdishness speak for itself. Yeğen further calls for a rupture within the spatial lexicon of the Kurdish question—for long, “East” in the Turkish academy—as he works through court records, personal archives, and parliamentary minutes:

The state that denies the physical presence of Kurds spent much effort to not use the term “Kurd” in its official records. Kurdish geographic names are replaced with Turkish ones, and using Kurdish names as official identity

⁶ Hereafter, *Kurdish Question*.

⁷ Van Bruinessen’s personal experience on the borders may be the earliest emphasis on mobility and migration as central to the methods of Kurdish studies. He refers to the three political events in Kurdish geography at the end of the 1970s: the Iranian revolution (1979), the 12 September coup d’état in Turkey (1980) and the prolonged Iraq-Iran war (1980) (van Bruinessen, 1999, p. 2). Van Bruinessen’s observations on the dissolution of traditional forms of Kurdish society, as these events triggered mass migration, informed his claims about the internationalisation and deterritorialisation of the Kurdish question (1999, p. 3, p. 12). In the early 1990s in Turkey, Kurdish refugees escaping from Anfal Genocide (1988) or the Kurdish uprising that led to Iraq’s failure in Kuwait (1991) were an undeniable public presence (van Bruinessen, 1999, pp. 7–8).

is banned or made impossible. The sensitivity of the state in not using the term Kurd reached a peak when a human rights defender asked to present his defence in Kurdish in the courtroom. The court record notes that “he spoke in an unintelligible language” (Yeğen, 1999, p. 127).

Yeğen’s *Kurdish Question*, published nearly a decade after *International Colony*, elaborates a critical reading of the ethnic foundations of Turkish modernism, towards reterritorialising the subject of the Kurdish question. Yeğen’s (1999, pp. 226–262) archaeological work on Kemalist state discourse in Turkey pushes against the descriptive conclusions of Kurdish sociology to acknowledge resilience against a discourse of victimhood, and offers a sociology of Kurdish resistance working through the case of autonomy. The intellectual and political references in Yeğen’s (2009b, 2011) sociological approach to Kurdish reality draw on and add to the literature on the possibilities of Kurdish politics in the present. The growing youthfulness of his book covers over the years (from a middle-aged Kurdish man in traditional clothes on his first book to two young girls smiling at the camera on his third) points to another optimism, with Yeğen increasingly thinking of the Kurdish question in Turkey as a political issue with ethnic references (Yeğen, 2011, p. 66). Yeğen’s sociological opening resonates in his reflections on Turkish discomfort around Kurdish director Yılmaz Güney’s persona, in a brief remark on Güney’s film universe: “The cinema of Güney reminds us that the victims, even in the absence of the pioneers who ‘bring things from outside (West) to the inside (Turkey)’, are capable of dreaming another world in a universal form” (Yeğen, 2001, p. 51).

The effects of the 12 September coup d’état—a regime based on the monopolisation of violence—are widely recognised, and not only on politics but on the entire structure of society, as the memories of Kışanak, Beşikçi’s encounters, and Yeğen’s campus experience suggest. Prison (in this case, the Diyarbakır Military Prison) was *the* space of siege during the coup, with lasting ramifications for the making of Kurdish subjects (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2013). Yılmaz Güney’s cinema was formed through his prison years in İmralı Island and leaked in his narratives on and about prison, including *Palm d’Or* awarded *Yol* (*The Road*, 1982). While Güney’s cinematic output across the 1970s embraces a certain Turkish socialist approach to the Kurdish issue (a focus on underdevelopment and backwardness) through socialist-realist depictions of poor Kurdish villages and feudal Kurdish society—the result of a positivist mode of

knowing Kurdishness in Turkish. Hints of Kurdish resistance appear in narratives signalling Kurdish culture and geography in Turkish. Filmed after 12 September while in exile, *Duvar* (*The Wall*, 1983) is the earliest archival work on the crisis of the Kurdish question in state discourse as materialised in the body of a woman. Güney exaggerates the alienating effect, for a liberated spectator, of the imagined modern Turkish family and its nation, depicting children protagonists deprived of a father (state) and distant from their mother (land) (Şimşek, 2021).

In his research on the trustee regime in Turkey, set in motion by the imprisonment of elected mayors of Kurdish cities in 2016, Serhat Tutkal (2021, p. 1182) claims that the Turkish state reclaimed its father status, installing only men as trustees to govern Kurdish people, in a manner furthermore constant with the authoritarian-neoliberal formations of the current state. With the end of the ceasefire between the PKK and the Turkish state in July 2015 and the Gülen Movement's attempted coup d'état in July 2016, the AKP government's instrumental use of certain terms when referring to negotiations between the two parties—"democracy", "solution", "peace" and "opening"—was laid bare through new monopolies of violence witnessed in curfews across Kurdish districts, namely Cizre, Nusaybin, Sur, Silvan and Silopi, as well as in the imprisonment of elected mayors and politicians and the installation of a trustee regime. If there is a certain masculine politics implied in Beşikçi's remarks on the Kemalist state's military operation in the region and in his critique of positivist methodologies, or in Yeğen's disclosure of the discursive operations for "incomprehensible" speech in court, our discussion can shift, then, to consider non-Turkish, non-masculine subjects of the Kurdish question managing a neoliberal Islamist present.

SPEAKING FROM HOME

Among the earliest public presence of Kurdish women were the Saturday Mothers, who emerged at the intersection of forced migration and forced disappearances in the mid to late 1990s, and who were subjected to various forms of violence at the hands of the Kemalist state in reaction to the events of the 12 September coup d'état. They were followed by the Peace Mothers initiative, which was founded by Kurdish mothers who lost their sons in the war between the PKK and the Turkish state in 1999. Makbule Özbek—or as she is known in print media, Mother Makbule—is a Kurdish woman from Bismil, Diyarbakır and a prominent figure among

the Peace Mothers. She is now 82 years old, suffering from old age and ailing health in prison, where she has been since 2020 (Amed, 2020). She was 40 when she was dragged into a police station alone, for the first time in her life:

I was 40 years old when I was taken into custody. I was a mother. I was with my daughter the first time. They [the police] told me, “Your daughter is staying with them day and night, she cannot be a virgin. We will take her to exam [her] hymen”. I told them, “I trust my daughter”. He said “Pardon me”, and continued: “look, now, you and her... your daughter, you two work with them all the time. Your husband works hard and brings all his earnings to you two, and you two pour that money to their road.” He said, “Let us bring him here! Maybe you aren’t his wife, who knows whose wife you are?” They told me, “We will bring your husband”. I told them, “If you bring my husband, you will ruin my family”. No man can tolerate such claims... God knows that my husband didn’t even mention it. God knows it. When I was out, my dear male commander came and hugged me and cried (Çağlayan, 2007, p. 203).

Writing about the selection of visual content in Kurdish newspapers in the 1990s, Kışanak could not be sure whether it was a reaction to the objectification of Kurdish women’s bodies or hesitation in the face of patriarchal Kurdish social practices that were behind the papers not including images of sexual violence against women (Kışanak, 2018, p. 188). Forty years after Beşikçi’s work, Handan Çağlayan met with Mother Makbule in Diyarbakır for her doctoral research in 2005, as a PhD candidate at Ankara University. Çağlayan is a Kurdish woman from Siverek who received a doctoral degree in 2006 based on the first academic research in a Turkish university on Kurdish women’s political subjectification: *Qualitative Research on Kurdish Women’s Identity from a Feminist Perspective* (Çağlayan, 2006). Following her thesis, she began a career as a Union Expert in *Eğitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası* (the Education and Science Labourers Union, or Eğitim Sen), where she worked for several years. She was then an adjunct instructor in the Human Rights Chair of Ankara University between 2011 and 2016.

There have been attempts, recently, to trace the history of the political presence of Kurdish women in Turkey to a specific leftist organisation, *Komeleya Jinên Şoresger-Demokrat* (Revolutionary Democrat Women’s Association), active between 1974 and 1980 (Alakom, 2020). The violence of 12 September targeted several Kurdish political

groups, among them Kurdish women, that spoke of “national oppression”, “national liberation” and “colonialism” when framing Turkey’s Kurdish question. The PKK emerged—and survived henceforth—from this period and the aftermath of 12 September as *the* hegemonic Kurdish political party. The PKK’s methods of Kurdish revolution, targeting the feudal structures of Kurdish society and the colonial occupation of Kurdistan, borrowed from myths of Kawa the Blacksmith and the struggle of Medes to articulate the Kurdish national movement (Güneş, 2012). The Kurdish movement’s relationship with that myth was transformed after a paradigm shift in the late 1990s that positioned women as heroic figures in the ongoing struggle through the myth of the goddess Ishtar, setting itself apart from most national awakenings and resistance movements (Çağlayan, 2012, p. 2). Çağlayan’s first book (2007, p. 21), *Analar Yoldaşlar Tanrıçalar: Kürt Hareketinde Kadınlar ve Kadın Kimliğinin Oluşumu* (*Women in the Kurdish Movement: Mothers, Comrades, Goddesses*), analyses the transformation of the notion of *namus* in the case of Kurdish women’s public mobilisation.⁸

Çağlayan proposes a methodological shift in studying the Kurdish question in Turkey within the Turkish academy through feminist praxis. Carrying out fieldwork in Diyarbakır, a city that bore the unbearable realities of the Kurdish question between 1980 and 2000 in particular, she focused on the actual subjects of Kurdish politics through in-depth interviews conducted in both Turkish and Kurdish (2007, pp. 17–36). Çağlayan’s work acknowledges the methodological problem addressed by Beşikçi and radicalises Yeğen’s redefinition of the Kurdish question in gender terms for a non-masculine subject of Kurdish question speaking for themselves. Traditional caregiver roles challenged assigned to Kurdish women, in the framework of *namus*, are challenged through Kurdish women subjects claiming a public presence, as by those who embrace and publicise their own story, or those who mediate personal accounts. All are part of an epistemological shift in how Kurdish lives are known through the emergent Kurdish women subjects who claim for the emergent publics (Peace Mothers or Saturday Mothers), who own their story to publicise it (Mother Makbule, Gültan Kışanak), and who mediate the personal accounts for an epistemological shift in knowing Kurdish lives (Handan Çağlayan).

⁸ Sharazad Mojab (2003) proposes the term “gendercide” to understand the so-called honour killings’ politics in Iraqi Kurdistan.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

“Undoing a world”, notes Berlant in the final pages of her book, “requires a surrealist affectsphere to counter the one that already exists, enabling a confrontation with the fact that any action of making a claim on the present involves bruising processes of detachment from anchors in the world, along with optimistic projections of a world that is worth our attachment to it” (Berlant, 2011, p. 263). Against the grain of a common scholarly tendency to seek its origins in exile, we have been tracking epistemologies of Kurdish lives in academic habituses in Turkey, and pushing, in so doing, for a reterritorialisation of the Kurdish question and its subject. I proposed a way of reading some key works by Beşikçi, Yeğen and Çağlayan, particularly certain seminal works published between 1991 and 2007—that both mark and challenge the merits of Turkish hegemonic politics and its imposition on epistemologies of Kurdish lives. The works focused on here coincide with many overlapping crises, translocal in scope: ethnic violence, forced migration and mass population movements, and liberal capitalism’s economic and financial instabilities and insecurities. The cruel optimism’s work in those has a promise for a better Kurdish life.

By the end of the 1990s, a handful of developments—Turkey’s EU membership process (1999), the recognition of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraqi Kurdistan (2003), the emergence of new media technologies, and a degree of expanded civilian support for the Kurdish movement—led to transformations in the publicness of the Kurdish question (Ayata, 2011; Bruinessen, 2016; Çiçek, 2015; Tutkal, 2021). By the mid-2010s, the considerable attention Kurdish women fighters of the *Yekîneyên Parastîna Jin* (Women’s Protection Unit, YPJ) received in Western Europe and the United States following the 2015 January victory in Kobane, northern Syria in the war against Islamic State (IS) contributed to that transformation (Şimşek & Jongerden, 2018; Toivanen & Başer, 2016). I suggest that the gender politics at work in the ways writers and thinkers unsettle epistemologies and enact resilience also participate in this transformation (see Göral’s chapter in this book). The hope here is that attending to certain non-patriarchal moves in these epistemologies might clear more space for non-masculine ways of imagining better ways of living.

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CHAPTER 6

Transnational Alevism: Shaping Identity, Community and Recognition Across Borders

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on Alevis and Alevism in the transnational context, exploring the factors driving international migration, its consequences for Alevis worldwide and its connection with the Alevi claim for legitimacy and recognition. Migration serves as a lens to understand the scope of the ongoing Alevi struggle for recognition as one of the most important unsolved problems in the Turkish Republic's history. Their claim emphasises equal citizenship and religious freedom, concentrating on the acknowledgement of *cemevi* (cem house) as the Alevi place of worship together with the removal of compulsory Islamic education classes (that exclude Alevism) for Alevi children.

Despite being the second-largest religious group in Turkey, Alevis have suffered centuries of oppression, marginalisation and exclusion. As their visibility often resulted in massacres, threats of violence and discrimination, Alevis could not express their identity openly. Accordingly, there is no reliable data on the exact number of Alevis, however, many estimates that they constitute between 20 and 25 per cent of Turkey's population (Massicard, 2012; Vorhoff, 2003). Alevis are a multi-ethnic population consisting of Turkish/Turkmen, Kurdish and a smaller number of Arabs.

The history of the struggle for survival against discrimination and the threat of extermination is crucial in understanding the formation of Alevi identity politics and their current attempts to actively seek visibility and recognition. Migration has transformed Alevis into a diaspora community with the freedom to openly practise their rituals. They have experienced significant community growth, which has increased their activism both nationally and transnationally, and gained official recognition to various degrees. However, despite these developments in European countries, where Alevism has been taught in schools, the struggle for official recognition in Turkey remains ongoing.

The first section of this chapter gives background information covering the historical context of the relationship of Alevis with the Turkish Republic, marked by century-long discrimination, oppression and exclusion. The second section explores Alevi migration in detail and includes the development of diasporic politics of Alevi identity, visibility and recognition, as well as the diasporic shift that resulted in a more institutionalised and spatialised Alevism. The final section explores the struggle for recognition in Turkey and its shift with the development of transnational Alevi

activism. The Alevi historical context, migration and diaspora experience, and the ongoing struggle for recognition are crucial not only for understanding the unresolved tensions and challenges within Turkey's complex sociopolitical landscape, but also for shedding light on the broader themes of minority rights, citizenship and transnational solidarity in an increasingly interconnected world.

ALEVIS AND THE REPUBLIC: A CENTURY-LONG OPPRESSION AND MARGINALISATION

Alevi communities were historically known as Kizilbash (or Qizilbash) in the Ottoman era, well-remembered among Alevis due to fatwas labelling Kizilbashis as heretics and infidels and permitting killing them, which was viewed as praiseworthy (Baltacioglu-Brammer, 2014). This humiliation and negative labelling in the Ottoman era echoed down through history, manifesting as public discrimination and prejudice towards Alevis. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, although the official policy on religion was revised, the Turkish-Islamic framework initiated by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP; *İttihat ve Terakki Komitesi*), later became the official policy of the Turkish Republic (Dressler, 2013).

The republic adopted Western institutions of nationalism to construct a “modern” national culture (Robins, 1996) and was widely accepted as more progressive by minorities, including Alevis, due to its highlighting of secularism as a value. The religious verdicts (fatwas) and mass violence Alevis experienced in the Ottoman era made secularism a crucial condition to escape from Islamist discrimination and justified their support to the Republicans (Akdemir, 2016). Kemalists praised Alevism “as a Turkish version of Islam without Shariah and a useful ally against *irtica*”, however, “de facto discrimination and suspicion of Alevis as potentially subversive continued for most of the Republican period” (Bruinessen, 2018, p. 12).

In the first years of the republic, many reforms were launched as part of the modernisation and secularisation process. A constitutional revision separating religion from the state was followed by the abolishment of Sharia courts. Though the abolition of the Caliphate and Sultanate was a certain step towards secularisation, the banning of all dervish lodges (*tekke*) and shrines (*zawiya*) and the creation of a state-managed Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) in 1924 made Sunni Islam the officially promoted religious identity within the Turkish nationalist framework (Dressler, 2010; Göle, 2010; Zürcher,

2004). Consequently, rather than a secular law safeguarding religious pluralism, issues concerning religious minorities fell under the authority of *Diyanet*, the advocate of Turkish Islam. Secularism, placed in the constitution as an essential condition of democracy, manifested as institutionalised state control over religion alongside the Turkish-Islamic nation-building process (Dressler, 2010; Göle, 2010; Köse, 2013; Parrilli, 2018).

Consequently, religion became “a matter of national security” (Bruinessen, 2018, p. 2) and the safeguarding of secularism was left to the Turkish military due to its role as the guardian of national values (Dressler, 2010). The active role of the military in Turkish politics has manifested with the coups that they legitimised under the notion of “protecting” Turkish democracy. The 1980 military coup was the third and the bloodiest in Turkish history,¹ and has left a strong mark on social and political life until the present day. By banning all political parties and imprisoning political activists, the military intended to design depoliticisation furnished with Turkish-Islamic ethos (Vorhoff, 2003) and while Turkishness was promoted against Kurdish activism, Islam was sponsored “as an antidote to socialism” (Akdemir, 2016, p. 72). The expansion of the *Diyanet* in the 1980s marked political Islam as a vital role player in Turkish politics after the military coup (Bruinessen, 2018; Dressler, 2010). Subsequently, religious classes imposing “Turkish Islam” became compulsory, and new textbooks contained passages marginalising Alevism (Bruinessen, 2018). The post-1980 policies against Alevis were not limited to religious education and were accompanied by the building of mosques in Alevi villages, even though no one was praying in them. This period continued with the exile of Alevi teachers and other civil servants from their regions as part of the assimilation policies, particularly in Dersim, the core centre of Alevi Kurds. Dersim already faced constant state violence throughout the republican era (see Dinç’s chapter in this book), marked by mass killings and the forced displacement of people during the genocide in 1937–38.

Accompanied by official discrimination, the feelings and attitudes marginalising and excluding Alevis from social, economic and political life, sometimes empowered radical Islamist groups to impose mass violence against them. There is a long history of violence towards Alevis in the

¹ This coup resulted in the execution of 50, the detention of 500 and the death of hundreds in prison due to their brutal treatment and torture. Furthermore, 30,000 political refugees fled abroad (Massicard, 2007; Zürcher, 2004).

republican era, which marked their history and identity. The massacres of Elbistan in 1967, Maraş and Malatya in 1978, Çorum in 1980 and Sivas in 1993 were mass attacks committed by radical or nationalist Islamist groups. Common to all these massacres is that the perpetrators were not punished and commemorations were not allowed in Turkey until recent decades. The Sivas Massacre was the last brutal event that marked the Alevi history of victimhood and had a profound impact on Alevis worldwide, particularly in stimulating mobilisation and expanding their transnational activism. On 2 July 1993, in Sivas city centre, thousands of radical fundamentalist Islamists gathered after Friday prayer and marched to the Madımak Hotel, where intellectuals and artists were staying for an Alevi festival celebrating Pir Sultan Abdal. After surrounding it, the mob set fire to the hotel, killing 35 people. The globally circulated video footage, which showed the perpetrators gathering and surrounding the hotel for eight hours, setting it on fire and then watching it burn while shouting “*Allahu Akbar*” and “Burn in hell!”, all in front of the media and the police-military forces, generated intense anger among Alevis worldwide. The massacre accelerated Alevi politics of identity and recognition, particularly in Germany, the first and largest of the Alevi diasporas that played a vital role in the development of the Alevi movement.

MIGRATION AND THE DIASPORA EXPERIENCE

Diaspora Politics of Identity, Visibility and Recognition

Unlike Sunni settlements, often concentrated in low-lying regions, towns and cities, Alevi settlements in Turkey are concentrated more in remote and mountainous areas, a social and geographical isolation resulting from centuries-old oppression and marginalisation. The accompanying economic and social disadvantages motivated Alevis to move from their villages to larger cities in Turkey in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Some later went abroad, or directly moved from their villages to Western countries, which typifies a considerable portion of Alevi migration to the United Kingdom (Hanoğlu, 2021).

The historical context of social, political and economic insecurity was the principal factor that “pushed” Alevis to move abroad. Hence, the Alevi population in Turkey exhibits significantly higher rates of transnational migration than their Sunni counterparts (Faist, 2000). Alevi migration to Europe began in the second half of the twentieth century,

driven primarily by labour migration to Germany. However, it continued as political migration to different European countries triggered by events such as the Maraş Massacre in 1978, oppressive Turkish state policies following the 1980 military coup and the armed conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which peaked in the 1990s and was accompanied by the evacuation and destruction of villages and forests. A considerable portion of the Alevi population consists of Alevi Kurds who are strongly affected by this war and unsurprisingly, the majority of Alevis in Europe are Kurdish as a result of the double discrimination (ethnic and religious). There are no accurate statistics about the Alevi population in Europe, but a tentative estimate is over 1 million (Keles, 2014), and as many as 1.5 million according to the Europe Alevi Confederation.

Alevis were initially not recognised as a distinct community in the diaspora and studies on labour migration considered these new immigrants to be part of the Turkish Muslim community, except Cesari (2013) who identified Alevis with a unique category of “minority within the migrant minority”. However, with developments in the diaspora, they became acknowledged as a migrant faith group which has increasingly distinguished them from Muslim communities. Sökefeld (2008) and Özyürek (2009) suggest that both the policy of the German government to recognise religious minorities as independent units and the legal and political conditions of the European parliament encouraged Alevis to describe their belief as distinct from Sunni Islam and to claim recognition of this difference.

The resurgence of Alevi identity and institutionalisation in the 1990s was a consequence of the diaspora efforts, particularly in Germany, to which the largest population of Alevis migrated (Köse, 2012; Massicard, 2012; Özyürek, 2009; Şahin, 2005; Sökefeld, 2008). This period was crucial in the historical trajectory of Alevis because public identification was a recent development encouraged by Alevi organisations. Şahin (2005, p. 482) suggests that Alevis was transformed from a closed minority into a “reinvented public cultural community” and Alevis in Western countries were the central actors that made Alevis public. Indeed, Alevis became visible through their increasing political action in the West (Cesari, 2013; Sökefeld, 2008), especially with the establishment of Alevi organisations and associations dealing with the political issues of the Alevi communities and the continuity of religious culture. These organisations and networks have played a significant role in the social

and political configuration of the Alevi communities by accumulating knowledge and coordinating collective action.

The Sivas Massacre had a significant effect on the Alevi population, as it highlighted the need to establish the Alevi movement as a defence against potential attacks from radical Muslims. It was followed by strengthened Alevi mobilisation both in Turkey and particularly in the diaspora (Sökefeld, 2008). This was exemplified in the case of British Alevis who in 1993 established the first Alevi association in Britain, the England Alevi Cultural Centre and Cemevi, as a gesture of unity with Alevis in Turkey and to offer support against potential future attacks (Hanoğlu, 2021). Commemorations of the massacre became one of the most important elements of the Alevi mobilisation, in addition to their contribution to the recognition process for Alevis in Germany. The representation of the massacre, according to Sökefeld (2008), furthered claims for recognition by presenting the “Alevi-Sunni master difference” to the German public. Narratives of the massacre were used as political capital in drawing group boundaries, which was closely linked to the efforts of the European Alevi federations to establish a common Alevi identity by addressing the oppression and discrimination of the Alevis in Turkey (Yildiz & Verkuyten, 2011). By politicising and mobilising Alevis, the Sivas Massacre forced and provoked a resurgence of Alevi identity and movement all over the world, which is widely known as “Alevi revivalism” (Bruinessen, 1996; Sökefeld, 2008). It had a strong effect on the social formation of Alevis globally and is, therefore, widely regarded as a catalyst for the emergence of Alevi identity politics and institutionalisation (Bruinessen, 1996; Köse, 2012; Sökefeld, 2008; Yıldiz & Verkuyten, 2011).

Though understood and adopted differently among Alevis worldwide, the shared history of victimhood and boundaries with Islam are two essential dynamics acting as permanent aspects of Alevi identity that were transported from Turkey to the diaspora. Both dynamics are closely linked to Alevi associations, which constantly reproduce the culture of victimhood and rearticulate and politicise boundaries with Islam to consolidate community and identity in striving for recognition. In particular, the question of distance from Islam, as the key pattern of Alevi boundary-making, is continuously articulated in the diaspora for their claim to be a “unique faith”, which has increasingly become a central element in the Alevi politics of recognition in Europe. Being free from certain religious restrictions that are found in Islam, such as gender segregation in social and religious practices, the prohibition of alcohol and a particular dress

code for women, has made it easier for Alevis to distinguish themselves from Muslims and to depict Alevism as more secular. Furthermore, the electoral success of the pro-Islamist AKP (Justice and Development Party) government and the rise of radical Islamism in the Middle East have also encouraged Alevis to express a secular identity that remains distant from Islam.

Diasporic Shift: Rise of an Institutionalised and Spatialised Alevism

Migrant groups like Alevis, who have faced discrimination and exclusion, enjoy democratic rights, including the freedom of religion, in the diaspora where they have various organisations and networks flowing across borders. However, to ensure continuity in the Western and global context, Alevis have needed to rearticulate their social structures and ritualised religious culture within new settings. As a result, Alevi communities, as well as Alevism itself, transformed within the social, political and spatial spheres of the diaspora where modern, secular and global discourses dominate everyday life.

There are many transformative factors involved in diasporic shift. First, the sociopolitical context of Turkey that forced Alevis to have an invisible existence made them concentrate on politics of identity and recognition, imposing visibility and material existence in the diaspora. The immobility of traditional religious institutions, *ocaks*,² which are rooted in tribal settings, could not be transferred to the diaspora, leading to organisational and operational challenges. Moreover, the spiritual essence of Alevism, valuing diverse interpretations and practices, contrasted with the need for collectivisation in the quest for reconstruction of identity and community in the diaspora. Likewise, Alevi mysticism, which emphasises morality, wisdom and inner quality rather than formalist worship, confronted the need to focus on the representation of Alevism in the quest for visibility and recognition. Finally, governmental regulations of religious pluralism required new organisational and operational structures to allow for official recognition in Western countries.

When Alevis dispersed first to urban areas in Turkey and then globally, Alevi religious organisation experienced a rupture as followers lost

² *Ocak* refers to an extended family descended from a sacred lineage. Religious knowledge is passed down orally through the families responsible for the community's religious leadership.

ties with their *ocaks*. As a result, the social, religious and organisational function of the *ocaks*, which structure the ritual world and regulate community life, has disappeared in the diaspora. In the meantime, the need for common spaces to gather, practice their faith and hold funerals led *cemevis* to play a key role in strengthening social unity and restructuring religious culture. This portrays a spatial shift, which emphasises a departure from the pre-migration Alevism. Special buildings as places of worship, like churches for Christians or mosques for Muslims, did not characterise Alevism until the migration, as Alevis used to gather in the largest village house, the home of the *ocak* family, or sometimes in an open area of sacred importance. This Alevi approach to spatiality is well defined by a *dede* I came across during my doctoral fieldwork, describing Alevism as “*lamekan*” (non-place) with a story. In a conversation, a Christian clergyman asks a *pir/dede*, “We have churches, Muslims have mosques, what do you (Alevis) have?” He answers, “Except your churches and mosques, everywhere between the earth and the sky is our place to worship” (Hanoğlu, 2023, p. 988). Nevertheless, this spiritual approach to space was upturned by the *cemevis* that became the spatial indicator of Alevism in the post-migration period. This institutional and spatial transition represented a radical structural change, which has significantly differentiated the religious, social and organisational life of Alevis.³

A Weberian reading of *cemevi*-centred Alevism emphasises the replacement of spiritual charisma with bureaucratic power. As the influence and authority of the *ocaks* decreased with migration, *cemevis*, which are new modern institutions, initiated an institutionalised and bureaucratised form of Alevism. To be more specific, while the old type of authority was based on religious-charismatic foundations, the new modern institutions, *cemevi* and associations, had secular leaders and were bound by bureaucratic rules. This bureaucratisation process, of course, affected the influence and position of the Alevi clergy, namely *pirs/dedes*. Their new position developed based on their greater competence and their attachment to *cemevis*, and became increasingly rationalised and influential merely as part of the *cemevi* bureaucracy (Hanoğlu, 2023).

³ Not surprisingly, these structural changes also involved a ritual modification that comprises a gradual routinisation, folklorisation and standardisation in worship. Accordingly, practising Alevism has moved beyond an act of worship to become more of a performance of Alevi cultural identity, especially among younger generations.

This transition to cemevi-centred Alevism allowed diasporic Alevis to focus more on rational actions aimed at their collective interests, namely the politics of identity, visibility and recognition. This encouraged Alevism to be a more “organised” and institutionalised religion that was endorsed by the Western regulations of religious pluralism. Brubaker (2013) points out that the legal frameworks of Western states, which protect freedom of religion and religious pluralism, inspire migrant faith groups to become “organised” with an authority structure that stimulates institutionalisation. Religious education in public schools is also seen as a means of institutional support for religious pluralism.

Indeed, the provision of religious education in public schools has been a fundamental factor that advanced Alevi institutionalisation in Western countries. For example, the Alevi community in the United Kingdom experienced important public developments after Alevism started to be taught in schools in 2012 in areas densely inhabited by Alevis, within the scope of the national religious education (RE) curriculum. Currently, Alevism is taught within the RE curriculum of over 20 schools. This increased the legitimacy of Alevism as a religion and paved the way for an institutional shift. Subsequently, in 2015, Alevism was accepted as an official religion when the British Alevi Federation (BAF) was granted religious foundation status as an umbrella organisation covering 12 cemevis (currently 18). This development brought more opportunities in the public sphere and recognition by more state institutions. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Alevis, established in the same year, served as a bridge between the British parliament and Alevis and increased the visibility of Alevis in domestic politics. Such accelerating developments strengthened Alevis’ engagement with local and national authorities and increased their participation in domestic politics. The election of more than 20 Alevi councillors in the London boroughs of Enfield, Hackney and Haringey in 2018 and the election of the first Alevi MP in the British parliament in 2019 are some of the results of the increasing visibility of Alevis in the UK public sphere.

TRANSNATIONAL ALEVISM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION IN TURKEY

Alevis have undergone considerable institutional and spatial developments that have shifted their local, national and transnational engagements. The more institutionalised and spatialised Alevism allowed them to become

more visible in the public space and achieve varying degrees of official recognition in European countries. However, their quest for recognition remains an ongoing struggle within Turkey. The focal point of this claim is the recognition of *cemevis* as worship places, symbolising the Alevi struggle for equal citizenship and religious freedom. Despite extensive mobilisation efforts by Alevis in Turkey and abroad, the Turkish government persists in rejecting official recognition of *cemevis* as places of worship, with an official viewpoint that such recognition might lead to the perception of Alevism as an independent religion and accordingly to the fragmentation of Islam (Salman, 2015). Despite efforts by opposition parties such as the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the People's Equality and Democracy Party (DEM—former HDP) to grant such recognition in their municipalities, governmental support is still lacking.

The AKP government has undertaken “Alevi openings” several times, which mostly signalled an acknowledgement of Alevis as a cultural asset of Turkey and found no support in wider Alevi society. In 2022, a new period started with President Erdoğan's visit to Hüseyin Gazi *Cemevi* in Ankara, where he attended a Muharram fast-breaking dinner after several attacks on *cemevis*. Following this visit, the government introduced a new bill proposing the establishment of an Alevi cultural agency. Although seeming to be a significant development in addressing the issues of Alevi citizens, the aim of institutionalising the administration of *cemevis* signals an intention to take Alevis under state control rather than recognise them as a religious community. The Alevi-Bektashi Culture and *Cemevi* Presidency, established under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, categorises *cemevis* as Alevi cultural centres devoid of religious significance, which not surprisingly created further tensions with the Alevi population, including the migrant Alevi associations declaring their objections.

Diasporic Alevi politics is significantly influenced by Turkey's political context, shaping Alevi moral and citizenship claims. The political activism and lobbying strategies of migrant Alevis in Europe and beyond are concentrated on protesting against Turkey's discriminatory policies and demanding recognition of *cemevis* as places of worship. Transnational linkages allowing Alevis to engage, communicate and constantly exchange information help their claims for recognition in Turkey as well as in settlement countries. Their intention to address and put pressure on Turkey's policies connects worldwide Alevis and expands the community's transnational political activism, producing cross-border solidarity. Thus,

the Alevi claim for identity, visibility and recognition serves a collective triadic purpose, asserting their territorial rights simultaneously in Turkey and the countries of settlement.

More than 250 Alevi associations in European countries (particularly in Germany, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland and Sweden) are connected through national federations under the umbrella of the Europe Alevi Confederation, which made Europe an organisational centre for worldwide Alevis. The organisational and financial power of these associations in providing space for various community activities and services, along with the Alevi media, have developed and maintained social and political cohesion in and between Alevi communities and pushed for the political mobilisation around an Alevi collective identity (Coşan-Eke, 2016; Koşulu, 2013; Sökefeld, 2008; Yaman & Dönmez, 2016; Yıldız & Verkuyten, 2011). The transnational networks of European Alevis transferred “identity discourse and an identity-based association model” to Turkey (Şahin, 2005). Indeed, the European Alevi associations link worldwide Alevis through various collaborations, campaigns, events and forums for social and political issues affecting Alevi communities and thus contribute to advancing the Alevi movement in Turkey.

The national federations, representing Alevi populations in their countries of settlement, campaign for recognition in the international arena, particularly in the European Union (EU) and its parliament. The Alevi Friendship Group of the European Parliament, established in 2018 by the Socialist and Democrat MEPs, reflects such efforts. As a result of lobbying activities, Alevis have increasingly become one of the key players in talks about the accession of Turkey to the EU, with the claim for recognition and the disadvantaged situation of Alevis in Turkey becoming a noticeable element in the negotiations. Official recognition of cemeyes as places of worship and the compulsory Islamic religious education of Alevi children were the primary issues most frequently occurred in the European Commission’s progress reports.⁴

⁴ See European Commission Turkey progress reports, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/turkey_en and European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) – Country monitoring in Turkey, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/turkey>.

The transnational connections also involve an ongoing attachment to their villages, impacting the rural Alevi landscape of Turkey. While migrants invest in their hometowns often through developmental projects in collaboration with government authorities (Lopez, 2015), this does not typify the experience of Alevis, particularly Kurdish Alevis who experienced double discrimination due to both their Kurdish and Alevi identities. The conflictual relationship with the Turkish state may lead to a lack of trust in state institutions, reducing their motivation to invest in their homeland with such projects. This represents the ethnopolitical dimension of the link between migration and development, which shapes migrant engagements and investments (DeHaas, 2005), as I observed among British Alevis who are predominantly Kurdish.

Diasporisation allowed Alevis to become more organised and advance spatial politics of identity and visibility that were transmitted to the homeland. Besides newly built migrant houses transforming the physical landscape, *cemevis* have grown in Alevi villages thanks to migrant remittances. For example, in the villages around the Afşin and Elbistan regions in Maraş, where I conducted my doctoral research between September 2017 and January 2020, almost every Alevi village had a *cemevi*, built and maintained by collective remittances. Collecting money and building a *cemevi* in the village was quite popular among the British Alevis and seen as an investment in their faith. These collective remittances hold religious significance, serving to reinforce a spiritual connection and sense of belonging to both their villages and their faith.

The growth of *cemevis* in Alevi villages is an important development that needs a more detailed account, as I have presented elsewhere (Hanoğlu, 2024), since it allows us to understand the changing spatial, social and cultural landscape of the rural areas as well as the transnationalisation of the village communities. These rural *cemevis* built by migrants indicate a new phase in the Alevi struggle for visibility, recognition and legitimacy, and are closely linked to diasporic identity politics. *Cemevis* were located only in urban areas until migrant Alevis started building in their villages in the last decade. By spreading *cemevis* to their villages, migrant Alevis revealed the religious identity of the village population for the first time, contrasting with the public invisibility that had marked Alevi history. The collective effort to build *cemevis* thus echoes a “spirit of solidarity” (Garbin, 2019) against the period when Alevis, as a persecuted minority, had to perform their rituals in secret. Thus, this practice,

which makes the Alevi identity spatially visible, serves as a political expression and an identity claim. Funerals, which are the primary motivation for Alevis to build *cemevis* in their villages, are also related to this politics of belonging. As well as representing a proactive expression of Alevi identity and visibility, these *cemevis* also contribute to the transnationalisation of rural communities by maintaining an ongoing connection between villages and Alevis worldwide.

The scope and regularity of the transnational collaboration are not limited to building *cemevis* in their villages. The European Alevi associations run various collaborative campaigns and projects with Alevi associations in Turkey to support them socially and economically through fundraising in their countries. One such example is the construction of the Maraş Erenler *cemevi* in Yörükselim, a neighbourhood of Maraş and the centre of the massacre that took place in 1978, where Alevis were brutally killed in attacks on their houses and workplaces, which had been marked with a cross a few days in advance. Initiated by those in the United Kingdom, it was a collaborative effort between British, German and Turkish Alevi associations and managed to build a *cemevi* in a place of such significance. This action with such a high symbolic meaning was accompanied by the successful attempts by BAF to commemorate the Maraş massacre in Yörükselim, which had previously been banned. It attracted the attention of Alevis in Europe and Turkey, and initiated and widened commemorations elsewhere.

Overall, the transnational Alevi journey underscores the resilience and determination of Alevis to assert their rights and preserve their religion in the face of ongoing challenges. As they continue to navigate the complexities of identity politics and engage in transnational activism, Alevis demonstrate a persistent commitment to achieving recognition and equality both within Turkey and on the global stage.

CONCLUSION

The chapter explored the complex relationship between historical oppression, Alevi migration and the ongoing struggle for recognition within the Republic of Turkey. Alevis have navigated a complex journey marked by migration, diasporic politics and the struggle for visibility and legitimacy. From their historical marginalisation in Turkey to their emergence

as a diaspora community with newfound freedoms in European countries, Alevis have continuously asserted their rights to religious freedom and equal citizenship.

Migration can be considered one of the cornerstones in the historical trajectory of Alevism due to its significant impact on the social, religious and organisational structures of Alevi communities. Such structural changes were triggered by rural–urban migration but matured in the diaspora, where Alevism became more institutionalised and spatially organised through *cemevis*, which has contributed to the Alevi claim for recognition in Europe and beyond. Since Alevis settled in European countries, they have developed considerably as a community marked by their local, national and transnational engagements. The Alevi politics of identity, visibility and recognition, together with governmental legal frameworks that protect freedom of religion and religious pluralism, have been key elements in encouraging a more organised Alevism in the diaspora.

The mobilisation of Alevi associations in Europe and their collaboration with their counterparts in Turkey highlights the interconnectedness of Alevi communities worldwide and their collective efforts to address longstanding issues in Turkey. European Alevi associations serve as crucial hubs for organisational and financial support, facilitating political mobilisation and advocacy efforts on both domestic and international fronts. The transnational activism of Alevis, fuelled by diasporic politics and an ongoing attachment to their homeland, exemplifies a collective quest for identity, visibility and recognition, fostering transnational solidarity across borders.

However, despite the recognition gained in European countries, particularly in the form of educational inclusion of Alevism and institutional support, the struggle for official recognition in Turkey remains unresolved. The claim for the acknowledgement of *cemevis* as places of worship symbolises Alevi desire for equal citizenship and religious freedom against the broader issue of discrimination and marginalisation within Turkey. Despite acknowledgement as a cultural asset by the Turkish government, the recognition of Alevism as a religious tradition remains out of reach, and has raised concerns about potential attempts to control Alevi practices rather than genuinely support their unique religious identity.

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CHAPTER 7

The Rise of Xeno-Racism in Turkey: The Transformation of Racism in the Context of Migration

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INTRODUCTION

In July 2024, a pogrom took place in Kayseri, with attacks on homes and businesses throughout the city. Crowds chanted, “Ne mutlu Türküm diyene!” (How happy is the one who says I am a Turk!) and “I don’t want refugees in my country” (Kısa Dalga, 2024). The following day, the incidents spread to Hatay, Bursa, Kilis, Konya, Şanlıurfa, Adana, Gaziantep, İzmir, Antalya, and Istanbul. In social media posts criticising the migration policy, a quote falsely attributed to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, “Too much compassion is a betrayal of the homeland”, was shared.

In a 2007 book on irregular migration and the informal market in Europe, the author argues that there was no xenophobia in Turkey yet, although there were signs of an emerging brand new *Western-style* issue (Doğan, 2007). Less than two decades later, in 2024, Turkey is confronted with expanded numbers and a variety of assaults against refugees¹ that have come with a rapidly growing xenophobia. In fact, xenophobia found its form much earlier, following the arrival of Syrians in the country. Turkey is characterised as a deeply divided nation with political conflicts primarily aligned with political and social distinctions (Aydın-Düzgüt, 2019; Somer, 2022). However, once it relates to the aversion of refugees, there is almost unanimous agreement. That is to say, in this democratically precarious nation that is only a century old, intolerance towards refugees is the one of the a few things that seems to bring its citizens together.

In this chapter, I focus on how racism has been shaped in the context of migration flows in the Turkish Republic as one of the legacies left for the new century, as its first century ends and moves into the second. The widespread belief is that there is no racism in Turkey because the search for its exact markers, as seen in the West, yields little. However, in this chapter, I refer to the cases of non-Turks and non-Muslims who have not been seen as full members, or at least equal members, of the polity throughout the history of the republic and have been subjected to the exclusionary and violent practices of both official and civilian individuals and collectives (see Öktem’s chapter in this book). Here, I argue that

¹ Turkey does not grant refugee status to people from non-Western countries due to the geographical limitations of the 1951 Geneva Convention. In this article, I use refugee as an umbrella term to cover all people who are in transit, asylum seekers and holders of asylum application, under temporary protection, and in transit.

the racism embedded in Turkey has found a new target in the context of migration and transformed into “xeno-racism”, the concept coined by Sivanandan (2001).

References to the hostile and exclusionary practices of Turkish history in this study are not to homogenise hostility towards refugees within nationally entrenched racism. Rather, I emphasise that hostile practices towards refugees have taken on a new form and show that the ethnicity of the target groups has started to lose its centrality. On the other hand, I try not to lose sight of racism against refugees within the historically existing racism in Turkey but rather show how racism against refugees is shaped within the dominant architecture and repertoire of racism. Of course, I am not suggesting that racism against minorities has been completely replaced by racism against refugees and that the only targets are refugees. Rather, I argue that anti-refugee sentiment has now taken a new form with racist overtones. While this form is “new” for Turkey, it is important to underline that it exists in many parts of the world, especially in Western countries, which have long been the destination countries of migration flows. However, I try to underline that this similarity is not identical in all its details and that each place should be read with its own historical and political context. Establishing temporal relations between the past and the present day by tracing notions and practices of racism is crucial to refute the misconception that the terminology and practices of that period are irrelevant today (Ergin, 2008, p. 828). As the republic enters its second century, it can answer some of the frequently asked questions about migration and refugees, not least the question of what awaits refugees in Turkey.

In the following, I first provide a discussion on xeno-racism, then a brief historical overview of migration flows and migration management in Turkey, followed by discussions on racism in the country. Finally, I look at the ways in which racism against refugees is “practised”.

XENO-RACISM

People often use xenophobia and racism interchangeably, or at least without clarifying the conceptual distinctions between them. While xenophobia is defined as dislike, exclusion, and fear of foreigners, the definition of racism is more complex (de Benoist, 1999; Blum, 2002; Wimmer, 1997). Racism, in its classical sense, manifests as body-centred and colour-coded stereotyping, stigmatisation, and discrimination. Racism is

famously defined by Solomos and Beck (1996, p. 213) as a “scavenging ideology” that derives its power from its ability to combine disparate and frequently contradictory elements. However, efforts to identify and reach a fixed description of racism both conceptually and socio-historically have tended to be futile and contributed to blurring understandings of the phenomenon.

In this context, it is important to remember Hall’s (2019) observation on racism, that it has historical specificity and is directly related to the time, place, and social contexts in which it emerges; it is therefore more appropriate to talk about racisms rather than racism. Grosfoguel (2016) states that there is no universal definition or marker of racism; religion, language, culture, ethnicity, and/or skin colour can be signs of racism. Therefore, looking for a universal marker in each social–historical context leads to overlooking the racism at that moment (Grosfoguel, 2016, p. 10). According to these conceptual debates, the proposition that “there is no racism in Turkey because there is no Western-style black-white segregation” collapses. On the contrary, it is possible to say that actions and policies towards minorities in Turkey’s history have been racist. When it comes to antagonising refugees, the diagnosis of whether these acts are xenophobia or racism becomes even more complex.

Sivanandan (2001) proposed that contemporary racism retains its fundamental nature but manifests itself in a xenophobic manner. The uprooted, the dispossessed, and the displaced are the targets of a new kind of racism (Fekete, 2001). The concept of xenophobia has been proposed to explain racism in the context of the Global North, which aims to exclude the “other”. However, countries in the Global South host much higher refugee populations than countries in the North, and all forms of exclusion, discrimination, racism, and violence also occur there. Therefore, it is possible to apply the concept in contexts beyond the Global North, albeit with unique contextual differences. This idea presents a more complex rejection ideology based on the stereotype of the impoverished refugees, “not necessarily ‘racially’ different, but marked by socioeconomic disadvantage and other social or cultural signifiers of alterity” (Di Masso et al., 2014, p. 343).

In this paper, I aim to show that the nature of attitudes, discourses, and acts of hatred and hostility towards refugees in Turkey should be considered beyond the racism-xenophobia pendulum. The first reason for this is that negative feelings towards refugees and the expression of these feelings are also built on ethnic and class ties rooted in Turkey’s history and

mental world. Like in many parts of the world, xenophobia increasingly targets the poor, vulnerable, non-Westerners, and particularly refugees. Moreover, it exhibits an Islamophobic nature, although its content differs from that of the West, and is closely associated with the country's shift towards Islamic politics over the past two decades. The AKP government's authoritarian regime, its empowerment of Sunni Islamic circles and values, and its pursuit of a similar course in domestic and foreign policy have created understandable anxiety among secular sections of the country. This anxiety is seen as part of the government's effort to further Islamise the country by welcoming refugees from Islamic countries (Saraçoğlu and Bélanger, 2019). Furthermore, acts of racial violence against refugees, such as lynching, which is an exceptionally brutal type of violence, have been manifested in various forms and magnitudes.

MIGRATORY FLOWS AND LEGAL ARCHITECTURE OF MANAGING MIGRATIONS

The mainstream narrative is that Turkey became a country of migration starting in the 1980s, which accelerated from the 1990s onwards. This narrative can be considered true concerning the contemporary perspective on human movements. However, population movements started in the Ottoman Empire and continued in modern Turkey (Akgündüz, 1998). Transforming the Anatolian peninsula into Turkish and Muslim lands has been a key pillar of the Turkification policy since the late Ottoman period, specifically from the *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (The Committee of Union and Progress) period. For this reason, political governments have mostly welcomed Turkish and Muslim communities that they assumed would assimilate into the new nation-state, but have been reluctant to accept non-Turkish and/or non-Muslims. It should be noted that Muslim populations do not refer to Arab Muslims. Furthermore, they pursued various policies, especially economic ones, to expel non-Muslims or weaken the power of those who remained.

İçduygu and Aksel (2013) categorise Turkey's migratory history into four distinct periods: (1) Two-way immigration and emigration circulation (1923–1950s), (2) the migration boom after the 1950s, (3) the emergence of new migration patterns in the 1980s, and (4) new modes of migration transition and its governance since the 2000s. Until the 1980s, Turkey maintained a policy of population engineering that closed the doors to non-Muslims and non-Turks. In the first period of İçduygu and

Aksel's (2013) categorisation, while non-Muslims were forcibly displaced, Muslims and Turks from the Ottoman Empire migrated to a place they thought of as home (Çağaptay, 2009, p. 131). Moreover, the policies of both the admission and management of Turks and Muslims and the resettlement of Turkish citizens based on race and ethnicity were shaped by the Settlement Laws of 1924 and 1934, the building blocks of the nation-state, in Erder's words (2018). Thus, a migration hierarchy emerged in 1930s Turkey, with Turkish communities at the top of the hierarchy, while stateless Balkan Muslims were accepted on a controlled basis. Kurds, Arabs, and non-Muslims were excluded from immigration (Çağaptay, 2009, pp. 152–158). In the second period, non-Muslim flight continued due to violence, especially in the cities; immigration of co-ethnics was encouraged; and for the first time, Turkish and Muslim emigration to Western European countries for work emerged. In the 1980s, in the third period, there was a significant increase in the movement of non-Turkish and non-Muslim people. The 1990s were also a period of reluctance to deal with the two red lines of the republic—the asylum seekers and the Kurdish issue—and the migration of Kurdish citizens from Turkey to European countries (İçduygu & Aksel, 2013, pp. 167–185). With the migrations that started in the 1990s and accelerated in the 2000s, especially from former Soviet and African countries, the countries of origin have diversified in terms of the type and duration of their stay, while the number of refugees has increased quantitatively. Turkey is now a country of arrival, departure, and transit for irregular migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and people in transit.

The Immigration Law and the Citizenship Law provided the legal framework for these rapidly changing migration flows. As migration flows diversified, Turkey introduced the 1994 Regulation on Asylum Seekers and became involved in regional and global migration management. Groups of Turkish descent who fled Bulgaria in 1989 and sought refuge in Turkey settled and—sooner or later—acquired citizenship on the grounds that they were cognates, while Kurdish asylum seekers did not enjoy such a chance. However, Turkey “sought repatriation and resettlement to third countries for the Kurds of Iraq” (Bozer, 2022, p. 105).

Indeed, it is imperative to add a fifth period to the preceding four, commencing in the 2000s, as a consequence of the mass exodus following the Syrian civil war. In April 2014, the Directorate General of Migration

Management (DGMM) was established to address the lack of coordination between institutions working in the fields of migration and asylum. The Turkish parliament subsequently adopted the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) to Europeanise the migration regime. Syrians were placed under Temporary Protection under Article 91 of this law. Although access to basic public services, such as health, education, and, to a limited extent, the labour market, as well as the right to non-refoulement have been provided and Syrians have been de facto granted the right to stay indefinitely in the country, the Temporary Protection regime is a regime of uncertainty. Syrians who have been in the country for more than a decade have not been widely and systematically recognised as refugees with the right to reside in the country over time and subsequently the right to citizenship. The idea that Syrians will return, or be “returned”, to their country is expressed as a promise by political figures and political parties when they aspire to power and as a demand by popular figures and ordinary people. In short, temporariness and uncertainty stand as obstacles for Syrians to build a safe and secure life, while another layer to the history of exclusion and racism in the country takes shape.

Moreover, among refugees coming from all over the world in different ways, refugees from Afghanistan are again frequently on the public agenda. Following the 2018 violence, drought, and economic catastrophe in Afghanistan and the 2021 Taliban takeover of the country, they usually come to Turkey as a result of secondary, tertiary migration, which is often unpredictable as to where and when it will end (GAR, 2023).

PERFORMING RACISM IN TURKEY

Yarkin (2022) divides research on racism in Turkey into two groups according to the period of focus: the first focuses on how the state, state officials, and intelligentsia defined the biologically defined “race” between 1920 and 1940, while the second focuses on the exclusion, discrimination, and violence to which non-Sunni Muslims and non-Turks are subjected by constructing Turkishness as a superior identity from the 1990s to the present. Different concepts such as xenophobia (Belge, 2002), racism (Maksudyan, 2005a), and anti-minority (Aktar, 2018) have identified practices of hostility towards minorities within the first group. Beyond the specific rationale behind the authors’ selection of these concepts, and without delving into the intricacies of the ongoing

debates about the similarities and differences between xenophobia and racism, it is crucial to underscore a few key points. No racism exists in Turkey, according to the mainstream narrative. Racism is simply framed in terms of the distinction between blacks and whites, with reference to the United States and the Europe, and the assertion that such a thing does not exist in Turkey. On the other hand, Maksudyan (2005) argues that because history and Kemalist ideology are largely determinative of contemporary historiography, racism is ignored by hiding behind the arguments of denialism, defensiveness, assimilation, and the circumstances of the time. At this point, it is worth remembering that just as racism emerges within contexts, the concealment of certain racism is also contextual (Sundstrom & Kim, 2014).

Prejudice, exclusion, and attacks against certain groups in Turkey's history are not new phenomena. Hostility towards minorities began in the late Ottoman period and became entrenched in the republican era, both in the mentality of the rulers and in state policies. In this book, Öktem discusses exile, the confiscation of the means of production and property, and collective violence against non-Muslims in detail. Furthermore, in the early years of modern Turkey, the exclusionary attitude towards Kurds and Kurdishness, despite being Muslim, took shape as one of the republic's "red lines" (Alkan, 2023). Turkey's monist state construction, which is secular but prioritises Sunni Islam and is based on Turkish ethnicity and culture, inevitably led to the formation of lines of tension, and these tensions turned into all kinds of violence that have continued for a century. In short, nationalism, with its religious emphasis, positioned non-Muslims and Kurds, with their group-specific specificities, as the "other".

The racialised regime in which Turkishness is in power, which was established in the first years of the republic, and which subordinated, dominated, and discriminated against non-Turks and non-Sunni Muslims, took a new form in the 1980s in the case of the Kurds. Starting from 1984 and escalating in the 1990s, thousands of people died, were displaced and arrested, and suffered widespread human rights violations (Bozarslan, 2001). State policy towards the Kurds differs from that towards other minorities in terms of the volume and persistence of violence, although it is, of course, important here that the PKK, as an armed force, organises counter-attacks. The slurs used for Kurds in the early years of the republic, such as "savage", "feudal", and "bandit" (Yarkin, 2022, p. 82), were replaced by slurs such as "Dirty Kurds", "Armenians", "terrorists",

and “kiros” in the 1990s (Yarkin, 2022, p. 84). While the efforts to assimilate Kurds continued politically, economically, and culturally, the burning of villages in Kurdish provinces in the 1990s and the displacement of their inhabitants were also part of the efforts to assimilate Kurds into Turkishness. The migration of the forcibly displaced to metropolises brought a new wave of racism and violence. In countless lynchings against Kurds, many people—from workers to university students, from artists to human rights defenders—have been lynched for speaking Kurdish or simply for being Kurdish. “The willing executioners of the state, armed with patriotic values, were rushing to fill in the gap presumably left open by the state” (Gambetti, 2013, pp. 120, 123).

Furthermore, it is crucial to highlight the prevalence of racism towards Arabs. Even today, Arabs are referred to as a “backstabbing” nation and untrustworthy people. Büke-Okyar (2017) argues that while Arab imagery has a long history dating back to their visual representation as dealers or carpet sellers in sixteenth-century Ottoman Karagöz shadow plays, the image of the “backstabbing Arab” was part of the postwar narrative that was used extensively from the early 1920s onwards. She posits that the unfavourable perceptions of the Arabs were passed on to the newly established nation as the state was seeking to create a “civilised” Turkish nation (Büke-Okyar, 2017, p. 566). While white and black Arabs were distinguished from each other in the Ottoman Empire (Büke-Okyar, 2017), today this distinction has disappeared, and Arabness and black skin colour are seen as one and the same thing. Afro-Turks, Syrians, and black people from Sub-Saharan countries are all described as “Arabs” in everyday language. As seen in the case of Afro-Turks who see and express themselves as Turks (Körükmez Kaya, 2017), discrimination in everyday language and practices is common because of their skin colour. In addition to these, racist characterisations and actions against football players can easily draw in the masses as seen in the racist wave at Karabük University in March 2024. Following a student’s allegation of contracting sexually transmitted diseases from a black male student, social media platforms were flooded with racist and sexist content, remarks, and images. Nevertheless, the discovery of the lifeless body of Jeannah Danys Dinabongho Ibouanga, a 17-year-old Gabonese student at Karabük University, in a river on 26 March 2023,

did not spark much public discussion at that time.² Refugee support groups and feminist circles communicated with and supported Dina’s family while monitoring judicial procedures.³

IMPLEMENTING XENO-RACISM IN TURKEY

Research on Syrians in Turkey clearly shows the extent and prevalence of discontent in Turkish society (Koca, 2016; Şenoğuz, 2017; Güney, 2021; Erdoğan, 2022). While the 2021 edition of the Syrian Barometer, which has been conducted thematically, albeit intermittently, based on extensive field research since 2014, shows an increase in negative perceptions, Syrians are cited as the cause of concerns such as damage to the economy, a decline in the quality of public services, crime, and demographic change (Erdoğan, 2022). Similarly, press and social media surveys reveal hatred and racism against refugees (Doğanay & Çoban Keneş, 2016; Aslan, 2017; Subay & Gökalp, 2023; Bağcı et al., 2023). Although hostility towards refugees has gradually but steadily increased, the situation has become more severe since 2019 with the general and local elections, the pandemic, the economic and political crisis, and the hardening of the government’s policies. Syrians are no longer the only target of hatred, even though they are the main target; people from African countries, including higher education students, Afghans, and Pakistanis, are also sometimes a trending topic under the heading of refugee hatred. In the days when hatred fuelled by various events—mostly hearsay and fabricated events such as unverified sexual harassment allegations—intensified, thousands of hateful, and racist comments were shared on social media under hashtags such as #sınırnamustur (border is honour), #ülkemdemülteciistemiyorum (I don’t want refugees in my country), and #SuriyelilerDefolsun (Syrians get out). As Ozduzen, Korkut, and Ozduzen’s (2020) study shows, in addition to the nationalist “Turkey is ours” theme, expressions used for Syrians were grouped under themes such as barbaric, invader, and potential terrorist.

² Bianet, “Parents of slain Gabonese student seek justice amid lack of progress in trial”, 30 April 2024, <https://bianet.org/haber/parents-of-slain-gabonese-student-seek-justice-amid-lack-of-progress-in-trial-294813>.

³ Bianet, “Feminist lawyers of Dina’s case: ‘There has not been an effective investigation’”, 8 November 2023, <https://bianet.org/haber/feminist-lawyers-of-dina-s-case-there-has-not-been-an-effective-investigation-287596>.

Not only have refugees themselves been targeted, but also civil society organisations, activists, and human rights defenders who support refugees, especially those who advocate visibly and publicly. These organisations and individuals have been accused of “taking funding”, “being Sorosian”,⁴ “being a tool of Europe by defending refugees in exchange for money”, and even “treason”. On social media, researchers, civil society organisations, and advocates were targeted with their photos and logos.

At the same time, the main opposition party’s promises to “send Syrians home” and the Victory Party, whose entire rhetoric is based on refugee hatred and which has rapidly increased its votes in the five elections since 2019, have played an important role in fuelling hatred. The AKP government was framed as the actor responsible for “bringing refugees into the country”, and this was one of its main weaknesses in the elections. Since 2019, the government has engaged in increasingly harsh discourse and practices. In this framework, practices such as identity checks on the streets, deportations, and deconcentrating policies have intensified. Refugees are confined to living in dread due to their refugee status.

Racism does not only remain at the level of discourse and social media. It is also experienced at all levels of education in the form of bullying by peers, teachers, administrators, and parents; all forms of harassment, exclusion, and wage theft in the workplace; social distancing; stigmatisation; as well as individual and collective physical violence.

Lynchings and pogrom attempts are extreme examples of physical violence, but unfortunately, there are cases both in Turkey’s history and in the context of post-2010 migration. The violence against refugees reached a degree of attempts at lynching in various cities, including Ankara, Izmir, Istanbul, Gaziantep, and Urfa. Among the numerous attacks reported in the news, some took days to subside, lynch mobs looted refugees’ homes and businesses, and police surrounded neighbourhoods (Sertkaya Doğan & Gökburun, 2021).

At least two cases of pogroms took place. First, a fight between two groups resulted in the death of a Turkish citizen on 10 August 2021. According to the observatory report by the İnsan Hakları Derneği (Human Rights Association, İHD), the attackers perpetrated acts of vandalism such as stoning homes, setting cars on fire, smashing shop

⁴ This accusation relates to using anti-Turkey speech or action motivated by financial advantage derived from sources either founded by or sponsored by George Soros.

windows, and throwing things into the streets and burning them. As a result, several refugees suffered injuries, and a pogrom occurred. Furthermore, the security officers failed to implement the necessary procedures and neglected to disperse the gathering. Various forms of indulgence were permitted under the watchful eye of law enforcement (İHD, 2021).

In cases of lynching and pogroms in Turkey, when lynch mobs attack dissidents or perceived enemies of the state (Şenoğuz, 2017), in most cases, the perpetrators are protected under the armour of impunity, and even those who are attacked may be subjected to punitive practices. The pogrom in Ankara was no different. In Altındağ, as a result of a fight, a young man from Turkey was stabbed to death by a Syrian person. Attacks on houses and workplaces where Syrians live took place. In lynching cases, it is usually not possible for the public to learn the exact reason why the tension started. According to Deutsche Welle (DW) Türkiye News, the reasons behind this are more complex. DW's interviews with residents reveal three distinct reasons for the incident: The growing population of Syrian residents in the area, prevailing economic challenges, and security challenges (Deutsche Welle, 2021).

The 2024 pogrom, which began in Kayseri and extended to other provinces, was sparked by allegations that a Syrian had abused a child; however, the allegations were not proven in the following days. According to the statement made by Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya on X following the events, a total of 343,000 posts were made on X by more than 79,000 accounts, of which 63 accounts were subjected to investigation. Of these, ten files were sent to the prosecutor's office, while the other files are still ongoing.⁵

Attacks against Syrians in Turkey have led to the targeting of lorries, military bases, governorship buildings, service institutions, and Turkish flags in Syria's Afrin, Idlib, Azaz, Jarabulus, al-Rai, and Marea. These attacks once again fuelled nationalist hatred against Syrians in Turkey. The spiral of hatred and violence led to the stabbing death of a Syrian teenager by three Turkish men in Antalya.

The slogan "Too much compassion is a betrayal of the homeland" circulated on social media. These slogans were the first public and explicit manifestation of "lifeboat ethics" (Sundstrom, 2013), expressing the hitherto hidden or muttered sentiment, "If this [anti-refugee words and

⁵ @AliYerlikaya, Twitter, 1 July 2024, <https://x.com/AliYerlikaya/status/1807834349712093635>.

behaviour] is racist, then yes, I am racist". The scapegoating of refugees during economic downturns is no longer a secret, and anti-refugees racist politics further exacerbate this inclination (Fekete, 2018). Both the newspaper excerpts and "lifeboat ethics" in slogans demonstrate that Turkey is no exception to that trend.

Xeno-racism, the coming together of two traditions of exclusionary discourse, is a potent fascist ideological and discursive mix, contributing to a particularly unstable and dangerous environment that can easily turn (and has turned) into violence against entire communities. Not surprisingly, these events were reminiscent of the pogroms in Turkey's history. Coincidentally, 2 July also coincided with the Madımak Massacre in 1993, which killed 33 Alevi and left-wing intellectuals and artists.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the widespread belief that "There is no racism in Turkey" since the emergence of modern Turkey as a nation-state, racism against non-Muslims and Kurds that are perceived as external to the polity has persisted. Racist practices range from subtle social distancing to mob violence; some practices are deeply rooted in everyday life and manifest as the behaviour of ordinary individuals, while others are implemented as government policies. Such practices or policies targeting minorities were either denied or rationalised as "one-off events" or "the state's reflex to protect itself". Xenophobia is a more recent phenomenon, linked to the influx of Syrians in the 2010s, yet its target is not limited to Syrians.

The danger of the amalgamation of racism and xenophobia lies not just in its propensity to incite far-right factions to unite behind a fascist ideology once more. It also has the potential to mobilise the left and other identity-based political movements that advocate for "equality and justice" towards implementing exclusionary policies pertaining to issues such as economics, gender, culture, and secularism.

This chapter has attempted to show the social and historical sources of the racism against refugees that we see in Turkey today. Turkey's racist and fascist practices against non-Muslims and Kurds have emerged in a new form as xeno-racism, which manifests itself in a cluster of intersectionality. The rapid increase of xeno-racism and its manifestation in the most extreme forms of violence requires both further research and the development of careful and long-term policies.

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PART II

Remembering the Past, (Re-)imagining
the Future

Fractures in Dominant Republican Memory: The 2000s, the Memory Turn and Memory Activism in Turkey

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INTRODUCTION

Nation-states need strong, exclusionary, persuasive memory regimes. Renan ([1882] 2018) and Anderson ([1983] 2016), in their respective eras, have emphasised the importance of shared memory in building and sustaining nation-states. While Renan argued that collective forgetting is fundamental, Anderson viewed nations as imagined communities that rely on shared memories to maintain their unity. In light of this, creating a strong and persuasive national memory fostering “commonality of destiny” and a “common past” is crucial for nation-states to ensure their survival and success and is seen throughout all nation-state-building processes. In the case of the Republic of Turkey, constructing a memory regime whose main characteristics are selective, exclusionary, and pragmatic was an integral part of the nation-state-building process. This memory regime has been constructed and reinforced through mnemonic mechanisms such as denial, distortion, and truth substitution.

However, the regimes of national memory have not been able to retain their former power throughout the twenty-first century. In Turkey, a dynamic process from the early 1980s to the 2000s eroded the limits of a monolithic and exclusionary national historical narrative. This chapter argues that a dynamic and pluralistic memory landscape emerged in Turkey after the 2000s, which has witnessed a powerful, multifaceted political struggle for memory that managed to open breaches in the national narrative. Furthermore, to comprehend the dynamics and background of this struggle, the article provides a periodisation of the salient phases and junctures of memory politics in Turkey.

MEMORY, NATIONS, AND TURKISH NATION-BUILDING: THE FRAGILITY OF NATIONAL MEMORY

Multi-religious and multi-ethnic community composition before the construction of nation-states obstructs the building of monolithic memory regimes, which are attempts “to cover the past with a monolithic, conflict-free unifying memory design” (Sezer, 2018, p. 86) and hide ethnic and religious conflicts, genocide, and attempts at ethnic cleansing. Nevertheless, the exclusionary and monolithic nature of national memory also carries its fragile potential. In Turkey, the twentieth century saw the return of pasts that had been previously denied or ignored. The Republic of Turkey, like many of its counterparts, was founded “in the aftermath

of a revolutionary rupture that violently removed an old regime, or in the aftermath of conflicts and wars that created deep rifts in collective memory, sometimes even in the shadow of a genocide” (Sezer, 2018, p. 85). Although national memory covers these conflicts with claims of integrity, cohesion, and non-conflict, it is open to challenges precisely due to these claims. The field of memory is always open to the intervention of agents who give voice to these pasts, and thus, have parallels with the dynamics of the struggle for hegemony (Popular Memory Group, 1982).

TURKEY’S DOMINANT REPUBLICAN MEMORY: A PROSPECT

In the first half of the twenty-first century, the Armenian Genocide; political, economic, and cultural violence against non-Muslim communities; attempts to exterminate the Alevi community; and violent practices against the Kurds living in Turkey—highlighted particularly in the Dersim Massacre—demonstrated the limits and exclusionary nature of the new national imagination. Initiatives that took place before and after the founding of the republic reflect not only the unifying character of the process of transition from empire to nation-state but also the pragmatic and exclusionary nature of the construction of collective memory, which is the central component of constructing a national history (Işık, 2011, p. 3).

Any periodisation inevitably carries with it the risk of over-homogenisation, and a closer look reveals several historical moments that interrupt coherent narratives about specific historical events.¹ This section aims to provide a descriptive framework for the dominant republican memory. Constructing a historical narrative that ignores the imperial legacy and explicitly aims at the imagination of a historical rupture is a fundamental characteristic of Turkey’s dominant republican memory. The establishment of the republic “marks a break in continuity” and, for precisely the same reason, “it [needs] to re-establish a sense of continuity” (Cavalli, as cited in Kolluoğlu-Kırlı, 2005, p. 29). The claim to “open a new era” inevitably brings with it efforts to redesignate the historical

¹ For instance, Akçam (2021, pp. 145–155) discusses different periods in the denial of the Armenian Genocide. Despite the long silence about the Genocide until the 1970s, he marks the post-1970s as the period when the “new policy of denial” began to be constructed and the post-1990s as the “demolition of the wall of silence” (p. 151).

reality, within which the mechanisms, methods, and scope have changed but the essence of the endeavour remained the same.²

...instruments of this erasure were genocide, dispossession, deportation, and population exchange shortly before the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and targeted the non-Muslim population. [...] Having diminished the non-Muslim population to an unthreatening number, the next targets of homogenization policies were the Kurdish and Alevi populations (Ayata & Hakyemez, 2013, p. 133).

Denial is not only a part of official history or state discourse; it is also present in everyday life, socialisation, and social interactions. Therefore, the history of denial in Turkey cannot be solely related to social memory. Imagining society as a “classless and privilege-free fused mass, as a whole” (Ahıska, 2007, p. 156) is one of the most prominent examples of denying differences and inequalities. Being a partner in denial, or at least not breaking the integrity of denial,³ is one of the prerequisites for socialisation.⁴ In the cities of Anatolia, there are stories about the Armenian Genocide that are passed on orally but are rejected and considered illegal when expressed in public (Ahıska, 2007, p. 159). This rejection of the stories—denial in everyday life—is an essential part of Turkey’s ethos (see Alıcı’s chapter in this book).

This has certain implications for the struggle for memory in Turkey. If a homogenising, unifying, exclusionary historical narrative is maintained through a silence inherent to Turkey’s ethos, what are the implications of the memory of state violence against different social groups in terms of the relationship between identity and memory? Different social groups in Turkey, who have individually experienced state violence in the past, have

² As much as acts of violence directly targeting communities, symbolic struggles are also part of the rupture. Kolluoğlu-Kırlı (2005, p. 27) reminds us that the destruction, redefinition and reconstruction of Ottoman spaces as new urban spaces was an intrinsic part of the construction of Turkish nationalism in the 1920s.

³ In her work, Göral (2021a, p. 88) refers to the concept of “public secret” as used by Taussig. She points out that the paradoxical relationship between the codification of historical reality as a public secret and its visibility or openness can only exist through a contract of public secrets.

⁴ Uğur-Çınar (2015, p. 7) places this in a broader framework and sees it as a fundamental characteristic of an organist historical narrative in which “inclusion is conditional upon internalizing cultural characteristics of the dominant group” (Uğur-Çınar, 2015, p. 88).

not been able to come together to discuss their experiences and establish historical and political commonalities.⁵ This has led to the existence of memory ghettos, where each group's memory of the past functions as a protective barrier for their respective communities (Booth, 2006, xi). After the 2000s, however, the repression created by the past and accumulated in these memory ghettos carried the potential for the emergence of a more plural landscape in the field of memory. The collective agents who emerged from the movements of the 1980s and onwards created the possibility of political and cultural encounters in the 1990s and gave voice to Turkey's problematic past. This helped to break down the barriers between different social groups and created a more pluralistic memory landscape.

EXAMINING TURKEY'S MEMORY REGIME AFTER THE 1980S

1980s-2000s: From Preliminary Neo-Ottomanism to AKP

The 12 September 1980 coup was a historical moment in which the ethos of Turkey was radically rethought. The Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which became the ideological centre of the coup and the political initiatives of afterwards, is also important in terms of the reformulation of social remembering.⁶ Ottomanist tendencies, which are largely interpreted as the central element of the AKP's memory regime, were part of the discourse used by Özal after the coup to formulate Turkish foreign policy, especially towards the Balkans, and to overcome the socio-cultural conflicts arising from the visibility of cultural diversity at home since the 1980s (Çolak, 2006).

At the same time, the 1980s was also a decade of the rise of identity-based movements in Turkey. The late 1980s and early 1990s was a period

⁵ I am not categorically ignoring the revolutionary and socialist struggles and organisations of the 1960s and 1970s. However, it was only after the 1980s that "identity" entered Turkey's social struggles agenda. Only then was it possible for specific identity groups to interact within the framework of shared remembering.

⁶ Maksudyán and Alkan (2023, p. 176) argue that from the 1980s onwards, Özal's Turkish-Islamic synthesis influenced school curricula and popularised "certain Ottoman cultural traits, such as classical Turkish music and literary forms". However, they also emphasise the continuity between the 1980s and the 1990s: "Throughout the second half of the 1990s, [...] Turkey faced the rise of an Islamist politics, which successfully Islamized this already existing vein of neo-Ottomanism".

in which parts of the past that had previously been little discussed were explored in a way that led to the emergence of new identities and, accordingly, new counter-memories (Çolak, 2006, p. 589). This development cannot be attributed to the alternative memory field that opened with Özal as it was real social movements that pursued counter-memories. However, since a neo-Ottomanist perspective invoked cultural diversity and cultural plurality, it challenged the Kemalist narrative of the past (Çolak, 2006, p. 599).

2000s: The AKP and Neo-Ottomanism

To some extent, the politics of the Özal era have been inherited by the AKP, but the significant difference between the two periods is that the AKP's vision of the republican past is markedly constituted by a negation of the republican history. The emphasis on the Ottoman past, which in Özal's case was both continuity-emphasising and pragmatically inclusive, has gained increasing strength in the AKP's neo-Ottomanist vision of the past, with an increased dose of "Ottoman Imperialism" and "Ottoman Islam" (Maksudyan & Alkan, 2023, p. 177). This negation can be seen in a series of examples, from the discursive choices in the Dersim Apology to the statements such as the republic being a 90-year hiatus given to the Ottoman Empire.⁷

In different debates, the AKP's memory regime has been conceptualised as "majoritarian conservatism" (Bakiner, 2013), neo-Ottomanism (Tokdoğan, 2018), or a consumption-based "ersatz nostalgia" (Ünal-Çınar, 2020). These debates had in common the emphasis on the AKP era's construction of a new and specific memory regime and its increasingly exclusionary, equally fluid, and pragmatic nature. The mobilisation in the field of social remembering in Turkey in the 2000s and the strengthening of oppositional imaginations about the past cannot, however, be explained solely by the AKP's critical outlook towards the

⁷ In November 2011, Erdoğan apologised for the 1938 Dersim Massacre, targeting the CHP and its leadership (Başbakan Erdoğan'dan Dersim Özrü, 2011). This was a conditional apology that pragmatically targeted the republican history (Ayata and Hakyemez, 2013, 138). In 2015, AKP Balıkesir MP Tülay Babuşçu stated that the Republic was a 90-year break given to the Ottoman Empire (AKP'li Vekil: Osmanlı'nın 90 Yıllık Reklam Arası Sona Erdi, 2015).

republic's history. Nevertheless, it is important to reflect on the relationship between the AKP's politics of the past and the transformation in the 2000s.

TURKEY'S MEMORY TURN

Global Tendencies and the Emergence of a Plural Landscape in Turkey

The two decades before the 2000s are generally recognised as a period of increased interest in memory worldwide, both in the academic field and the politics of memory. The decline of the global experience of socialism and the archives of this experience being seen in a new light, the efforts to “recover” indigenous histories in the post-colonial period, the post-traumatic situation following the Holocaust and WWII, the death of generations who experienced these traumatic events, and the possibilities offered by digital technologies for the storage and circulation of information are all significant moments in the growth of interest in memory (Assmann, 2006, pp. 210–211).

This global emphasis is also essential for understanding the field of memory in Turkey. These junctures contributed to the growth of a horizontal, democratic, and inclusive field of memory and pluralisation of memory in its encounter with official history. On the other hand, “amnesia [as the] starting point of the Turkish national narrative” (Kolluoğlu-Kırlı, 2005, p. 41) imposed fragility on the national narrative and inevitably led to intrusions and interventions. The 2000s are understood as a period in which “collective amnesia has been scrutinized and the overarching master narrative has been contested by critical voices and formerly silenced memories” (Gönlügür & Sezer, 2021a, p. 3). This openness to the past and social remembering (Özyürek, 2001, p. 7; Özyürek, 2007, pp. 2–4) is considered to be “an unprecedented interest in the country's recent and distant past” (Bakner, 2013) or a “memory turn” (Sezer & Gönlügür, 2021b, p. 10). While it is accurate to view it in the context of the global trend, it is crucial to understand this transformation specifically in Turkey.

TURKEY'S MEMORY LANDSCAPE IN THE 2000S

During the 2000s, Turkey witnessed a significant movement centred around memory and identity. This movement progressed on two planes, the first being the conflicting visions over the fundamental antagonisms of the republic of different political identities. Contrasting and contradictory debates on how the republic's history should be remembered led to an "agonistic field" (Sezer, 2018, p. 85) filled with forgetting, traumas, and conflicts. However, the agonistic field is not limited to the social recollection of these political identity groups. The republic's history corresponds to a historical process in which plural social groups were subjected to violence, were ignored, and sought recognition. Therefore, different religious and ethnic groups, women, and LGBTI+ communities took their place as agents in the plural memory landscape of the 2000s. This movement has helped to bring to light the atrocities committed against various social groups and to create a more inclusive milieu open to recognition of the claims about the past.

The AKP's critical discourses and actions towards the republican past up to 2013 were not genuine attempts to come to terms with the past. However, they did make a significant contribution to opening up some breaches in the dominant republican memory that had seemed largely "untouchable". The AKP's actions also led to the reinterpretation of republican history from a more confrontational perspective. Furthermore, they paved the way for the emergence of a democratic vision around the memory of the past. Developments such as the initiation of Ergenekon and the Balyoz trials, starting in 2008 and 2010, respectively⁸; the trial of the generals who carried out the 12 September 1980 coup starting in 2011; and the Dersim Massacre being brought into political discourse by Prime Minister Erdoğan in 2011, despite their problematic nature,

⁸ The Ergenekon Trials are the trials of 275 people, including many military officers, for "plotting against the government" between 2008 and 2016. At the outset, the trials appeared to be an investigation into human rights violations in Turkey but they later became highly controversial and most of the defendants were acquitted. The Balyoz Trials, aimed at alleged perpetrators of a coup plot to overthrow the government in 2003 after the AKP came to power, took place between 2010 and 2015 and were also controversial. In 2015, 235 defendants were acquitted.

have brought the dubious pasts of the republic's history into public discussion.⁹

I mentioned earlier that the social movements of the 1990s paved the way for the struggle for memory in the 2000s. Among these, the Saturday People occupy a specific place.¹⁰ In 1995, the movement began in the Kurdish provinces and then spread to Taksim in front of the Galatasaray High School. This movement allowed for the convergence of the reality of the Kurdish provinces and Western cosmopolitan life. Taksim is a political space for organisations and collectives of social opposition, and the Saturday People created the possibility for daily and political encounters, enabling memory communities to connect with each other. The Saturday People also provided a first point of contact between the memory ghettos. The movement also relates to the experience-based rupture of the 1990s in different areas of Turkey. Göral (2021a, p. 93) points to the memory gap between the west of Turkey and Kurdish provinces in the 1990s, and the crucial lack of acknowledgement and recognition of the violence in Kurdish cities by those living in the west. The Saturday People hold a significant position in eliminating this disruption of memories and experiences.¹¹

The murder of Hrant Dink and the subsequent organisation of political mourning around it also shaped the field of memory in Turkey after the 2000s. The murder produced meanings far beyond the murder of an Armenian and dissident/socialist journalist. Not only did the murder open considerable breaches in the dominant republican memory, demarcated by the denial of the Armenian Genocide (see Maksudyan's chapter in this book), but it also turned the AKP's discourse of democratisation

⁹ See Kaya (2015) for a discussion of public debates on the past in the 2000s framed by the "coming to terms with the past" discourse. To Kaya (2015, p. 682), this discourse was "a therapeutic language of memory" that "challenges official Kemalist history by bringing to light repressed memories".

¹⁰ The protests, initially called Saturday Mothers, aimed to seek justice for individuals who were forcibly disappeared while detained. Despite their name being changed to Saturday People, they remained committed to their original goal and eventually became a leading movement in raising awareness about human rights violations in Turkey.

¹¹ This can be seen in everyday encounters. While young generations in western Turkey are nostalgic for the glittering popular culture and secularism of the 1990s, the childhood imaginations of the young generations who grew up in Kurdish provinces are immersed in war memories.

on its head as it highlighted how the AKP employed the past arbitrarily and selectively. As Birdal (2013, p. 273) aptly notes:

It is not the power of mourning alone that transforms Hrant's commemorations into a political opposition and a call to confront the country's dark past; [...] What endows Hrant's mourning with such a critical and 'unsettling' capacity to have an impact should be sought in the fact that it can turn into a 'counter-mourning' that is much more comprehensive, much more insistent, demanding and able to 'go further' than [...] the dominant political culture and *ethos of* the country.

The trial of the generals responsible for the 12 September coup also marked a pivotal moment in the 2000s, allowing for an open and inclusive discussion of the coup's legacy. People who were tortured and suffered from legal sanctions during the coup period, and who were already organised as communities and associations, attempted to intervene in the 12 September trials and to take part in public debates as active agents,¹² developing a post-memory of 12 September in later generations¹³ as well as in people who understood the coup in the neutrality of a historical event. This process began in 2010 and involved diverse political actors, popular figures, politicians, former politicians, and artists in the 12 September debate (Orhon, 2023a, 2023b, pp. 109–113). The convergence of three significant events resulted in an opportunity to consolidate memories and bring fragmented sites of social remembering into contact with each other.

Returning to the discussion on global trends in memory, the memory turn in Turkey during the 2000s was facilitated by the widespread use of new communication technologies. These technologies allowed for increased interaction in the social process of remembering and presented opportunities for intervening in the representation of past events, as well as addressing issues of epistemic injustice¹⁴ at the level of the audience. The digital space, although not entirely free from structural asymmetries,

¹² See, Orhon (2015, pp. 71–74).

¹³ The expansion of television culture after the 2000s also played a role in developing this post-memory. The political history series aired on mainstream television channels in the early 2000s not only informed later generations about 12 September but also revived interest in the recent past. See Emre Çetin (2014).

¹⁴ Sezer and Gönügür (2021b, p. 12) designate this as "memory injustice".

helped to overcome the injustice of being known, heard, and recognised. This creates a partial difference at both the level of representation and audience. At the level of representation, it strengthens the possibility of revealing and publicising the testimony of those whose experiences and testimonies are usually unheard, ignored, or silenced. At the level of the audience, it creates potential opportunities to access testimony produced spontaneously or in a targeted manner, allowing individuals to become viewers and listeners. This refers to the digital field's reinforcement of a potential inherent in collective memory: collective memory is in a state of "constant negotiation and reconfiguration" and this process "supplies the individual with new interpretive frameworks with which to construe their experiences" (Ryan, 2011, p. 161). The ever-fluid nature of digital technologies aligns with the dynamic nature of collective memory.

MEMORY ACTIVISM IN TURKEY: MULTIPLE FIELDS, COLLECTIVE AGENTS

The transformation of the memory culture in Turkey in the 2000s is an extremely broad topic and includes elements ranging from ethno-religious narratives of the past excluded by the monolithic memory regime of the republic to the attempts to contact the past within the cultural sphere (especially in cinema and literature), and from digital memory works to how popular culture, especially television cultures, relate to the past. On the other hand, the singular and collective plurality of agents in the field of memory also hinders drawing a cohesive landscape.

We can classify the groups involved in the memory struggle in Turkey into four categories.¹⁵ The categorisation we are discussing is strongly connected to two aspects that were previously mentioned: that the current memory movement is closely linked to the accumulation of social struggle that occurred during the 1990s and that digital technologies contributed to the dynamism in the field of memory during the 2000s. In particular, the last two points refer to movements that effectively utilise social media and digital possibilities.

Communities and organisations are the founding elements of the memory struggle in Turkey, and the Alevi community and the Saturday

¹⁵ I used the initial version of this categorisation in my speech at the Turkey Beyond Borders project. See, (*Göze Orhon One Part/Tek Bölüm - TurkeyBeyondBorders*, 2023).

People can be considered founding communities in the field of memory. These relatively homogeneous groups exist as memory communities around a cause of recognition. The Alevi community is not only already a community of memory but has also been involved in a multi-layered struggle regarding the Sivas Massacre (see Hanoğlu's chapter in this book).¹⁶ The Saturday People rose to prominence in the mid-1990s as a collective agency linked with the Kurdish political movement. Today, they remain a vital part of the struggle for memory in Turkey. Alongside them, Hafıza Merkezi, established in 2011, stands as one of the founding organisations of the memory struggle (see Göral's chapter in this book). Initially having “focused on enforced disappearance to contribute to uncovering gross human rights violations, and to confront these violations from a perspective of transitional justice”, Hafıza Merkezi has expanded its field of work in the current conditions of the country and “added recent gross human rights violations to its monitoring and documentation activities” (Our Story, n.d.).

In the 2000s, there has been a growing interest in memory among civil society organisations. Some of these organisations, with different fields of activity or political interests, have either become or have had to become involved in issues related to politics of the past, oral history, political mourning, and legal struggles over past events. One example is the Hrant Dink Foundation, which was established shortly after Dink's murder. While the foundation was initially founded to keep alive Hrant Dink's dreams, struggle, language, and heart (Vision & Mission, n.d.), over time, it became actively involved in the memory movement with the establishment of the 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory (23.5 Hrant Dink Site Of Memory—Hrant Dink Foundation, n.d.). The foundation served as a predecessor of other organisations established after political murders in Turkey in the following years. The oral history and memory studies of Kaos GL, which is basically an LGBTI+ organisation, on the social history of the movement can also be considered in this context. The comprehensive study by Kaos GL, which is considered “a notch in the official history” (Tar, 2019) is based on oral history research held with the movement's veterans.

¹⁶ The Sivas Massacre was an incident in which people, including artists, intellectuals, and children who had gathered for a festival on 2 July 1993 were attacked by political Islamist attackers who set fire to their hotel. As a result of the attack, 37 people, including children, artists and Alevi intellectuals, lost their lives.

As Turkey's recent history has witnessed numerous political murders, massacres, and violence against defined groups, memory organisations in Turkey include groups, platforms, and communities that have come together around a particular social incident or trauma. One of the early examples of this is the Social Memory Platform, which was established in 2009 with the gathering of people who had lost relatives in political assassinations. On the other hand, the last decade in Turkey has also witnessed an escalation of social violence. Deaths during the Gezi Uprising and the 10 October 2015 Ankara Train Station Massacre left traumatic memories behind. The 10 October Solidarity, which was established after the massacre, and the associations and solidarity groups that were established to commemorate losses in Gezi, can be considered in this context.

In keeping with the dynamic and plural nature of collective memory, activism groups, large and small, should also be mentioned among the agents of the memory struggle.¹⁷ While some spontaneous and dynamic action groups are permanent, others may disband or take different forms over time. We can refer to the digital archiving initiatives that emerged after the Gezi Resistance, including collectives such as Seyri Sokak, which document social movements, resistances, and efforts for social justice. Additionally, numerous social media accounts operate either individually or collectively and contribute to these efforts.

This accumulation of struggles involving these collective agents has emerged in the last 15 years. These groups or organisations are not isolated; rather, there is a dynamic interaction between them. Some shape the field of memory and others are affected by the field's horizontal dynamism and engage in the struggle for memory. Although this is the current landscape, it is clear that the interaction between these organisations and communities on the politics of the past will continue. This is partly guaranteed by the plurality inherent in the past, and the fact that the past is too multidimensional and multivocal to be fully encompassed by particular agents, hierarchically positioned voices, and canonical narratives. Discussing the past in a divided society with diverse and even distant memories requires negotiation. In Turkey, it is expected that the resistance to monolithic narratives will persist within this deliberative environment.

¹⁷ For a list of digital memory works, see (Hafıza Merkezi, n.d.) 12 September Memory Museum for Historical Justice and Madımak Massacre Memory Center are two major digital memorialisation works.

CONCLUSION: SOME PROSPECTIVE INSIGHTS

The scope and diversity of Turkey's memory turn are much broader and multifaceted than have been portrayed here. In this chapter, I have focused on the collective entities involved in the memory struggle and mainly concentrated on political memory. Nostalgic representations of Turkey's recent past, political power-promoted neo-Ottoman nostalgia, and Istanbul-centred cosmopolitan nostalgia can be interpreted as popular manifestations of looking back at the past.

Currently, the struggle over memory is one of Turkey's most vibrant and ambitious political struggles. Despite political fatigue and cynicism resulting from repeated political defeats, there has been a lively and diverse field of memory that has emerged since the early 2000s. Even in Turkey's strictly militaristic climate, this vibrant and diversified field of memory continues to thrive (Göral, 2021b, p. 32). Organisations dedicated to the memory of repressed pasts in Turkey are strong and realistic due to their organic connections with social movements. Researchers in the field of memory are often asked whether Turkey is a society that is forgetful. However, this stereotype is no longer accurate. The decades under discussion only refer to the primary actions and imaginings of the memory turn in Turkey. This is just the beginning, and we can expect that the struggle for memory in Turkey will progress in a way that promotes diversity and further erodes monolithic narratives.

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Confronting the Shadows: Transitional Justice and the Armenian Genocide in Turkey

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the ways in which the Armenian Genocide can be approached through a transitional justice lens, specifically focusing on the truth recovery mechanisms. The Armenian Genocide, perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire during World War I, saw the systematic extermination and execution of over a million Armenians through deportation, forced marches, state-enforced famine and starvation, and massacres (Akçam, 2012; Kevorkian, 2011; Kurt, 2021). This consistent process also included dispossession, destruction of material culture, and forced assimilation (Üngör, 2012). The Republic of Turkey has followed a strict denialist approach to the Armenian Genocide, which has involved vigorous efforts to challenge and disregard historical evidence that has been established by scholars. The unwillingness to acknowledge the genocide entails state-sponsored campaigns aimed at minimising or rationalising the atrocities committed, citing geopolitical considerations and national identity narratives. Despite increasing international pressure and calls for acknowledgement, Turkey's denial of the genocide has remained a significant obstacle to reconciliation, reflecting the complex historical and political dynamics surrounding the issue.

A century and a year since the Republic of Turkey was founded, contemporary acts of violence against Armenians show that racial hatred, genocide denialism, and anti-Armenian sentiments remain integral to the fabric of Turkish institutions and society. The assassination of the Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, an outspoken and fierce critic of denialist politics, on 19 January 2007 was something of a turning point in revealing this continuity. His assassination, in which the state is widely considered to have been involved and implicated (Tataryan, 2011), was perceived by many Armenians and scholars to be a continuation of the deportation of Armenian intellectuals on 24 April 1915, marked by the “1,5 million + 1” banners in Hrant Dink's funeral (Akçam, 2020; Ankara Düşünceye Özgürlük Girişimi'nden Hrant Dink'i anma paneli, 2023). Akçam argues that Hrant Dink was killed in public specifically because he was Armenian (Akçam, 2020), as the state sought to prevent Armenians from speaking freely and to remind them that the genocide was committed to mute their voices in the first place. Turkey's support for and celebration of Azerbaijan's ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Karabakh sent a similar message of continuity, specifically in terms of Turkey's ongoing genocidal aspirations (Ankara Düşünceye Özgürlük

Girişimi'nden Hrant Dink'i anma paneli, 2023). The Karabakh conflict is seen by some as rooted in the unaddressed legacy of the genocide:

With hindsight, the unresolved historic legacy of the 1915 genocide can be seen to have influenced the emergence of the Karabakh conflict back in the late 1980s, and it continues to pose an important obstacle both to the resolution of the conflict and to the normalisation of relations between Turkey and Armenia (Cheterian, 2018).

HOW CAN TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE BE HELPFUL: TWO MAIN CHALLENGES

From a transitional justice perspective, it is challenging to find the right mechanisms to address an atrocity that took place more than a century ago when survivors and indeed perpetrators are no longer alive (Malcontent, 2016). Cooper and Akçam (2005, p. 88) describe this challenge as follows:

When the crimes lie far in the past (as in Turkey), acknowledging them serves a broader societal and political purpose: it signals a society's maturity and its ability to accept sometimes painful criticism, which is indispensable to democracy. In Turkey's case, an honest reckoning with the past is necessary not only to overcome tensions with Armenians. Turkey's own ability to nurture a democracy in which conflicts are resolved peacefully requires it to overcome the authoritarian desire to make history serve an official narrative.

This challenge can be understood to have two components. The first is about how to draw on existing and established transitional justice practices, from a critical viewpoint, to make them meaningfully applicable in the context of the Armenian Genocide. But what mechanisms are suitable when more than a century has passed? Is it through a historical commission, a truth commission, or trials (relatively easy and straightforward to dispense with as the perpetrators are long gone)? Or would a comprehensive reparations programme be the most effective way to address the grievances, so that the descendants of the survivors not only feel that some justice has been done, but also recognise that their present lives are least affected by the ongoing denial of the genocide?

The second part of the challenge derives from the meaningfulness question. What should we aim to achieve exactly? If the actual perpetrators, those who enabled the genocide and those who participated in individual and collective acts of violence, are not alive to be brought to justice, and if the victims and survivors of these acts are not alive to be offered tools and support for reparation, then we need to talk differently about a potential reconciliation of perpetrators and victims and survivors. If we cannot hold the individuals accountable, where should demands for truth and recognition be directed? Our focus immediately turns to the institutions, mechanisms, social structures, and ideologies that enabled the genocide and that have sustained its denial to date. The challenge becomes even more layered at this point. We often refer to the Turkish state as the subject of our demands for ending the denial, recognising the genocide, and repairing the harm. Who and what constitutes the Turkish state? The same question applies to society in general. Who do we want and need to engage in conversations around the genocide? What do we expect from specific individuals and families who, for example, reside in the land that used to be Armenian? What change do we want to create in an ordinary citizen of Turkey whose thoughts and ideas have been shaped by state-sponsored colonialist and nationalist sentiments and denial?

Unpacking these questions is necessary to be able to select specific mechanisms and approaches from the transitional justice repertoire. Oranlı explains that there is an interplay among “individuals who perpetrate genocide denialism, the ideology (that of Turkism) behind denialism (and genocide), and the institutions (both educational and legal) supporting genocide denialism” (Oranlı, 2021, p. 120). Targeting each of these pillars, for example, could help to specify the goals of transitional justice mechanisms. This chapter offers a starting point for those who are willing to undertake such a huge and important task. It does not, however, aim to provide an in-depth analysis of each issue that could be dealt with. Rather it aims to present a broad overview of the framework with which the genocide could be addressed, specifically from the truth pillar of transition justice.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of genocide denialism and discusses its ongoing impact. It then turns to a detailed picture of truth recovery mechanisms that have been used around the world to discuss their relevance for the Armenian Genocide. By drawing connections with established transitional justice practices at the global level, the chapter

provides an insightful examination of possible approaches to dealing with the past in the context of the Armenian Genocide.

CONTINUITY OF GENOCIDE DENIALISM

The Armenian Genocide and its denial have been an integral part of the nation-building of the Turkish Republic, an essential feature of the Turkish state, and an ordinary part of daily life (Gocek, 2014; Oranlı, 2021; Suciyan, 2016). In another chapter of this book, Orhon explains that nation-state building has enabled denial through a selective, exclusionary, and pragmatic memory regime, and therefore, how denial in everyday life and social interactions has become part of Turkey's ethos (see Orhon's chapter in this book). Denial of collective violence against Armenians persists within the society and state (Tataryan, 2011). A significant characteristic of the post-genocide society is widespread knowledge about the catastrophe and the absolute denial of that knowledge. This "post-genocide habitus of denial", extends into a denial of the Armenian's existence and history (Suciyan, 2016).

There are ongoing examples of the Turkish government's denial policy as well as its punitive approach towards recognition and memorialisation attempts for the Armenian Genocide. Those who are not Armenians but who consistently refer to 1915 publicly as the Armenian Genocide are repeatedly criminalised in the Turkish legal system. One of the most recent examples is the case against human rights defenders Eren Keskin and Gulistan Yarkin, who were accused of "insulting the state" under Article 301 of the Turkish penal code because they participated in a commemoration on the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide held by the Human Rights Association's (*İnsan Hakları Derneği*, İHD) Commission against Racism and Discrimination in 2021. The trial is taking place at the time of writing this chapter. Article 301 also started the process that ended up in Hrant Dink's assassination,¹ and is generally a way for the state to punish those who dare to publicly acknowledge the genocide and call for dealing with the past (Keskin, 2010).

¹ Hrant Dink was assassinated following a nationalist campaign that included charges against him for "insulting Turkishness" based on Article 301. He was being prosecuted because he explicitly referred to the events of 1915 as the Armenian genocide. Article 301 is considered by many as a violation of the right to free expression. To read more about the case, see: Hrant Dink Turkey <https://pen.org/advocacy-case/hrant-dink/>

These investigations are often opened following the 24 April commemoration of the genocide and they take several years until there is a court case. In most cases, they do not result in any charges. Nevertheless, they serve as continuous stress against human defenders who are determined to commemorate and ask for recognition of the Armenian Genocide. It would be right, therefore, to argue that the state attempts to suppress any effort or initiative that seeks to remind the world of the truth about the genocide, as well as those who seek to force the government to recognise it.

TRUTH RECOVERY APPROACHES TO THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

Transitional justice started mostly as legal measures that successor regimes have used to deal with past abuses. Over time, the concept has broadened to include diverse approaches, instruments, and agents (Lawther & Moffett, 2017). Currently, criminal prosecutions, truth-telling, reparations, institutional reform, and memorialisation are accepted as the main components of transitional justice (de Greiff, 2012). The UN defines four pillars of transitional justice as truth, justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-recurrence (UN, 2010). These pillars are interlinked, and some mechanisms could be considered under different pillars. Truth recovery, in particular, can be pursued through a variety of mechanisms including a historical clarification commission, a truth commission, a public inquiry, or a combination.

De Greiff (2012) points out that truth commissions seldom reveal previously unknown facts, but they still make fundamental contributions in recognising victims and their experiences. In the context of the Armenian Genocide, numerous valuable works establish the historical context, the details about the deportation, the confiscated Armenian property, and how denial has shaped contemporary society (Akçam, 2012; Gürpınar, 2016; Kurt, 2024). Therefore, there is a need not only to know and uncover what happened and how, but to translate and transmit the established facts into public knowledge that is recognised and respected by society so that it can have a transformative impact on the wider population.

TRUTH COMMISSIONS

Truth commissions provide alternative sources of justice to address a violent past in contexts where criminal prosecution is not a possibility (Bevernage, 2010). They can offer victims and survivors the opportunity to share their truths and set the stage for reparation, help reshape the narrative around political violence and atrocities, and establish new political, legal, and cultural structures by recommending changes for institutional improvement (de Greiff, 2006; Ross, 2003).

Multiple civil society actors have called for the establishment of a truth commission to investigate the various episodes and atrocities in the history of the Turkish Republic. A workshop organised by İHD in 2013 concluded that the Armenian Genocide should be the first matter that any potential truth commission in Turkey would need to address (İHD, 2013). There were also debates, although limited to a small number of politically engaged activists, around how such a commission could address the treatment of Armenians in Turkey. These debates touched upon important practical and political questions, such as who would represent Armenians in a future truth commission: the Republic of Armenia, the Turkish-Armenian community, or the Armenian diaspora.

These are indeed vital questions to ask in the design of a truth commission, especially when the atrocity took place such a long time ago. There are several recent examples of truth commissions that address atrocities that took place generations ago and may no longer have living survivors or perpetrators, particularly among countries with colonial histories. These have established commissions to address their colonial pasts and the ongoing impact of that past on newer generations. For example, the Yoorrook Justice Commission in Victoria, Australia was established in May 2021 as a truth-telling mechanism for the impacts of colonisation on First Peoples, as well as the historical and ongoing injustices they have experienced. Having been established more than two centuries after the colonisation started, the commission is tasked with establishing an official record of the colonial past's impact, developing a shared understanding of the impact of colonialism within society, and making recommendations for policy, practice, and legislation. In 2021, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria submitted a report to the commission and established the following:

Future generations now carried the trauma of the brutality their ancestors suffered – forced removal, massacre, slavery, suppression of culture and language, removal of land. Many languages were lost – they now lay dormant waiting to be awoken again.

We believe that the establishment of the Yoorrook Justice Commission is an historic opportunity for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Victoria finally to begin to listen to each other and create a new heritage together. Our peoples will no longer have to carry the pain of these stories alone – this history and these truths become everyone’s history and truths (First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria, 2021, p. 4).

This quote demonstrates that setting up a truth commission has to do with the need to address and share the deeply rooted pain that has been carried over generations. This is relevant to Turkey as well, especially because denial prevents the painful history from being seen, acknowledged, and made part of an official history.

Another example is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) which was set up in 2008 to address the legacy of Indian Residential Schools, following survivors’ and civil society organisations’ grassroots efforts (Kazan, 2023). Indian Residential Schools were boarding schools that operated from the 1880s to the 1990s and meant the removal of indigenous children from their families. The TRC was mandated to “reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools” and “guide and inspire a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 23). Other transitional justice mechanisms, including court proceedings, preceded this truth commission. However, based on the survivors’ demands for reparations and a truth and reconciliation commission, the TRC was established with a bottom-up approach and completed its work in 2015.

The TRC offers a good example of how centring survivors’ stories and testimonies can spark long-term reconciliation processes, especially concerning atrocities with a genocidal purpose. It collected testimonies from more than 6,750 survivors and organised seven national truth and reconciliation events and 17 community or regional hearings. These events received extensive media coverage and were livestreamed. Based on survivor accounts, historical research, and an examination of the inter-generational impacts of residential schools, the TRC concluded that the residential school system amounted to cultural genocide (Nagy, 2020). Its six-volume final report, “Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the

Future”, made 94 calls to action aiming to address the legacy of residential schools and further the reconciliation process, including systemic changes (TRC, 2015). However, the implementation of the calls has taken place slowly and only symbolic recommendations have thus far been put into effect (Kazan, 2023). Although the TRC was not perfect, “it could and did serve as a catalyst for the ongoing unsettling of colonial beliefs and attitudes and the re-storying of settler narratives in response to what was witnessed” (Nagy, 2020 p. 237).

As the above examples show, truth commissions are often mandated to provide recommendations. However, the implementation of those recommendations is where the problem starts. Bakiner emphasises that “The processes that generate the largest effects are direct political impact and delayed political impact through civil society mobilization” (Bakiner, 2014, p. 9), as truth commissions’ non-binding recommendations are only implemented when there is constant civil society mobilisation to hold policymakers accountable. This is an important issue to keep in mind for Turkey, and any future truth commission on the Armenian Genocide will rely on civil society mobilisation to generate impact. Civil society actors that can play an important role in such a process include organisations and activist groups that have advocated for truth and justice mechanisms for Turkey’s violent past and have been vocal in calling for recognition of the genocide, such as İHD, Nor Zartonk, Hrant Dink Foundation, Truth Justice and Memory Centre, and DEMOS. Considering the past and continuous work of organisations and activist groups to recognise and commemorate the genocide, it is important to emphasise that civic space should expand towards a more diverse set of actors for their impact to be relevant for a wider portion of society.

HISTORICAL CLARIFICATION COMMISSIONS

As another truth recovery mechanism, historical commissions aim at producing shared narratives and creating a space for historical dialogue. A joint Turkish-Armenian historical commission to investigate the Armenian Genocide has been discussed in both Turkey and Armenia, and while it has not yet been realised, the idea created a considerable public debate about its usefulness.

Numerous historical commissions have been established, particularly since the end of the Cold War, and have played an important role in raising public awareness about the potential harm caused by conflicting

historical memories (Barkan et al., 2020). Advocates of historical commissions aspire to promote mutual knowledge and awareness of the perspectives and experiences of the other side “through revisiting heated public historical discourses” (Barkan et al., 2020, p. 14). Historical commissions have been created in contexts where “shameful historical episodes cast a long shadow over contemporary society and where debates over the past have become the subject of political wrangling” (Karn, 2018, p. 2).

The purpose of historical commissions is to inquire into events that happened a long time ago and that targeted particular groups (Hayner, 2001). Concerning the Armenian Genocide, historical commissions can play a particularly important role because they can assign political accountability for a specific group in a context in which the passage of time makes it difficult or impossible to prosecute perpetrators criminally (Karn, 2015). They can do so by addressing “issues of political and moral accountability for the past wrongs within the parameters of political responsibility towards the past” and challenging and changing perceptions and myths about the past (Pallí-Asperó, 2022, p. 230).

Historical commissions are different from truth commissions both in their functions and conceptualisations. What is significant for this chapter is that in terms of mandate, truth commissions tend to investigate recent events while historical commissions operate primarily to inquire into atrocities committed in a distant past and respond to deeply rooted historical tensions and recognition claims (Barkan, 2009; Pettai, 2015; Pallí-Asperó, 2023). Another important difference is the method they employ. While truth commissions use testimonies of victims, survivors, and witnesses, historical commissions primarily rely on archival resources. While some historical commissions have had access to testimonies, in the majority of cases, victims and survivors are no longer alive. Both of these differences make historical commissions a meaningful mechanism to use to address the legacy of the Armenian Genocide.

As with other transitional justice measures, historical commissions face certain challenges. As state-sponsored mechanisms, the boundaries of their work are usually drawn by governments in power, meaning that they do not operate with complete freedom and autonomy despite the rigour of their historical methods (Pallí-Asperó, 2022). This also entails the risk of governments instrumentalising historical commissions to manipulate history to support their official narrative, which is a serious risk for such a commission in Turkey. A historical commission’s work, depending on the historians who take part in it, could be a way of advancing the denialist

agenda. The selection of commissioners is, therefore, of utmost importance. For an Armenian Genocide commission's findings to be accepted, acknowledged, and respected by many, the commissioners should be selected among those who have already produced respectable historical work on the issue to international standards. While there are many examples of such individuals, including those cited in this chapter, they may face challenges in receiving state approval as their work has consistently provided a historical, political, and cultural account of the genocide and its denial. Bottom-up, grassroots efforts again emerge as an important element in terms of creating national and international pressure for such a commission to operate autonomously and credibly.

To enhance the impact of historical commissions and expand their impact beyond the scholarly world, their recommendations should be considered seriously and brought together with other measures to address the past. Recommendations may include a variety of tools such as changing national history curricula, building monuments to commemorate and honour the victims, and material compensation. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to imagine the resistance to such recommendations were this to take place in Turkey, particularly regarding compensation. In that case, instead of treating it as a taboo, a platform should be provided to engage in dialogue about what meaningful compensation should look like.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONS

Parliamentary commissions have emerged as another mechanism of truth recovery specifically regarding colonial pasts. A parliamentary commission of inquiry refers to a temporary committee formed by legislators to examine and explore a specific event or a sequence of events that hold significance for the public (Bakiner, 2022). In Belgium, a parliamentary commission was launched as “an enquiry into Belgium’s overseas colonial legacy and reflecting on appropriate reparations” (Destrooper, 2023). Dealing with Belgium’s colonial past in Congo (1908–1960), Rwanda, and Burundi (1919–1962), the commission focused on truth and reconciliation. It consisted of 17 members, proportionally reflecting the political parties in the parliament. Despite its shortcomings, the commission “could generate momentum as well as a dynamic of rhetorical entrapment or socialization that could provide breeding grounds for further struggles for justice and thick accountability that may then

have more potential to disrupt the status quo, lead to more transformative justice efforts, and challenge epistemic injustice” (Destrooper, 2023, p. 169).

Parliamentary commissions differ significantly from other truth-telling mechanisms in terms of partisan politics being an inherent part. As most of their members are members of parliaments, independence from political processes is not an achievable goal (Bakiner, 2022). This makes those commissions more vulnerable to political changes. Turkey is familiar with the vulnerability of parliamentary commissions. While a parliamentary sub-commission was established under the Human Rights Committee in 2015 to inquire into the Diyarbakir Military Prison,² the early elections in 2018 suspended its work. Although it had conducted a comprehensive investigation, including hearing torture survivors’ testimonies, its report has never been released (Alici, 2022). The lack of transparency in such commission’s findings makes their independence and usefulness questionable.

Parliamentary commissions also carry the risk of not being independent of the government’s politics, especially in authoritarian countries like Turkey. They can be perceived as politicised and therefore lack the trust of the public (Bakiner, 2022). Cooper and Akçam (2005) addressed this risk with a specific focus on the Armenian Genocide:

The historical debate should, so far as possible, be taken out of the exclusive hands of parliaments and political circles. The Turkish government should heed its own argument that history is not for politicians by ceasing its production of propaganda and support for historians who advocate its viewpoint (p. 91).

However, parliament also has the potential to provide much-needed legitimacy for such a commission and facilitate a public discussion around difficult issues, in this case, the Armenian Genocide. In particular, those individuals who reproduce genocide denialism following the state’s official narrative could see some credibility in such a commission’s work, especially if it is constituted by a wide participation of political parties. Different parties’ consensus on facts and narratives has the potential to send a strong political message of acknowledging the crimes. If a

² Diyarbakir Military Prison was infamous for severe human rights violations, including sexualised torture against Kurdish political prisoners after the 1980 coup.

politically sensitive and divisive issue such as the Armenian Genocide becomes part of an official parliamentary investigation, this can also have a normalising and decriminalising impact on a social level.

CONCLUSION

This chapter highlighted the complexities of addressing the Armenian Genocide through a transitional justice lens, particularly focusing on truth recovery mechanisms. Despite occurring more than a century ago, the Armenian Genocide remains a contentious issue due to Turkey's denialist approach, which has hindered reconciliation efforts and enabled the continuation of unaddressed trauma. The chapter has outlined three mechanisms that fall under the truth pillar of transitional justice to address the legacy and ongoing impact of the Armenian Genocide—truth commissions, historical commissions, and parliamentary commissions—while emphasising the importance of challenging and dismantling the racist social and political structures that enable genocide denialism.

Overall, the chapter highlights the importance of addressing historical injustices such as the Armenian Genocide through transitional justice mechanisms, despite the challenges involved, as through these Turkey can move towards reconciliation. However, since genocide denialism is still very strong in Turkey, and the authoritarian regime barely accepts the visibility of efforts to deal with the past, a comprehensive process to address the Armenian Genocide seems unlikely at present. Persistent civil society mobilisation, grassroots activism, and international pressure can make a move towards that direction possible. These efforts are also needed, as the chapter shows, to ensure the effectiveness and legitimacy of transitional justice mechanisms. Transitional justice efforts should engage a wide range of actors, including civil society, scholars, and political parties, to ensure broad ownership. Moreover, attempts for truth recovery cannot be conducted in isolation from the outer context of continued violence against Armenians, the most recent example being the ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Karabakh. A good starting point, therefore, would be to pay more attention to the Karabakh conflict and stand firmly against Turkey's support for Azerbaijan.

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CHAPTER 10

Emancipatory Space of the Political and Social Movements: Bodies, Meetings, and Street Protests

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INTRODUCTION

The last Kurdish rebellion in 1984, which took the form of armed conflict between the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party—PKK) and the Turkish army, represents one of the essential political contentions of the republican century of Turkey. Throughout the century, in terms of managing Kurdistan, the new regime chose a contentious colonial path including violence, assimilation, oppression, and Turkification. “During the first few decades following the establishment of the Republic, its founders reframed the (Kurdish) question as a social clash between *past* and *present*” (Yeğen, 2011, p. 69). According to this perspective, the Kurdish community, with its feudal ties, traditional society, religious everyday life, and nomad character, represented the *past* as a population that needed to be tamed and brought into the present through the civilising mission. After the bloody repressions of the early Kurdish rebellions and a period of silence until the beginning of the 1960s (Bozarslan, 2008, p. 343), the Kurdish movement, both as a ruthless critic and as a disciple of the 1970s revolutionary movements of Turkey and Kurdistan (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2011, p. 124), began a new type of resistance.

The Kurdish movement, through various moves of its different components (including military, political, and social bodies), produced new forms of challenge to different official political positions. Furthermore, by building political relations with other groups of the left movement, feminist organisations, ecological initiatives, and LGBTI+ platforms during the last four decades, the Kurdish movement also was at the centre of different alliances, and coalitions within the left-wing political scene of Turkey and Kurdistan. One can argue that, with both successful and failed attempts, the Kurdish movement represents par excellence in the efforts of establishing alliances and coalitions throughout the last republican century (see Şimşek's chapter in this book).

In this chapter, I focus on the Kurdish movement, conceptualising it in relation to other political and social movements, namely feminist movements, and LGBTI+ movements. In this way, I show the relationality of different political and social movements within Turkey and Kurdistan and also how different state policies, practices, and discourses were established in response to the trajectories of these movements. Furthermore, I claim the importance of *encounters* for a deeper understanding of the emancipatory space built on different levels by the movements, with the existence

of different inner conflicts, contentions, and debates. I argue that there is a connection between the state apparatus and the emancipatory space built by these movements, and I examine the relationality between the thing that we call “the state” and the sounds coming from the streets.

NOTES ON THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, TERMINOLOGY, AND METHODOLOGY

Philip Abrams, in his pioneering article *Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State*, defines the state as “a spurious object of sociological concern” and reveals different types of theoretical traps that one may fall into in the absence of an essential questioning of the reification of the concept of the state (Abrams, [1977] 1988). His approach paves the way for a conceptualisation of the state as a series of practices that may contradict, resemble, or articulate with each other and as a series in which different actors move by constructing different processes. In this chapter, I use this framework for analysing the state apparatus.

The late 1960s was characterised by the debate of *new social movements* (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 159; Mouffe, 1984), the academic literature which grew extensively afterwards. According to this perspective, the newness of the new social movements stems from three dimensions: the emergence of new forms of struggle in relation to new forms of subordination and oppression in late capitalist society, such as the peace movements, the ecology and anti-nuclear movements; the absence of any previously constituted schema for the historical situation of a given subject position and the dissolution of the “representation of interests” model; and the combination of the importance given to high levels of participation in internal decision-making, the search for cooperative relations, and the respect of social differences (Slater, 1985, pp. 6–7).

After the pluralisation of the social movements field during the last three decades, not only has the theoretical wall between the political and social movements been weakened but also the place of the *political* within the literature of the new social movements has been questioned. On the one hand, the overemphasis on the process of mobilisation (such as how social groups, whoever they are and whatever their aims, marshal resources, and recruit adherents to grow and succeed), which erodes the analysis of the relationship between social structure and political behaviour, has been criticised (Walder, 2009). On the other hand, in terms of the analysis of the relationship between political violence

and social movements for instance, the lack of a perspective that sees the strong communication between different levels—macro-level systemic causes, meso-level organisational characteristics, and micro-level individual motivations—has been emphasised (Della Porta, 2008). For this chapter, I follow the line that theorises the political and social movements in their strong relationality.

In this chapter, I use the term *Kurdish movement complex* in the sense suggested by Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya and Joost Jongerden as they argue that the PKK has undergone a transformation from a classical political party to a party complex (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2011). The *Kurdish movement complex* contains political parties or movements and an armed movement active in four countries (Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey) with its high-ranking commanders on the Qandil Mountain, an extensive diaspora in Europe with its organisational structure, various grassroots initiatives along with different non-governmental organisations, and thousands of political militants in the prisons of Turkey, including the leader of the movement, Abdullah Öcalan, incarcerated for 25 years. I use the term *Kurdish movement* when I refer to this multi-actor complex and the term *Kurdish political movement* while referring to Kurdish political actors, including political parties, political figures, and local political institutions.

The feminist movement very much diversified in Turkey during the 1990s and 2000s, through the building of different initiatives and organisations with diverse political affiliations, from Kemalist or state feminism approach to decolonial and Kurdish stances (Diner & Toktaş, 2010). In this chapter, while scrutinising the relational space built by the collaboration of the Kurdish movement and feminist and LGBTI+ groups, I mostly analyse radical feminist initiatives, which either have strong political connections with the Kurdish movement or acknowledge the colonial situation of the Kurdistan from a feminist political perspective or both. Furthermore, my focus is more on the Kurdish LGBTI+ activists and LGBTI+ activists and organisations that recognise the strong and multi-faceted relations between LGBTI+ groups and the Kurdish movement's struggles. This focus, however, should not abate the heterogeneity of different political perspectives within the broader political landscape of LGBTI+ movements.

Finally, the findings analysed in this paper are based on different long-term pieces of research. First, I use the data of fieldwork carried out

during my work at *Hafıza Merkezi* (Hakikat Adalet Hafıza Merkezi—Truth Justice Memory Centre), an NGO that documents enforced disappearances in Turkey, and my fieldwork conducted for my dissertation, on the enforced disappearances occurred during the 1990s in the context of the Kurdish conflict. Between 2012 and 2017, I and my research associates conducted 248 semi-structured interviews with the relatives of the disappeared, lawyers, politicians, and activists, in Diyarbakır, Şırnak, Mardin, Batman, and Istanbul. Last but not least, I and my research assistant conducted 20 semi-structured interviews in the context of my current research project in Paris, Berlin, Istanbul, and Diyarbakır in 2023 and 2024, entitled *Alone but not Lonely: Subjectivities, Agency, and Activism of Displaced Kurdish LGBTI+ communities*, funded by Gerda Henkel Stiftung, which are also used in this chapter.

THE MAKING OF THE EMANCIPATORY SPACE

Considering that the Kurdish movement complex is not a typical entity scrutinised within the literature of social movements, can one explore its activism with the notions of social movements literature? I think it is possible, specifically after the transformation of the movement that began in the late 1990s. The perspective of the movement, aiming for national liberation with independence and its strategy based on rural guerilla warfare, began to change by the late 1990s. The new political project, referred to as “democratic confederalism”, “democratic autonomy”, and “democratic nation”, is described by Abdullah Öcalan within the historical context of non-state civilisation. Accordingly, the aim is “[...] creating political formations aiming to achieve a society that is democratic, gender equal, eco-friendly and where state is not the pivotal element” (quoted by Jongerden, 2017).

Alain Badiou states three dimensions of the transformation of the classical Marxist left as follows “[...] politics beyond the state, political organizations beyond the party and political subjectivity beyond class” (quoted by Jongerden & Akkaya, 2012). If we add the term nation as one of the political subjectivities that the movement is trying to go beyond, this formula is also appropriate for the transformation of the Kurdish movement. The transformation was not linear and absolute, however; it was rather contradictory, multidimensional, and contingent, along with its ideological, political, and organisational/practical consequences.

The Kurdish political movement historically mobilised peoples in its political hinterland through different forms of activism, but a novel repertoire of political activism emerged by the beginning of the 2000s as a result of the novel political paradigm. Examples of activism that occurred throughout the 2000s include the petition campaign for the right to education in the mother tongue (Kurdish), organised by university students (in 2001); the campaign for Öcalan in which more than three million Kurds in Turkey and Europe signed a petition stating that they “recognise Öcalan as their political representative” (in 2006); political campaigns for a new constitution based on an ethnically neutral definition of citizenship; different political campaigns and initiatives for deepening the notion of democratic autonomy and self-governance; campaigns for different issues of gender inequality such as sexual violence, violence against women and early marriages, organised by Kurdish women’s organisations; and debates on the conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes. Rhetoric based on notions such as rights, autonomy, democracy, participation, gender equality, and equal citizenship (Ersanlı & Özdoğan, 2012) provided a political positioning in which new political affiliations and belongings were possible. In the context of the redesign of the Kurdish movement, the crucial part was allocated to women’s liberation, the ecological dimension, and a congress-type organisational structure. Thus, the Kurdish movement reinvented itself (Fadaee & Brancolini, 2019, p. 13), specifically in relation to other political and social movements.

The transformation of the Kurdish movement also converged with the political insistence of the movement on the notion of “Turkeyfication” (*Türkiyelileşme*), which implies a radical political imaginary and programme that goes beyond Kurdistan and aims to build up a political initiative in Turkey (Kavak, 2012). This tendency reached its peak point with the constitution of a new political coalition for the alliance of different political and social movements, the People’s Democratic Congress (*Halkların Demokratik Kongresi—HDK*) founded in 2011 and a new political party for the alliance of different political groups, the People’s Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi—HDP*) founded in 2012, which together were established to implement the new political paradigm. The roots of this process may be traced back much earlier, however, to the establishment of The Democratic Society Congress (*Demokratik Toplum Kongresi—DTK*) in 2007, an umbrella organisation with the goal of establishing democratic autonomy

and guaranteeing the coexistence of different peoples based on people's democratic organisations. As put by Fadaee and Brancolini: "It aims at empowering ordinary people to work with each other as individuals as well as in collectives and groups" (Fadaee & Brancolini, 2019, p. 9). All these steps led to a novel political momentum at the beginning of the 2000s that prevailed more or less until 2015, which opened up a political climate for alliances and collaborations with other political and social movements. It is on this background that the making of a relational space, which I define as an emancipatory space, was possible.

DEFINING THE RELATIONAL SPACE: WHAT MAKES IT EMANCIPATORY?

One of the distinctive characteristics of the Kurdish movement in post-1980 Turkey is the fact that the movement has been successful in mass mobilising women, according to Handan Çağlayan, a pioneering researcher focusing on Kurdish women's political participation (Çağlayan, 2012). Kurdish women's engagement within the Kurdish movement, their reflections on the political meanings of their experiences, and their efforts to produce policies against sexism in all areas of social life, along with the writings of Abdullah Öcalan, formed a gender paradigm in the movement. As a result of their efforts to create a movement, Kurdish women have developed a new organisational style: "[...] women struggled with their mistakes and shortcomings, but they created their own unique models" (Bozan & Ekin, 2005, p. 207). The establishment of the Democratic Free Women's Movement (*Demokratik Özgür Kadın Hareketi*—DÖKH) in September 2003 marks the moment when women decided to organise autonomously.

It should also be noted that the Kurdish women's movement has always grown alongside Turkey's feminist movements. On the one hand, the feminist movement and DÖKH have collaborated in certain campaigns, and on days of street demonstrations such as 8 March and 25 November, they have developed protests that were at first controversial but over time organised in cooperation. "They also acted together and organized activities on common platforms such as the campaign for the enactment of the new Civil Code, the preparation of a 'Shadow Report' for the CEDAW Committee or the invasion of Iraq" (Çağlayan, 2013, p. 85). On the other hand, the Kurdish women movement severely criticised different forms of "state feminisms" (Tekeli, 1992) and the

Turkishness of the feminist circles. Inspired by their own experiences and also by other feminist criticisms of mainstream or white feminisms, such as Black feminists, the Kurdish women’s movement questioned the different assumptions underpinning the mainstream feminist paradigm of Turkey that underestimate the massive political mobilisation of Kurdish women (Çağlayan, 2019; Diner & Toktaş, 2010; Kışanak, 2022; Üstündağ, 2023). Even among women who have been acting together to a considerable extent throughout the 2000s, Kurdish women “[...] feel obliged to struggle for a right of expression that is not limited to the position of ‘victim’ and to be recognized as one of the subjects of the women’s movement” (Çağlayan, 2013, p. 86). In line with some of the main critiques of Black and decolonial feminism, the Kurdish women’s movement and other Kurdish women/feminists continually expressed—both in the 1990s and during the 2000s—that they have hierarchical ways of speech-making and the perception that they are treated as “the little sister” whose legitimacy is limited to victimhood. Kurdish women also criticised the feminist movement for defining their agenda through a single state of womanhood and subordinating their own experiences, leading to the development of a political paradigm entitled *Jineoloji*.

Feminist circles and the Kurdish women’s movement remained in the debate despite heated contentions and were together in several street demonstrations as well as diverse initiatives for peace, gender equality, and political participation. All these debates re-criticised and re-articulated the ways and demands of the feminist struggles. The alliance of diverse feminist movements and DÖKH, along with other Kurdish feminist circles, increased their common political resilience. This political resilience was vital while struggling with and positioning vis-à-vis the state’s contradictory responses throughout the 2000s to the Kurdish movement, ranging from partial/selective recognition to total war and annihilation.

Adding to this feminist alliance, relations with the LGBTI+ movement contour the lines of the emancipatory space. The participation of the parliamentarians of the pro-leftist/Kurdish party HDP in the Pride marches during the 2000s, the collaboration between HDP and LGBTI+ organisations in the context of the new constitution drafting commission established between 2011 and 2013, and the mentioning of sexual orientation and gender identity in the political programme of the HDP are some of these signs. Furthermore: “With the growth of Kurdistan solidarity activism after 2014, queerness increasingly became an issue for Kurdish political circles to contend with, creating both friction and

possibility” (Dirik, 2023, p. 191). Dirik also underlines queer/LGBTI+ internationalists who decided to support or join Kurdish guerilla forces in the context of their fight against Islamic State, by stating the names of Uta Schneiderbanger, Ivana Hoffmann, and Anna Campbell, identified as lesbian or queer, and interprets the movement’s critique of the traditional hetero-patriarchal family as a queer critic. Thus, the relationality of the Kurdish and LGBTI+ movement should not only be considered as formal and organisational but also as internationalist and bodily alliances, where Kurdish and queer/LGBTI+ individuals from other nationalities define themselves as both queer and part of the Kurdish movement’s perspective. The same is true for the relationality of feminist movements and the Kurdish women’s movement. There is a strong interaction between these movements not only in the sense that they emerged together but also in the existence of thousands of Kurdish women—mostly young but coming from different generations—who define themselves as part of both the Kurdish and feminist movements. In that sense, these movements are not solely relational on the inter-organisational and formal level but rather they are intertwined, politically, socially, and bodily, through the moves and flows of thousands of bodies navigating within them.

Last but not least, the importance attributed to street politics, or the notion of “being in the streets”, shaped all of these movements. The 1980s saw the launch of the feminist and LGBTI+ movements, and despite the use of other forms of political mobilisation such as self-constructive small-group activism, the street has been the crucial political space for feminists and LGBTI+ activists (Zengin, 2024; Yüksel, 1995). Radical small-group protests over the situation of political prisoners in Turkey, Pride marches, and street demonstrations for abortion rights for women and equality at work for the LGBTI+ community formed the core of feminist and LGBTI+ movements (Partog, 2012; Savran, 1998). Street protests had also always been an essential place for the Kurdish political movement; being in the streets implied being politically dynamic and resilient, with street demonstrations considered a sign of the strength of the movement both before and after the political turn of the 2000s (Güneş, 2013). Being on the streets for joint protests created a space for solidarity, alliances, discussion, and inner debate for all of these movements.

Finally, a few words on the use of the term *emancipatory*. In the Proletarian Nights, Jacques Rancière delineates the term emancipation as a possibility of making a voyage or navigating from one social group to

another, a voyage between different worlds (Rancière, 2012). In other words, emancipation is an act or move that changes the position of the oppressed, which reveals that we are capable of what we are not supposed to be. Emancipation is thus not a finished situation or static, unproblematic status referring to quasi-mystic salvation, but rather consists of mundane voyages that highlight the possibility of our capabilities.¹ In that sense, the relational political space built by the Kurdish movement, feminist movements, and LGBTI+ movements represents a strong potential for emancipation, since it revealed the possibility of increasing the capabilities of ordinary people through political activism and their capacities to voyage between different worlds. These movements weaved a relational space of emancipation not only in the street protests where the activists of these movements were together but also in the political encounters of diverse meetings where political imaginaries were carrying the flames of decolonial, egalitarian, and queer worlds.

ENCOUNTERS OF THE MOVEMENTS, ENCOUNTERS OF THE BODIES: COEXISTENCE OF STREETS AND MEETINGS

For a deeper understanding of the emancipatory space built up by these movements throughout the 2000s, I argue that three notions are crucial: *witnessing*, *remembering*, and *encountering*. I specifically focus on the notion of *encountering* and illustrate its importance for the building of relational emancipatory space. But before going into further detail, first I briefly analyse the Turkish state's contradictory responses during the long decades of the Kurdish conflict, which is inherently related to the trajectories of the political and social movements.

¹ Hakan Sandal-Wilson argues that by troubling the narratives of the Turkish, Arab, and Iranian nationalisms and by promising a multitude of possibilities, the Kurdish issue becomes an ally to queer studies in its potential to disrupt systems of discipline and domination. This disruption is not pointless, but rather promises a multitude of possibilities—though not all these possibilities are necessarily and inherently positive. As Muñoz puts it, “queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (Sandal-Wilson, 2023: 12). It would be very promising to think simultaneously Rancière's concept of emancipation and queer notions of potentiality or concrete possibility for another world, which Sandal refers to. It goes beyond the limits of this chapter, but I aim to provide some hints for that kind of reflection as well.

THE TURKISH STATE AND ITS CONTRADICTIONARY RESPONSES

Throughout the 1980s, various actors of the state apparatus preferred a strategy of downplaying or trivialising the conflict unfolding around the Kurdish issue. Within official discourse, the PKK was consistently described as “a bunch of bandits that would easily be crushed” or “nothing but a minor gang of thugs with foreign support”. An important journalist of the period, Hasan Cemal mentions how an upper-level commander he interviewed in the 1990s complained of this 1980s policy of defining the PKK as a “small band of bandits”, saying that this kind of discourse weakened the fight against terrorism (Cemal, 2003, p. 77). Although there were different opinions within the different official cliques, the position of this commander reflects the official position towards the PKK at the commencement of the 1980s. It became, however, increasingly difficult to demean or minimise the position of the Kurdish movement during the 1990s. The growth of the Kurdish movement’s mass support base throughout the 1990s, the fact that its political arguments began reaching larger portions of society and were voiced on new political levels through a political party with the founding of the People’s Labour Party (*Halkın Emek Partisi*) in 1990, and its establishment of various media organs by which it brought into circulation alternative truth discourses, came to constitute new collective forms of challenge within the political sphere (Watts, 2014). The new political momentum, characterised by a massive wave of political mobilisation around the Kurdish movement complex, was perceived as a moment of crisis of sovereignty by the state apparatus and was responded to through unconventional warfare methods. The 1990s signify an era of intensified military clashes, as well as one in which the Kurdish population was subjected to widespread and systematic forms of state violence—including, forced migration, illegal and arbitrary executions, enforced disappearances, and widespread and systematic torture (Göral et al., 2013; Çelik, 2021; Işık, 2022; Tezcür, 2010; Balta, 2010).

While these years were defined as years of *total war* in the terminology of the Kurdish movement, they were also marked by indirect talks between the Kurdish movement and the state, despite their fragile, short-lived, and vulnerable character. Despite all the violence, the 1990s also became a time in which possibilities for a political resolution to the Kurdish issue entered the discussion on the state level. The (short-lived) ceasefires declared in 1993, 1995, and 1998 may be read as part of

this newly emerging “moment” characterised by the search for a political solution (Çiçek, 2018, p. 110).

During the 2000s, the state apparatus may be described as a pendulum moving between the use of diverse forms of violence and the political rhetoric of solutions. As categorised by Cuma Çiçek, three important ventures for resolution and peace took place in the 2000s: the İmralı Process (1999–2004); the Oslo Process (2008–2011); and the Resolution Process (2013–2015) (Çiçek, 2018, pp. 143–185). These ventures, however, did not follow a linear path. On the one hand, the political representatives of the Kurdish movement were able to establish an extensive presence in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey for the first time as elected independent members for consecutive periods and demonstrated ever-increasing success in winning municipalities in Kurdistan in local elections. On the other hand, however, whenever ventures for a resolution somehow collapsed, a new wave of violence ensued, and the human losses caused by the conflict continued to swell. To give but a few examples: in protests that were sparked during the funeral ceremony held in Diyarbakır for PKK members who lost their lives between 28 and 31 March 2006, 14 people—6 of whom were children—were killed, 563 were taken into police custody, and 236 were arrested (Çiçek, 2018, p. 326). Again, as a result of intensifying clashes, a total of 842 people lost their lives in 2011 and 2012 according to data provided by the Human Rights Association (*İnsan Hakları Derneği* – İHD, 2012, 2013).

BODIES, MEETINGS, AND STREET PROTESTS

For the Kurdish activists, activism meant encountering diverse groups of Kurdish and non-Kurdish activists in the context of their struggles in trade unions, feminist movements, different urban coalitions, and other types of transitory or permanent political initiatives during the 1990s and especially throughout the 2000s. As a consequence of the paradigm of *Turkey-ification*, and especially after the strengthening of the People’s Democratic Party, novel alliances among the classical voters of the Kurdish movement and sympathisers of the movement took place. When I say encounter, I refer to the short-term and long-term encounters that occurred bodily, discursively, and performatively through diverse gatherings, meetings, street protests, and institutional exchanges, which have the potential to change the political positioning of individuals or groups

through staying—at least for a while—within the debate and reflection.² The key point here is staying within the relational space despite the existence of contentions, blockages, and pauses. The notions of debate and reflection are the components that provide the possibility of staying within the relational space.

One of the initiatives that made encounters possible was the Woman Initiative for Peace (*Barış İçin Kadın İnisiyatifi*—BIKG), founded by feminist activists, activists from DÖKH, human rights activists, and representatives of left-wing organisations. It was originally established against the massive wave of incarceration of DÖKH activists but became a political locus of feminist peace-making debate after the commencement of the “peace process” in 2013. Politically, BIKG insisted that the peace process should go beyond a formal closed procedure of disarmament and establish a political atmosphere to systematically erode the social basis of the patriarchy, with feminist radical political imaginaries. Activists and young scholars gathered groups to prepare reports on the war crimes in Kurdistan; BIKG published several other documents on the relationship between the Kurdish conflict and the strengthening of the patriarchal forms of male violence; through different meetings, conferences, and gatherings, BIKG not only pointed out the importance of the mechanisms of transitional justice for women but also problematised and criticised them; and different feminist groups within and around BIKG organised street demonstrations to support the peace process and strengthen its gender-oriented lens. After the blatant demise of the peace process in 2015 and the huge wave of state violence, BIKG activists organised street demonstrations with the slogan “We are insisting on peace” in Istanbul and other cities of Turkey. However, as of August 2024, its political situation can be described as dormant.

During the peace process, a larger number of political encounters occurred in Diyarbakır as well. Keskesor Amed LGBTI+ Initiative, for instance, was founded in Diyarbakır in 2012, which is known for following the legal proceedings of a murdered LGBTI+ by his family, Roşin Çiçek, against the impunity of the perpetrators. The initiative became a member of HDK Diyarbakır, after tense debates among groups. The political influence of the ceasefire in the context of the Kurdish

² In Peru, *reflection* and *debate* are key concepts for feminist movements in terms of the encounter with other movements (Leinius, 2024, p. 114). I believe that these two concepts are also crucial for analysing the encounters in this chapter.

conflict, as the material basis from which different political and social groups could multiply their repertoire of political mobilisation, was massive in Kurdistan and Turkey. It is on this material basis that the Gezi protests became possible in 2013. During the Gezi protests, which represented an alliance of the urban dissident groups, different encounters between secular, urban, middle-class strata, and the militants of the Kurdish political movement arose. My aim below is to highlight some important points regarding the activism of the Kurdish movement.

First, the rapprochement between the urban, secular, middle classes and the more conventional supporters of the Kurdish political movement initiated by the *Turkey-ification* of the movement and several other encounters in different forms of activism is important but should be understood only as introductory. For the establishment of broader political alliances, more gathering, debate, and political mobilisation are necessary. If not, an over-simplistic approach stating that middle urban classes understood par excellence the experience of Kurds as a result of current protests carries the risk of aggravating the existing relationship between these groups. The violence that conglomerated around the Kurdish conflict, intensified after 2015; the massive multidimensional political mobilisation; the different political demands of the movement; and the diverse experiences of discrimination, humiliation, resistance, struggle, and resilience of the Kurdish groups cannot be accurately understood and acknowledged only with abrupt gatherings.

Second, the “anti-government” alliance is heterogeneous and does not acquire a democratic political programme for the solution of the Kurdish conflict. The issue of how to politically situate the Kurdish conflict engenders contentious and dissimilar responses. The relationship between the Kurdish activists mobilised around the Kurdish political movement and other components of the dissident groups vary to a great extent in terms of their political positions vis-à-vis the Kurdish conflict and movement. Among the dissident groups, some criticise the government for conducting negotiations and a peace process with the Kurdish movement between 2013 and 2015.

Finally, the existing polarisation of Turkey, expressed and formulated by cultural terms in order to create a *Kulturkampf*, dilutes the political dimension of the Kurdish issue. As a complicated and autonomous issue with political, historical, structural, and cultural components, the Kurdish issue, along with the armed conflict at its heart, has been diluted and instrumentalised over the last 30 years. Novel encounters may have

the potential to exceed these already existing reductionisms by aiming to gather different political affiliations with a political programme of peace-building and dealing with the past perspective regarding the Kurdish issue. Such a programme may gather, at least partially, conservatives and seculars, urban and rural strata, diverse political militants, and activists struggling for a more egalitarian Turkey. To do so, epistemic decolonisation needs to be on the agenda of all the activists struggling in the streets of Turkey not only to demand that the Turkish state change its violent and colonial attitude but also for a radical transformation of the existing forms of activisms, to use the potential of the social movements.

CONCLUSION

The state's ultimate response to the failed peace process was extremely violent. Actions taken after the recommencement of the Kurdish conflict in 2015—the implementation of forms of state violence on a massive scale, the new political alliance established by AKP with the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*—MHP), the appointment of trustees to the municipalities of the Kurdish cities while incarcerating the elected HDP mayors, and the implementation of repressive legal procedures—altogether contour the basis of the *processes of fascisation* (Palheta, 2022) of the political structures in Turkey. The post-2015 political conjuncture represented a political will for the total closure of the streets, despite its impossibility. After the immense wave of state violence in Kurdistan and especially after the state of emergency declared after the coup d'état attempt of 2016, a massive wave of incarceration of the Kurdish movement's activists, the closing down of the associations, and the dismissal of thousands of individuals with the statutory decrees took place. To a varying degree, the politics of taming and intimidation was also on the official agenda for other political and social movements, including feminist and LGBTI+ platforms. So, the main motivation for both activists and organisations of different political and social movements was to stay alive and protect the existing organisations, relations, and communities, through networks of solidarity and collaboration (Bor et al., 2021; Gülen, 2021).

Today, although weakened compared to the early 2000s, the emancipatory space built up by the Kurdish, feminist, and LGBTI+ movements is reformulating despite inner contentions. The emancipatory space woven

by the Kurdish, feminist, and LGBTI+ movements, unfinished and vulnerable, is possible with these contentions and debates. It has been built by Kurdish LGBTI+ activists who refuse to leave the Newroz celebrations both in Istanbul and Diyarbakır, even though they have been subject to violence consecutively in 2022, 2023, and 2024. It has been built by the feminists who were in the streets not only on 8 March but also to protest the trustee regime of Kurdistan. It has been built by Kurdish women activists who work in cooperation with LGBTI+ organisations in Diyarbakır as part of their civil society activism. Despite its various weaknesses, this is the only space that has the potential and political will to challenge the republican centennial repression and current neofascist tendencies. Its imperfection may be a sign of its resilience, which has the potential to prevail over the next hundred years.

Note on Ethics Informed consent was obtained from research participants for their participation and the publication of their statements, either anonymously or, if specified, with their name and institutional affiliation.

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PART III

Resistance of the Peoples

Feminist Approaches to Sexual Morality in Turkey

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter delves into a specific strand of feminist analysis, exploring the foundational role of sexual morality within the Turkish nation, state, and family triad. Specifically, I focus on the cisheteropatriarchal notions of “honour” (*namus*), “common morals” (*genel ahlak*), and “decency” (*ahlaklılık/iffet*) as a way to understand historically shifting dominant discourses of sexual morality and their relation to social hegemony and feminist organising in Turkey. Even though the discourse of honour continues to inflict sexual violence on women, queers, and trans people, I argue that it was much more common in popular and political discourses up to the 2010s and has more recently shifted to a discourse of “common morals” or “decency”, especially with the growth of queer and trans movements in Turkey (see Bayramoğlu’s chapter in this book). I propose that we can discern this shift by historicising the changing meanings of sexual transgression, particularly in the establishment of the hegemonic sexual and intimate moral order in Turkey.

Historically, scholars of sex work in Turkey have shown that state and social concerns primarily centred around the prostitute as a prominent figure of sexual transgression, and hence, a primary concern for the state regulation of sexual morality (Belli, 2021; Wyers, 2012; Yılmaz, 2016; Zengin, 2011). Through the figure of the prostitute, the state institutionalised a discourse of honour and solidified the hegemony of cis-hetero-reproductive intimate life for the Turkish nation. Starting in the late 1970s and escalating especially in the 1990s, the figure of the “transvestite” (*travesti*) was similarly instrumentalised for trans women sex workers in state and popular discourses through the deployment of perversion (Berghan, 2007; Savcı, 2021; Selek, 2001; Zengin, 2024). As of the 2010s, the figure of sexual transgression has further broadened and multiplied by the inclusion of LGBTI+ in the official discourse, which has been reflected by predominantly embracing common morals and “perversion” (*sapıklık*) instead of honour (*namus*). A similar discursive turn has taken place in feminist discourse, and I propose that this has been facilitated by growing connections, coalitions, as well as conflicts with queer and trans movements. Commencing in the late 2000s, feminist, queer, and trans groups have increasingly joined forces to challenge the structuring of social and daily life within the rigid confines of the cis-hetero-reproductive family and the sex/gender binary. To trace this shift, I specifically focus on two significant feminist campaigns: “No to 438!”

in 1990 and “The Istanbul Convention Saves Lives”, an ongoing political campaign since 2021.

ARTICLE 438: WHORES VS “CHASTE” WOMEN

In 1986, a woman named N.T. in Antalya was raped by four men. The court decision mitigated the punishment of the perpetrators by asserting that N.T. was a sex worker. This legal claim was rooted in Article 438 of the Turkish Penal Code, which granted mitigation if the victim was proven to be a sex worker. This provision, which was in effect since 1926, reflected a cultural perception of sexual morality that unjustly differentiated between non-sex worker women and sex workers, categorising them as chaste and unchaste, respectively.

Indeed, “the prostitute” has always been a central figure in the social imagination of proper womanhood, and symbolically plays a significant role in determining which sexual moral standards are socially acceptable. As Vivien Jones (2000) mentions, a triad of “virgin/mother/whore” exists in relation to the definition of femininity within modernity and she argues that “‘whore’ is the category which, through difference, guarantees the respectability of the other two” (p. 127). The situation is similar in Turkey. Hegemonic sexual morality has drawn strict lines between “sacrificing mother” (*fedakar anne*) and “bad woman” (*kötü kadın*); “good woman” (*iyi/namıslu/terbiyeli kadın*) and “whore” (*orospu/kaltak*); or “family girl” (*aile kızı*) and “street woman” (*sokak kadını/kızı*) since the establishment of the republic, an issue that my previous research on sex workers in Turkey discussed in great detail (Zengin, 2011). Jones (2000) continues to argue: “Perhaps the most significant aspect of that difference is the prostitute’s public identity: the prostitute makes visible and commercial, sexual transactions which are hegemonically defined as private and affective” (p. 127).

The history of feminist critique in Turkey has taught us similar lessons. Several feminist scholars of Turkey argue that active female/feminine sexuality has had to be detached from publicity and contained within the private space of cis-hetero domesticity for women to gain respectability and recognition (Arat, 1997; Sancar, 2012; White, 2003). Excessive exposure of bodily parts, flirtatious public behaviours, and the ways women talk, walk, and laugh can easily be stigmatised as the sexually transgressive codes of prostitute or slut behaviour, which most of the time justified sexual harassment or violence in the public eye or court decisions.

The court decision for N.T.'s murderer was shaped by similar sexist judgements. Various social groups criticised this discriminatory legal decision, advocating for equal treatment before the law. In 1990, feminists launched the campaign "No to 438!" to protest the socio-legal division between chaste and unchaste womanhood and redefine prostitution as a legitimate occupation. During this campaign, feminists reclaimed the term *fahişe* to eliminate its derogatory connotations, emphasising its professional status at a time when the concept of "sex worker" was unfamiliar. The feminist demand centred on the self-ownership of the female body for all women, irrespective of their sex worker status. This significant leverage provided by the ongoing feminist protests marked a historic moment later that year and led to the annulment of Article 438.

However, this legal victory did not change the wider discriminatory institutional attitude towards the figure of the prostitute. Turkey still has the Legal Code on Prostitution Prevention, the current form of which was enacted in 1933 even though its legislation has a longer history that dates back to 1915.¹ Apart from a few additional articles and minor changes in 1961 and 1973,² this regulation, as of 2024, remains in effect. It continues to reflect a legal interpretation of "a culture of honour" (Parla, 2020) in Turkey that perceives women's sexuality as the property

¹ As Zafer Toprak (1987) notes, the year 1914 saw a significant influx of both occupation forces and white Russians migrating to Istanbul after the October Revolution. This situation further diversified the prostitution scene in Istanbul. According to Toprak's information, migrants in Istanbul could engage in any kind of work, including prostitution, and prostitutes were also under the supervision of capitulations. Among foreign registered women, Russians were the most numerous. As can be expected, with the increase in prostitution in Istanbul, sexually transmitted diseases also rose. To combat sexually transmitted diseases, an official organisation was established for the first time on 18 October 1915. The organisation's working methods and duties, detailed provisions regarding prostitutes and brothels, the classification of women, and the operating rules of brothels were all meticulously determined by legislation. The places now known as brothels were referred to as *umumhane* at that time. Apart from brothels, pensions rented to prostitutes and "rendezvous" houses were also defined within the scope of places where prostitution took place. These places of prostitution could not operate in areas outside those specified in the legislation and could not be opened in neighbourhoods next to or across from houses where "respectable" families resided. Women working in these places could not reside outside the neighbourhoods where brothels were located. The Istanbul Police Department issued an "identity card" to working women, who were required to display the identity card prominently in the room where they engaged in prostitution and carry it with them when moving around on the streets.

² Resmi Gazete, 19 April 1961.

of men, family, or society rather than women themselves. This code functions as an official discourse that constructs hierarchies between different forms of sexualities, through which moral social life and intimacy are organised. As a result, the sexual public visibility of a woman poses a threat to the functioning of the public order. This understanding, in turn, establishes different categories of womanhood in terms of women's chastity, morality, and virginity. As long as women regulate and control their bodies in compliance with the socially accepted codes of decency, their sexuality is publicly recognised and celebrated as part of family-making processes (Ilkkaracan & Ronge, 2008; Kandiyoti, 1998; Sirman, 2000; Tekeli, 1988). Hence, there is a patriarchal consensus for defining women's sexuality as it relates to procreation and social reproduction rather than individual pleasure.

Until 2004, these patriarchal values shaped the organisation of legal regulations, which worked as a mechanism to regulate women's sexuality. For instance, Pinar Ilkkaracan and Karin Ronge (2008) demonstrate that sexual crimes like rape, abduction, or sexual abuse against women were legally categorised under "Crimes Against Society", and specifically under the subsection of Crimes Against Traditions of Morality and Family Order (*Adab-i Umumuiye ve Nizam-i Aile*), rather than being considered violations against individuals (p. 237).

Yet in September 2004, the Turkish Penal Code was reformed, removing all reference to women's virginity, chastity, morality, and honour, and recognising women's autonomy. These changes were achieved as a result of a feminist movement that emerged at the beginning of the 1980s and politicised the issues of domestic violence, sexual abuse in the family, and sexual liberation for the first time in Turkish public life. This was also the feminist environment within which the annulment of Article 438 was achieved as a political victory.

Concerns for sexual liberation lost their attraction for many women after the mid-1990s because many felt that their existing rights in the public sphere were under threat with the success of the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) in both local and general elections in 1994 and 1995, respectively. Consequently, the issues relating to sexuality were absent from the feminist agenda until 2002 when the campaign for the Reform of the Turkish Penal Code from a Gender Perspective began. This

campaign focused on “virginity tests”³ and “honour crimes”⁴ rather than directly referring to women’s autonomy over their sexuality (see Zengin’s chapter in this book). The campaign not only mobilised particular public discussions around how female sexuality was constructed as a familial asset at the intersection of shame and honour, but also drew attention to how the state itself acted as one of the most significant promoters of this very construction through its law-making processes.

Despite the significant achievements of this campaign, feminist discussions around state intervention and control in sexual matters have not gone beyond the Penal Code. As mentioned earlier, women’s modesty, chastity, and virginity are still dominant reference points in the Prostitution Code. In addition, even though the formation of the code, which aims exclusively at the control of women prostitutes, is strongly linked to the state’s sexual logic based on women’s honour, feminist discussions have rarely considered this issue. The state’s role in shaping the lives of sex workers did not find a space for public discussion until Ayşe Tükrükçü and Saliha Ermez, two retired female sex workers from

³ According to the Turkish Penal Code, virginity tests can be demanded by the prosecutor in cases of rape, prostitution, and extramarital intercourse. However, the routine practice of these exams historically went far beyond the legal definition and reached also at female subjects who were political detainees, girls in state-run dormitories, orphans, and girls in high school. Virginity exams, while marking women’s purity as an emblem of family honour, represent an institutional surveillance mechanism through which the state preoccupies itself with the modesty of its national female subjects, as well as the production of decency and public morality. For a more detailed analysis of how virginity was persistently emphasised in the law, and how the Turkish state created a national order on the basis of women’s modesty, see Ayşe Parla (2001).

⁴ Thanks to decades-long feminist organising in Turkey, the “honour crime” discourse has been widely replaced by a political and legal discourse of femicide. An honour crime is mostly referred to as the killing of a woman by her family members who denounce her sexual behaviour. In Turkey, another common name for honour crimes used to be “crimes of tradition”, which was associated with Kurdish cultural norms. This thinking also allowed the Turkish people to construct Kurdish people as their racial other by imagining themselves as modern subjects in favour of greater gender equality between men and women as opposed to the Kurdish people who were stereotyped as victimising their women through “honour killings”. However, a close look at the Turkish judiciary system, which granted reduced sentences for perpetrators of honour killings, reveals how this so-called “tradition” has also been cemented in the law itself. Although measures were introduced in September 2004 to prevent these reductions, juridical decisions are still rooted in “traditional” concerns for women’s modesty. For further analysis of the institutional production of “tradition” in regards to honour killings, see Dicle Kogacioglu (2004).

state-regulated brothels, ran as independent candidates in the July 2007 General Elections. During their election campaigns, Tükürükçü and Ermez received strong public support from feminist and LGBTI+ organisations. However, feminist organisations once again lost their focus soon after the elections.

Nevertheless, public discussions of sex work during and after the elections helped initiate a unionisation process that was facilitated by sex workers in 2008. Pioneered under the leadership of Pink Life (*Pembe Hayat*), an Ankara-based LGBTI+ rights association, and with the support of two other queer organisations, *Lambdaistanbul* and *Kaos GL*, and many non-governmental organisations, sex workers formed “Red Umbrella Sex Workers Network”. Pink Life organised a conference in Ankara for the “March 3 International Sex Workers’ Rights Day”, which gathered together around 60 workers to express their problems and discuss the difficulties of sex work (Pembe Hayat, 2008). As a result of the event, the idea of establishing a union was postponed and the “Red Umbrella Sex Workers Network” was established. Even though the idea of forming a union continued for a while, it has gradually died down. Later in 2013, the same group of sex workers founded the “Red Umbrella Association” in Ankara to organise around sex workers’ rights.⁵

Returning to feminist public debates on sexuality in the early and mid-2000s, it was not only sex work, but also queer and trans issues that were disregarded as part of the political agenda. This disengagement began changing with the LGBTI+ movement’s growing public voice in articulating their political concerns, especially regarding their subjection to continuous police violence and social discrimination. This growth coincided with the change in the government when the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) came to power in 2002 and has managed to maintain its power position to the present day. It was against this background that the public discourse of honour has gradually shifted to a discourse of “common morals” or “decency”, which has also been embraced by the state as an official discourse to stigmatise sexual transgression and point it as a target.

⁵ <https://kirmizisemiye.org/> (Accessed 12 June 2024).

POLITICS OF SEXUAL MORALITY AND THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

Since the AKP came to power, it has further entrenched the historically dominant sexual order by promoting a vision of the national future centred around the cishetero-reproductive family. Everyday life in Turkey has been transformed through a series of government measures and locally enforced directives that increasingly embrace conservative norms and values. The state has enacted legal amendments that strengthen the institution of the nuclear family and traditional family values, while also regulating women's sexuality by linking it to the demands of family, men, and the state. Lives outside the cishetero-reproductive family and kinship structures are deemed less valuable and undeserving of state protection or resources.

This growing authoritarianism has broadened the definition of sexual transgression, turning it into a critical site in which intimate ties and alliances between the state and the family are solidified. Both the figure of the prostitute and LGBTI+ individuals have become targets of the state's rising authoritarianism, which frames them as perverse and a threat to common morals. This shift became particularly apparent with the renunciation of the Istanbul Convention.

The Istanbul Convention, formally known as the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, was signed in Istanbul in 2011. Turkey was the first state to ratify the convention in 2012, followed by 33 other countries. The convention promotes a comprehensive understanding of gender violence, viewing it not just as an individual issue but as a pervasive political and systemic problem affecting all aspects of life. Signatory states commit to punishing perpetrators, preventing violence, and protecting victims. The convention also emphasises protecting victims from violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity, incorporating the concepts of "gender as a social construct" and "sexual orientation".

However, the government and its allies exploited this emphasis to launch a smear campaign against the treaty, demonising it for its inclusion of queer and trans people. Critics argued that the convention encouraged individuals to "become LGBTI+" and promoted divorce, which they claimed was contrary to the Turkish family structure, traditional values, and common morals. The State Directorate of Communications officially stated, "The convention's original intention of promoting women's rights

was hijacked by a group attempting to normalise homosexuality, which is incompatible with Turkey's social and family values".

Various state officials, including then Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu, labelled LGBTI+ people as "perverts" and "threats to our children" through official social media accounts and public speeches.⁶ In 2021, Turkey formally withdrew from the Istanbul Convention, with senior government officials announcing plans for judicial reform to address domestic violence through an Ankara Convention based on "Turkish traditions and customs".

Feminist, queer, and trans movements rallied around the slogan "The Istanbul Convention saves lives", both in the streets and on social media, highlighting the dangers of the withdrawal and emphasising the importance of addressing gender violence. The withdrawal weakened legal protections against violence and femicides, emboldening perpetrators. During this period, femicides and hate crimes in Turkey increased. The COVID-19 restrictive measures exacerbated the risk of domestic violence against women, queers, trans people, and children. Despite the evident need for more tools to prevent and combat gender violence, state officials instead promoted public hatred against women, queers, and trans people on social media and beyond. In these campaigns, the discourse of honour was replaced by one of morals and decency, with the slogan "Whose morals are common morals?" (*Genel ahlak kimin ahlaki?*) becoming particularly striking. In the current authoritarian political atmosphere, morality has become the discursive currency to stigmatise not only transgressive hetero-female sexuality but also queer and trans lives and sexualities.

⁶ This anti-LGBTI+ stance was not unique to Turkey, as right-wing authoritarian regimes worldwide, such as those in the United States, Brazil, and India, utilised anti-LGBTI+ agendas to consolidate power and establish international alliances. Concurrently, Middle Eastern countries like Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and Qatar fostered a growing systemised queer panic, resulting in bans and crackdowns on queer activities and spaces. The rise of anti-LGBTI+ government politics in the Middle East coincided with similar trends in Eastern Europe and Northern Asia, particularly in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Russia.

CONCLUSION

The Turkish state has historically turned women's bodies into a site for the reproduction and consolidation of its regime of sexuality, gender, and intimacy. To achieve this moral goal, the state has institutionalised the prostitute woman as sexually transgressive and weaponised the discourse of honour to regulate female sexuality. Over the last decades, sexual transgression has amplified its meaning by more and more resorting to a discourse of common morals and decency, which included queer and trans people. This piece provided a brief history of this shift through specific feminist campaigns organised around sexual stigma and vilification.

While deeply alarming and disconcerting, the escalating preoccupation with "LGBTI+" at both the state and societal levels illustrates the significant role that feminist, queer, and trans movements in Turkey have assumed as influential political actors, wielding substantial influence over the political landscape and discourse. The connections and coalitions forged between feminist and LGBTI+ movements have strengthened and become indispensable. Both political groups reject the social and institutional insistence on recognising women as part of the family rather than as individuals. They have done great organisational work around alternative forms of living arrangements, households, relatedness, love, sexual life or networks of solidarity beyond the cis-hetero-reproductive nuclear family model. Indeed we have been facing the emergence of an entirely new generation of fearless feminists, queers, and trans people, resiliently resisting increasing sexual authoritarianism while progressively establishing a prominent position of political agency within the country.

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CHAPTER 12

Traitors, Terrorists, & *Çapulcus*: Protests and the Limits of Democratic Politics in Turkey's First Century and Beyond

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INTRODUCTION

I want to start this chapter with an observation that presents a seeming paradox: on the one hand, social movements and street protests have historically played a crucial, if overlooked role in shaping political developments in Turkey. Turkey boasts a complex civil society with professional bodies, unions, and student organisations, among others, that have regularly used varied forms of protests as a means of claims-making. Yet protests as a form of street politics have not been normalised as they have in democratic settings: the rate of protest participation is low, protests have little legitimacy among the public and the authorities, and they are repressed regularly.

This chapter deals with this paradox and highlights the lack of normalisation of protests as a facet of one of the unresolved problems of the Turkish Republic—its failure to constitute a form of democratic, civic citizenship. I take protests to be a crucial democratic mechanism that provides an avenue of voice and participation to citizens, especially to those who might be alienated from institutional politics. In the liberal-democratic tradition, street protests as forms of contentious politics are seen as one of the many, if non-institutional, avenues for citizen participation and are accepted as a fundamental democratic citizenship right and practice. Protests present an interface between the society and the state; they are one of the ways by which the society communicates with, and checks, the state and the political establishment.

That protests are not seen as legitimate means of participation in contemporary Turkey relates not only to their conflictual and violent history in the twentieth century, which I discuss below, but also to the boundaries of desirable behaviour for citizens; that is, to how an acceptable citizen is imagined. In what follows, I first present a brief, and thus unavoidably incomplete, history of protests and social movements in Turkey. The complex history of movements and their mobilisations in Turkey cannot be adequately summarised in a few pages. Moreover, considering the multiplicity of groups that appear in this history with different ideologies, identities, and tactical choices and are of different sizes and importance, it is hard to make general statements that cannot be challenged. The point of this brief and incomplete history is to underline key issues and discuss the non-normalisation of protests in Turkey. I examine non-normalisation by considering state repression as well as public attitudes. I then discuss developments during the AKP (*Adalet ve*

Kalkınma Partisi, Justice and Development Party) period, taking Gezi as both a culmination and a possible turning point that contained a radical potential for the transformation of protests and democratic politics. I conclude the chapter with an assessment of the relationship of protests to narratives of citizenship and where Turkey is at 100+1 years.

THE TUMULTUOUS HISTORY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND PROTESTS IN TURKEY

1960s–1980: Growth, Radicalisation, and Violence

The roots of many of the movements that are still active in Turkey date back to the 1960s, when there was significant growth in social movements, even though the long history of contentious politics in Turkey goes back to the Second Constitutional Period (Çetinkaya, 2004). Various factors contribute to this; along with accelerating urbanisation, industrialisation, and urban migration (see Arslanalp's chapter in this book), the permissive political opportunity structure that emerged after the 1960 coup played an important role. Specifically, the 1961 Constitution, arguably the most democratic in Turkish history, significantly expanded and protected civil liberties and was followed by laws such as the Trade Union Act and the Collective Bargaining, Strikes and Lockouts Act in 1963 that encouraged and safeguarded the organisation of labour, along with the Republican Party elite that supported the student movement. The effects of global anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movements contributed to this invigorating environment.

The mobilisations in this period were led by the student movement, trailed closely by labour and farmer's movements that used a diverse repertoire of protests (Alper, 2018; Gümrükçü, 2014). A new wave of Kurdish political dynamism also emerged with new repertoires of action (Gündoğan, 2011). While violence dominates the histories and memories of mobilisations of the late 1960s and 1970s, overshadowing other forms of protest, conventional tactics like meetings, forums, press statements, and mass protests, as well as more unconventional tactics such as occupations, boycotts, and strikes, were common. Some significant examples of these are the wildcat strikes of 1965 in Zonguldak (Roy, 1974), the Eastern Meetings in the eastern part of Turkey (Gündoğan, 2011), university boycotts and occupations of 1968–9 (which then diffused to labour and farmer movements, for example, the Derby and Singer factory

occupations), and the massive labour protests of 15–16 June 1970 (see Alper, 2018, Chapters 7 & 8).

This is, however, neither an uninterrupted nor a peaceful history. The trajectory of social movements in modern Turkey, as with many other political phenomena, is strongly tied to, interrupted, and shaped by the history of military interventions, namely the 1960 and 1980 coups, the 1971 ultimatum, and the attempted coup of 2016. These were all followed by heavy-handed and extensive repression by the military (and in the case of 2016, the government), targeting civilian politics, and civil society. This repression, which included mass arrests of prominent cadres of movements, meant a break and a huge drop in activities, which then started picking up after a couple of years (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2024; Gümrükçü, 2014).

Yet coups are not just exogenous factors affecting social movements and street politics. Leading to them, social movements were crucial political actors actively shaping the political field and the country's trajectory. Specifically, between 1960 and 1980, the trajectory of social movements, their increasing levels of activity, political demands, and repertoires shaped the political context. In both the late 1960s and 1970s, a cycle of increased movement activity went hand in hand with radicalisation and sustained violence on the streets, which was used by the army to legitimise its intervention in politics.

This cycle stopped after the 1980 coup, which was particularly vicious in its repression. With the goal of depoliticisation, the military restructured the political field, closing parties and countless organisations, and introducing a constitution that was restrictive in its treatment of civil and political rights (including the right to protest). While the country returned to civilian rule with the 1983 elections, it took multiple years for social movement activity to pick up again: the first mass protest after the coup happened only in 1989, involving workers at state enterprises (*Bahar Eylemleri*, Spring Protests).

1980s and 1990s: Break, Securitisation, and Transformation

What defines the 1980s and 1990s is the securitisation of public life by the military based on an ethnic-nationalist worldview after the coup and the armed conflict between the PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, Kurdistan Workers Party) and the Turkish state/army. While the Kurdish issue is foundational to the Turkish Republic and the repression

of the Kurdish movement a persistent part of its history, the declaration of an armed insurgency against the Turkish state by the PKK in 1984 started a new and consequential chapter of this conflict. The southeastern provinces of Turkey remained under a state of emergency for 12 years (from 1987 to 2002), and Kurdish populations were violently repressed via the use of the whole state apparatus, including extra-judicial methods (see Tekin's chapter in this book).

The Kurdish conflict as a “threat to the indivisibility of the state” enabled and aided the securitisation of a political life that was already securitised via the entrenched role of the military in politics and a national security culture that repeatedly underlined the threat (and fear) of enemies that undermine the unity and security of the country (Karaosmanoğlu, 2000). It gave leverage to authorities in silencing not only Kurdish demands but also any other movement and groups that were critical of state policies. In the 1990s and onwards, however, as the country integrated into the global market, new kinds of movements and activisms like the women's movement, the environmental movement (see Aydın and Turhan's chapter in this book), and the LGBTI+ movement, which might fit under the category of new social movements, grew stronger, dealing with issues which were possibly not regarded as “threats” and hence tolerated by the military and the state. These became important players in Turkey's social movement field, active in discussions of democratisation and citizenship rights, and remain today as key challengers of the regime and its policies in AKP's Turkey. They also introduced a break of sorts from the labour and student movements of earlier periods, relying on less hierarchical, networked, and grassroots organising rather than the more hierarchical movements of the 1970s that were linked to institutions such as unions and parties (Yıldırım & Gümrükçü, 2017, pp. 396–398).

The 2000s and Beyond: Continuity and Change in the AKP Years

In 2002, the AKP was elected with the promise of further democratisation and the continuation of the EU integration process. The first term of AKP, in particular, was perceived as a period of democratisation, with concrete steps taken towards completing the accession process with the EU. These steps were reflected in and encouraged a public sphere that became invigorated with new initiatives, spurring critical discussions on topics historically considered taboo (such as the one-party period and Kemalism, the Armenian Genocide, Alevi identity, and the repression

of non-Muslim minorities). This liberalisation had repercussions for the protest field, providing an opening for and normalisation of protest politics (Uysal, 2017). Yet even then, those movements that were seen as threats, such as the Kurdish movement, continued to face repression (Atak & Bayram, 2017; Bakiner, 2017).

This opening was rather short-lived. As is well discussed at this point in the literature (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Somer, 2016), the AKP started turning increasingly authoritarian after 2007, putting more pressure on various oppositional arenas. It was well before the Gezi protests that the regime started increasing the pressure on the streets via protest bans (Arslanalp & Erkmén, 2020a) and changes to legal frameworks (for example, the Anti-Terror Law in 2006 and the Law on the Duties and Competence of the Police Force in 2007). What is crucial is that while the AKP used the same discourse of national security discussed above, it targeted not only the old “enemies of the state” (Kurds, labour, and the radical left) but also new ones, such as secularist, environmentalist, and LGBTI+ movements (Arslanalp & Erkmén, 2020a).

The increasingly repressive AKP years contain one of the most critical moments of Turkish protest history: the Gezi protests of 2013. These massive protests spurred around the relatively small Gezi Park in Taksim, Istanbul and spread to the rest of the country, highlighting the growing discontent against AKP’s policies and autocratisation. Importantly, the Gezi protests represent the crystallisation of the legacy of the democratisation efforts and the organisational infrastructure that had been building up since the 1990s in a civil society that made space for and explored different political subjectivities, practices, and forms of organising, revealing the possibility as well as the potential of transformation of the culture of protests and democratic politics in Turkey, which I discuss below.

The massive Gezi protests created a new impetus for the already autocratising regime to suppress protests. This increasing repression was exacerbated by the state of emergency that was declared in July 2016 after the failed coup attempt, with serious repercussions for opposition movements. Not only did the number of protests drop significantly, but the state of emergency led to the closure of many associations and the extension of protest bans, which had spill-over effects after the end of the state of emergency in 2018 (Arslanalp & Erkmén, 2020b). Hence what defines the late AKP period is increased and varied protest repression that

affected not only the numbers but also the repertoires of oppositional protests (Arslanalp & Erkmén, 2024).

FACES OF NON-NORMALISATION: PROTESTS, REPRESSION, AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES

The above-presented history of protests, as Uysal (2017, pp. 19–20) aptly states, is a history of their non-normalisation as a method of participation and a key democratic right. Except for brief openings, the widespread repression of protests, especially when it comes to groups like the radical left and Kurdish movement, is an ongoing and regular part of political life in Turkey. Along with overt police violence, legal forms of repression against protests, activists, and social movements are common. These include protest bans, detentions, arrests, and fines, all of which work through the judicial infrastructure, supported by legal frameworks/laws and authorities such as the police, judges, and prosecutors, who interpret these in a restrictive manner.

Yet I want to point to non-normalisation in a different but related and reinforcing sense, shifting the focus to public opinion and behaviour. When it comes to repertoires of participation in politics, as a form of claims-making and voice, protests are not a preferred, habitual, or even tolerated option for many citizens in Turkey. As discussed elsewhere in detail (Arslanalp & Erkmén, 2022), especially compared to developed democracies as well as many countries of similar levels of socioeconomic development, participation rates in protests are low in Turkey. Surveys from 2002, 2006, and 2007 (Kalaycıoğlu, 2008) put those who said “they participated in a legal march” at 3.3%, 6.5%, and 4%, respectively (for similar results, see also different waves of World Values Survey). Our own representative survey in Istanbul conducted in 2020 reveals that 5% of the population in Istanbul participated in some kind of protest (Arslanalp & Erkmén, 2022, p. 386). While it is hard to compare these numbers cross-nationally and even temporally, it is not a stretch to state that these are low figures. In Europe, where protests have been considered a key form of political participation since the 1970s, surveys reveal that 20–30% of the population has participated in a protest (Dalton, 2014, p. 54). Similarly, many Latin American countries have higher participation rates, despite having high levels of repression (see, for example, Moseley, 2015).

Moreover, one suspects that many among the Turkish public do not consider protesting as a key right and have a distanced attitude towards

it. In the survey we conducted in Istanbul, the rights to peaceful protest, assembly, and demonstration were considered to be fundamental only by 26% of the respondents, the lowest among all the rights we listed. A majority of respondents also thought that protests could be restricted, not only under exceptional circumstances but also when they “criticise government policies” (63%), “disturb the moral sensibilities of society” (82%), or “obstruct traffic” (82%) (Arslanalp & Erkmén, 2022, pp. 390–391).

EXPLAINING THE NON-NORMALISATION OF PROTESTS AS A FORM OF PARTICIPATION

While persistent repression is an indication of the non-normalisation of protests in Turkey, it is also possibly a cause of it. That is, the lack of normalisation among the public, at least partially, follows from the history of repression of protests. Repression increases the cost of protesting, deterring citizens, and decreases the opportunities for doing so. Moreover, both the repression and the discourse of authorities surrounding it associate protesting with illegality, disorder, and violence, which might contribute to reluctance to participate.

A Culture of Security and Securitisation

However, it is also possible that these attitudes towards protest are grounded in the aforementioned security culture. While, of course, one cannot talk about a homogeneous, stable, and unchanging political culture of any group, let alone a national one, certain themes and ideas have historically circulated widely and persistently in Turkey, spread via the ideological apparatuses of the state, the media, and popular culture, and repeated in daily narratives and discourses. These include two key narratives that work together to legitimise violence: the threat of internal and external enemies that want to undermine the unity and security of the Turkish nation, and the role of the military in fighting off these threats. While these narratives are clearly used in legitimising coups (Acar & Önal, 2022), they spread widely and deeply, and are contained and reflected in legal infrastructures (see, for example, State Security Courts, *Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemeleri*) and ordinary political discourse. It is not just state authorities but also various actors within civil society who readily, perhaps

automatically, adopt these narratives, accusing challengers of being agitators and traitors provoked or used by external forces. Turkey's protest history has too many examples of these to provide in a short chapter, such as the case of the Bergama resistance against gold mining, whose leaders were accused of "spying" and had a state security court case opened against them by the prosecutor, based on claims that the resistance was organised and financed by German foundations. See also how after the wildcat strike of coal miners in Zonguldak in 1965, even union leadership from Türk-İş and Maden-İş claimed they were a "provocation" which had "an external origin" (Besen, 1965 cited in Mello, 2020, p. 101).

What these narratives display and generate are a preoccupation with the "sanctity of the state", with "unity" and the imagination of the nation as an organic, naturally homogenous unit (with its roots in the solidaristic understanding of Kemalist nationalism), which translates to the valorisation of and deference for authority in its various manifestations, promotes suspicion of minorities and those who question or challenge this imagined unity or sanctity, and provides a suitable framework to exclude those who do not fit in (see Taşkın, 2001, p. 582). It is not a stretch to think that these frameworks work as legitimisation tactics for repression partly because they resonate with, are possibly accepted, used, or at least, not challenged by many among the majority Sunni-Turkish population. That is, while one can imagine that the public's attitudes are shaped by repression, it is also possible that repression works because it has roots in attitudes shaped by these widely circulated narratives.

The Legacy of Violence

One can also imagine that the experience and the collective memory of the 1960–1980 period, as well as the aftermath of the 1980 coup, have left a mark on the imagination, discourses, and attitudes of many citizens (see Orhon's chapter in this book). As mentioned above, street violence was significant and consequential between the late 1960s and the end of the 1970s. The growth of vocal leftist movements in 1960s, such as TİP (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, Worker's Party of Turkey) established in 1961 and DİSK (*Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*, the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey) established in 1967, was countered through violence by right-wing organisations, spearheaded by *ülküçü* youth organised around Idealist Hearths (*Ülkü Ocakları*) with links to MHP (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, Nationalist Action Party),

which, in turn, radicalised the left (Bozarslan, 2020; Gümrükçü, 2023). From the mid-1970s onwards, violent methods became the primary repertoire of movements in Turkey (Gümrükçü, 2014), including severe physical violence such as killings, bombings, and kidnappings, and were utilised by both the left and the right, reflecting the ideological and tactical choices of these movements as well as the zeitgeist of the period. Sayarı (2010) states that an estimated 5000 people were killed between 1976 and 1980. The savage repression that followed the 1980 coup then targeted activists, where thousands were imprisoned in abhorrent conditions and endured horrendous levels and types of torture. Hence a possible legacy of the street politics of the 1970s and the repression that followed is that, especially among the Sunni-Turkish majority of the population, extra-institutional/contentious methods of participation and claims-making are coded as repertoires of “radicals”, associated with “anarchy” that ultimately carry very high costs with real consequences.

These are of course not the only legacies of these periods, nor does repression only result in demobilisation or fear. Both street violence and state repression are remembered and interpreted differently by different groups and have fostered a “martyr culture” among radical leftist groups in particular (Yonucu, 2022). Instead of creating fear, in this tradition, violence and repression are used to feed into resistance by valorising sacrifice for a cause, as seen in for example, the use of hunger strikes by the radical left (Bargu, 2014) as well as the language and imagery accompanying them. A different legacy of violence in the protest arena is the widespread occurrence of commemorative protests that remember and demand accountability for victims of state violence (such as the *Cumartesi Anneleri*, Saturday Mothers) and violent events (such as the Maraş massacre).

The Neoliberal Turn and Neoliberal Subjectivities

The economic crisis going into the 1980 coup was countered by the introduction of the neoliberal reforms with the January 24 decisions, dictated by the IMF. The reforms required control over the activism of labour and the streets to be implemented. The privatisation of multiple sectors and the flexibilisation of the workforce introduced by the reforms both led to and required the precarisation of the labour force and weakening of unions, hence a steady erosion of the unions’ capacity to mount challenges against the state.

Yet maybe a less discussed effect of the neoliberal turn in its relationship to social movements is at the level of ideology and subjectivities. The neoliberal restructuring also meant a reordering of societal values, prioritising individualism (over the collective), competition (over cooperation), and consumption (over frugality). As Turkey integrated into global markets and new goods, lifestyles, and forms of consumption became available, the way a good life was imagined was transformed, especially for the new urban middle classes, with its images circulating via television and magazines (Bali, 2007). In these images of a good life, there was not much space for “politics”, which was not only dangerous but simply not appealing. While there is not much written on the relationship between this transformation and political values in the Turkish case, it is possible to imagine that for the majority of the generations who grew up in the political landscape that was shaped by the 1980 coup, organising for political ideals was neither as familiar nor desirable as it had been for the students of the 1960s and 1970s. On the global scale, the 1990s also spelled the end of the USSR and hence a discrediting of Marxist-Leninist movements, weakening an important ideological pull towards organising. However, as mentioned above, both globally and in Turkey, the weakening of the left and the neoliberalisation of society went hand in hand with the rise of movements in the 1990s and 2000s that organised not only around identity issues but also around the discontent that was being generated by global neoliberalism, such as anti-globalisation and environmental movements (Gümrükçü, 2010). Moreover, Islamic mobilisation found a suitable ground within this period and articulated a synthesis of Turkish-Islamic ideology and neoliberalism (Tuğal, 2009). The transformations in communications infrastructure, especially the spread of the internet, made it easier for movements to link and learn from each other transnationally.

A NEW KIND OF PROTEST CULTURE? GEZI PROTESTS AS A CRITICAL MOMENT

The Gezi protests of 2013 emerged as a critical moment when the growing discontent among secular urban classes against the AKP and its policies crystallised around Taksim Square. While it is the immense participation that was so astonishing, as protests spread through the country, Gezi’s importance in Turkish protest history concerns the modes and tactics of participation and the political subjectivities these revealed and

enabled, which carried the potential to transform the way protests, and democratic politics, were imagined, practised, and narrated in Turkey. In many of its characteristics, Gezi has more in common with the protests of the global protest wave of 2009–2013, such as the Occupy movements (2011), Indignados (2011–2012), and the Arab Spring (2010–2011), than the ones from 1960 to 1970s in Turkey (Tuğal, 2013).

First, unlike previous major mobilisations in Turkey’s history, Gezi was neither organised, dominated by, nor associated with an ideological faction, specific movement, or group, nor was it linked to institutions such as unions and parties. While its class background was widely debated (Gürcan & Peker, 2015; Yörüük, 2014), it brought together a heterogeneous and overlapping group of protesters, including students, professionals, Kemalists, feminists, LGBTI+, anti-capitalist Islamists, nationalists, Kurds, and leftists. This multiplicity, with various groups that do not generally cross paths existing and protesting together at Gezi Park, holds a crucial place within the narratives of participants as a key element of the “Gezi Spirit” or *Gezi Ruhu* (Karakayalı & Yaka, 2014).

This does not mean, of course, that Gezi appeared out of nowhere. It was linked to existing networks (see *Taksim Dayanışması*) and was foreshadowed by multiple contestations over urban spaces, such as protests against urban transformation, the Third Bridge, and the demolition of the Emek movie theatre. In fact, Gezi was built on the efforts and legacies of the previous two decades, especially when considering the important role that urban and LGBTI+ movements played in Gezi (see Bayramoğlu’s chapter in this book). It reflected the networked and non-hierarchical approaches developed in these movements, rather than the more hierarchical or institutionalised organisational styles of street politics before the 1980s.

Relatedly, Gezi was decidedly non-violent, colourful, and carnivalesque, relying on a whole new batch of symbols and images, using a lot of humour, as such introducing imagery, as well as language and practice, that contrasted with the more regimented earlier decades. Considering its slogans, its notably limited demands, and its narratives about itself, Gezi used a very different language and worldview than both the Jacobin student movements of the 1960s and the radical leftist movements of the 1970s. There was no talk about revolution, no talk about “saving” the state; and, while this was contested especially outside of the Park, nor did the majority claim to act in the name of a Kemalist legacy. See, for example, the slogans *Mustafa Keser’in askerleriyiz*, “We are the soldiers

of Mustafa Keser”; which is a word-play on the slogan “We are the soldiers of Mustafa Kemal”, and *Kabrolsun başızı şeyler!* “Down with some things”; some deliberately misspelled (Morva, 2016; Seçil Dağtaş, 2016; Taş, 2017).

Similar to other protests of the global wave, a striking feature of Gezi was the occupation of the park and the commune that lasted for 15 days. During this period, many stayed in the park, living together, sharing meals and chores, and participating in forums and activities, engendering a form of solidarity through communal living and sharing of space. The Gezi commune emphasised participatory practices, inclusive language, and non-violence, enacting a form of prefigurative politics that embodied the myriad criticisms that were voiced against the conservative AKP regime as well as neoliberal capitalism (Gambetti, 2014). Even after the commune was destroyed by police forces, these participatory practices lived on in forums in parks in various neighbourhoods of the city (Ugur-Cinar & Gunduz-Arabaci, 2020).

Prefigurative politics, active participation, solidarity building, cross-cleavage alliances, the emphasis on commons, and the creation of an identity (*çapulcu*) that did not have ethnic, national, or religious connotations challenged dominant historical understandings and practices of citizenship in Turkey, which oscillates between a militant or passive understanding of citizenship (Üstel, 2004), as well as an understanding of democracy that prioritises institutional, representative practices over everything else. Not discounting the historical struggles and tensions, one can argue that the dominant understanding of citizenship in Turkey places the state and/or the nation above the individual, emphasising citizens’ duties and responsibilities, and loyalty and obedience towards the state, more than their rights and capacities. This takes place within an organic understanding of the political community, prioritising, especially after the 1980 coup, a Turkish-Islamic identity and worldview (Üstel, 2004). Citizenship, moreover, has never been fully inclusive in modern Turkey, in practice or discourse, fractured along the key sociopolitical cleavages, including religion and ethnicity.

The Gezi protests realised a modality of political existence and participation that did not fit within these key frameworks in Turkish politics and society. While the participants in Gezi did not emerge out of nowhere and are indebted to the legacy of the movements before them, the protests and the commune themselves worked as a laboratory that catalysed political subjectivities and practices (Ugur-Cinar & Gunduz-Arabaci, 2020;

Yılmaz, 2018). The after-effects of Gezi continued for an extended period in the form of increased mobilisation and through protests and forums in parks (Ramazanogullari, 2022). The energy of Gezi also seeped into institutional politics, for example, in the popular electoral monitoring campaigns (*Oy ve Ötesi*), in the No Campaign of the 2017 constitutional referendum (Özkaya, 2023), and also arguably in HDP's (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, People's Democratic Party) campaign in 2015, which resulted in the HDP members being elected to the parliament and the AKP losing its majority.

Yet, the aftermath of the Gezi protests has been a period of further and significant autocratisation in Turkey, which along with the inherent limits of the protests themselves (Pelivan, 2020), arguably conditioned and limited Gezi's transformative potential. The Gezi protests heightened the threat perception of the regime, creating a fear of mass mobilisation and leading to further repression of protests which, in line with historical trends, only became worse after the coup attempt and the declaration of a state of emergency in 2016 (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020b). Gezi itself was integrated into the security language of the regime, becoming a bogeyman of sorts. President Erdoğan regularly framed it as a violent attempt to overthrow the government, organised by a handful of traitors, supported by foreign forces, with this exact accusation used in the Gezi trials to jail prominent activists. This framing of Gezi continues to be utilised to paint other opposition protests as both undemocratic and illegal.

Building on historical fissures and narratives already in place, the populist authoritarian leadership of the AKP regime further weakened the fragile bonds of citizenship, reducing it to the dichotomy of "us vs them": loyal subjects who belong to the "we" of the Turkish Republic, and the disloyal others whose rights can be disregarded. While the boundaries of the groups are flexible, the loyal subjects are to follow the dictates of the leader, which might include mobilisation for the state and leader. Hence, under the AKP, street mobilisations are tolerated and even welcomed when they are regime-approved and/or regime-mobilised, as was seen during the mobilisations after the coup attempt in 2016 (Gümrukçü, 2022; Kahvecioğlu, 2022). Yet for all others, democracy is a practice that can only be exercised at the ballot box, in a heavily tilted playing field.

CONCLUSION: PROTESTS AND CITIZENSHIP AT 100+1 IN TURKEY

This chapter has provided a short account of the long and complicated history of social movements and protests in republican Turkey, emphasising the non-normalisation of protests as a form of claims-making and democratic participation among many, considering the historical circumstances that have shaped this non-normalisation. The chapter has underlined the multiplicity of traditions and practices, as well as transformations, and pointed to the Gezi protests of 2013 as a critical moment. The Gezi protests revealed the possibility of a democratic politics that challenges the dominant notions of citizenship and participation in Turkey, with the potential to transform not just the practice, but through both the widespread participation and the narratives surrounding it, the imagination and perception of protests.

This succeeded only to a limited extent, however; the developments in the subsequent decade meant that the potentials contained in Gezi largely dissipated and remained unfulfilled. Yet one can imagine that, just like other significant events in Turkish protest history, they created a legacy that lives through its traces (even if they are small) which might inform practices at crucial turning points in future.

That the AKP regime, with an unchecked president at the top of the country, is propagating an understanding that associates protests with anarchy, illegality, and the incitement of internal and external enemies, which already has a key place in Turkish political history and culture, while controlling the police, the media, and the judiciary, does not bode well for street politics and participation in Turkey. After a century of struggle, the Turkish Republic falls short of securing a democratic and civic imagination of citizenship, which envisions all citizens of Turkey as equal individuals with rights who can hold authorities accountable.

However, as is obvious in this chapter, there are multiple resilient and resistant threads in Turkish society with long histories. While maybe under pressure, Turkish society contains forces that have the potential to surprise even itself, as was clearly revealed during the Gezi protests and very recently during the 2024 local elections.

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CHAPTER 13

Turkey's Queer Struggle: Digital Media and Nightlife as the New Frontiers

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INTRODUCTION

Turkey's 100+1 year anniversary is shaped by a sociopolitical climate that is increasingly dangerous for its gender and sexual misfits. Turkey's LGBTI+ movement has witnessed several important turning points since its beginning in the 1980s, which have not always led to a progression of rights. Yet the increasing repression of human rights has always pushed Turkey's queers to create new spaces and contexts for activism, solidarity and visibility. After a historical overview, this chapter focuses on digital media and nightlife as the two new frontiers of Turkey's current queer struggle.

Although media and nightlife have always played a crucial role in queer visibility and culture, they have gained a whole new dimension with the increasing authoritarianism in Turkey. The repression of LGBTI+ rights in Turkey is simultaneously unfolding with the increasing digitalisation of social and cultural life. Digital technologies have emerged as ambivalent tools for queer resistance, due to the Turkish state's increasing censorship and control of social media. In a similar vein, nightlife and clubs play an ambivalent role in the queer struggle. On one hand, they have crystallised as one of the few remaining spaces in which people not only come together to have fun but also create new forms of politics. On the other hand, nightlife is not detached from commercial interests or major events such as wars and the rising cost of living.

Based on a literature review and my ongoing research on queer media practices of belonging, I first provide an overview of key moments in Turkey's queer struggle. While discussing queer interventions in urban public spaces such as the occupation of Istanbul's Taksim Square, the first section also discusses the sociopolitical and cultural contexts in which Turkey's queer struggle is embedded. As I show, the recent literature is teeming with the rightful concerns about the Turkish state's repression of LGBTI+ rights, which makes activism in public space increasingly dangerous. The second section draws attention to digital media, which emerged as an important player in Turkey's queer struggle in times of authoritarianism. In the last section, I demonstrate how the current queer nightlife has become an important context in which not only queerness is experienced and learned, but also where normativities are put into question.

QUEER STRUGGLE IN URBAN SPACES FROM THE 1980S TO THE GEZI UPRISING

The turbulent decade of the 1980s was not only shaped by the military dictatorship and the arrival of neoliberal politics but also made possible the first political mobilisation of gender and sexual misfits. Trans sex workers were at the forefront of a movement that led to the first queer demonstrations in public space, despite the hostile authoritarian climate of the time (see Zengin's chapter in this book). The authoritarian climate that followed the military coup of 12 September 1980 had wide-reaching impacts on many aspects of life, including the politics of gender and sexuality. Increased police violence against trans women in particular (Gürsü, 2013), the forced displacement of trans women from large cities to rural areas, the torture in custody and public shaming of trans women and gays and a law that prohibited "homosexual performers" from performing on stage—in the interest of public morality (Sarı et al., 2018)—were among the repressive measures taken against queers in the 1980s. In certain cases, such as in the neighbourhoods in which trans women managed to create a vibrant community, residents mobilised against the transgender presence (Bayramoğlu, 2013; Yetiskul & Demirel, 2018). Turkey's queer struggle emerged despite the manifold hostilities that controlled and oppressed queer lives in the public, cultural and urban landscapes.

While violent regimes that sought to curb non-normative sexualities and gender identities continued to shape society, a contradictory and more liberal discourse on sexuality and gender began to influence Turkish culture in the late 1980s. An explosion of printed lifestyle magazines went hand in hand with the burgeoning of a more open discourse. Newly established tabloid magazines and newspapers started covering formerly taboo topics such as homosexuality, masturbation and transgender struggles (Gürbilek, 2001). It was within this new liberal context that a book entitled *Türkiye'de Eşcinsellik* (Homosexuality in Turkey) by Arslan Yüzgün attracted intense media attention in 1986 (Yüzgün, 1986). While Yüzgün took advantage of this to promote his book, the awakened public interest also paved the way for open discussions on queers as political subjects.

It was within this newly emerging climate that a group of queer activists, mostly trans women, organised the first LGBTI+ demonstration in Turkey. People gathered in Taksim Square, where years later the Gezi protests would take place, to demonstrate against the police violence (see Erkmen's chapter in this book). The demonstration was accompanied by

a hunger strike. The event caught substantial media attention, including from the European newspapers (Bayramoğlu, 2021). While the Turkish public was mostly concerned with trans visibility in public spaces in the 1980s, starting from the late 1990s onwards, attention shifted towards the idea of a Western gay male identity, which arrived in the Turkish media (Gürel, 2017). Gürel argues that left-wing media outlets, in particular, celebrated gay identity as Western, and thus modern. Within this context, trans women (particularly the category of “*travesti*”) became a kitsch, local and unwanted form of queerness in the media (Gürel, 2017, p. 148) The establishment of Turkey’s first LGBTI+ organisation, Lambdaistanbul, was also an outcome of an urge to turn to the West for sexual and gender identity rights. Lambdaistanbul was born in 1993 when activists wanted to organise “Christopher Street Day” to remember the Stonewall Uprising, which took place in the Stonewall Inn at Christopher Street in New York City. Although Istanbul’s mayor did not permit the event to take place, the local and international activists who came together led to the establishment of Lambdaistanbul. Until the early 2000s, Lambdaistanbul did not have an office and was rather an initiative meeting in private homes. Lambdaistanbul, and other initiatives such as Kaos GL, only became officially registered NGOs with offices and funded projects due to the now-frozen negotiations with the EU on possible accession.

Two decades later, Turkey has veered away from the path of becoming an EU member—which also changed the picture for its LGBTI+ (non-)citizens. Here, similar to other human rights issues, the Gezi protests mark an important turning point for Turkey’s queer struggle. While the protests against the demolition of Gezi Park turned into an uprising against the government’s increasingly authoritarian style, it also paved the way for more queer visibility in the public sphere. As Özbay and Savcı (2018) show, from the 1970s onwards Gezi Park had been a place where gay men and trans women visited for cruising. After the increasing migration from the Middle East, newly arrived queer migrants have also used the park to make new friends and connections (Zengin, 2013). Moreover, the Gezi protests opened a whole new democratic space, where several sexual, gendered and racial claims were made about the park in particular, and society in general. While queers took part in the demonstrations as the park had a subcultural meaning for their community, the Armenian population of Turkey were also reminding the public that the Ottoman barracks that Erdoğan wanted to re-erect were built on an Armenian cemetery (Özbay & Savcı, 2018). The Gezi protests inspired also other

struggles, such as HIV activism about reshaping the public space in terms of sexual rights. Inspired by the Gezi Uprising's DIY and solidarity atmosphere, HIV activists used public spaces such as clinics and hospitals to offer free information and health checks (Özbay & Savcı, 2018, p. 519). Similarly, the increasing queer visibility in politics and public life after the Gezi protests resonated in smaller cities in Anatolia, where new LGBTI+ organisations were established and Pride events started taking place (Çetin, 2015).

The Gezi Park demonstrations were also a turning point when the ruling party Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) veered away from "tolerating" LGBTI+ issues into a more authoritarian style in which politicians would openly attack LGBTI+ issues. This a very dramatic shift of events; when asked by a student in a Turkish TV show about same-sex marriages in 2002, the newly elected Erdoğan said that his government would consider LGBTI+ people's rights as a human rights issue and would introduce policies accordingly. When it comes to the oppression of the LGBTI+ movement, the AKP justifies its actions with some rather indistinct arguments such as the need to protect "public security" or respect "public sensitivities". When Istanbul's governor banned the city's Pride march in 2015, which had often been championed as the world's biggest Pride march in a predominantly Muslim country, he claimed to be doing so to prevent public sensitivities being disturbed during the holy month of Ramadan. The rise of authoritarianism gained further momentum after 15 July 2016, when the Turkish military once again tried to take over the government. Directly after the coup attempt, the government declared a state of emergency that led to the closure of schools and media outlets, the detention of thousands of individuals, and increased censorship. Following the coup attempt, queer cultural events were banned in Ankara in 2017 and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan referred to LGBTI+ identities as a "cursed perversion" when he expressed his support for the ban of Istanbul's Pride march in 2020.

According to Koray Çalışkan (2018), Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has implemented an authoritarian regime in several steps. At first, the government decided to freeze the EU negotiations to limit the country's openness to pro-democratic influence. Furthermore, it introduced juridical reforms, which made it difficult for courts to make decisions independently (Çalışkan, 2018, p. 7). Evren Savcı (2021) calls the current sociopolitical climate in Turkey "neoliberal Islam", which combines aspects of

discourses on progress, modernism and globalism with cultural, traditional and religious values. Turkey's neoliberal Islam also made it possible to create a divided public, in which sexual rights as well as LGBTI+ people were discussed in relation to the rights of Muslim women with headscarves (until 2013, women with headscarves were not allowed to become public servants). As Savcı demonstrates, Islam and capitalism merge with one another in the contemporary Turkish public space, creating new forms of violence but also opening up new and unexpected methods of resistance and activism. Social media is one of the important, yet ambivalent, new tools for queer resistance in Turkey.

ONLINE ACTIVISM

The emergence of the internet, particularly the increasing importance of social media platforms for everyday communication, was initially seen as a positive development for marginalised communities. In its early days, the internet was thought to be a utopian place that would, unlike offline public spaces, allow gender and sexual minorities dispersed in different places to connect with each other much more easily and quickly, access information that was socially hidden from them and empower themselves without the fear of harassment or punishment. Some scholars, such as Rohit K. Dasgupta, argue that the emergence of queer digital media activism and culture should be understood as an outcome of an urge to create safer spaces for LGBTI+ people (Dasgupta, 2012, p. 116). And yet, digital space does not necessarily function as a replacement for the offline physical space, but more as an extension of it, where always an interaction with the physical space occurs (Dasgupta, 2012, p. 118).

Interactions between digital and offline queer spaces can be traced in Turkey's LGBTI+ movement as well. Serkan Görkemli, one of the first scholars working on the meaning of the internet for LGBTI+ activists in Turkey, argues that it enabled new possibilities for LGBTI+ activists, such as allowing Kaos GL—which was founded in 1994 in Ankara and mobilised students around reading and discussion groups, a print magazine and LGBTI+ film screenings on campuses—to connect with LGBTI+ people outside Ankara. Legato, on the other hand, which was founded in the early 2000s as a queer university initiative, used the internet as an integral part of its activism. The internet helped Legato to become a nationwide initiative, which used this new media to recruit new activists for the movement as well as to encourage LGBTI+ students to come

out (Görkemli, 2012, p. 74). Nonetheless, in their campaigns such as “coming out of internet”, Legato activists were putting forward a certain Western idea of sexual orientation that was lived not in secrecy but out in the public.

While activism in public spaces has become increasingly difficult after the Gezi protests, activists have started using social media as a new tool for mobilising, networking and empowerment. Some scholars have defined the transformation of street-based activism into digital spaces as a dispersal from public to digital (Cabadağ & Ediger, 2020). Existing studies demonstrate that there is a feeling of shrinking possibilities (Altay, 2022, p. 67), as well as a shift from offline to online spaces (Caliskan, 2021), expressed among queer activists.

Particularly since the ban on the Istanbul Pride March, LGBTI+ activists in Turkey have increasingly used social media to shift attention to the current oppression of LGBTI+ rights. Often, activists reappropriate their oppression in their digitally coordinated form of resistance. An early example of such campaigns was mobilised around the hashtag #wedisperse. When Istanbul’s governor banned the city’s Pride march in 2016, the decision of queer activists not to simply give up but to shift the event’s location opened new possible contexts and creative approaches to activism that had not previously existed. They appropriated and subverted the “Disperse!” command shouted by police before launching attacks on the demonstrators. The digitally coordinated pride parade was publicised on the day of the march via social media with the hashtag #dağılıyoruz (#wedisperse). Moreover, instead of marching together down İstiklal Street, where Pride marches had previously taken place, activists spread out into backstreets and different neighbourhoods, reading their press releases in places that the Pride march had never reached before. They also recorded their acts in videos and pictures, and simultaneously posted them on social media platforms (Bayramoğlu, 2021).

Onur Kilic’s digital ethnographic study observes how LGBTI+ activists turned to Twitter (now X) when the Istanbul Pride March was once again banned in 2019 (Kilic, 2023). Under the hashtag campaign #HerYuruyumuzOnurYuruyusu (Every Parade of Ours is a Pride Parade), activists shared pictures and narratives of their everyday walking on the streets of Istanbul. By borrowing Zeynep Tufekci’s concept of “networked public sphere” (Tufekci, 2017), Kilic argues that such digitally coordinated and publicised forms of LGBTI+ activism under Turkey’s current authoritarianism reconfigures the spatiality of activism. LGBTI+

activists uploaded their pictures and videos of walking in the streets of different cities and towns. Through the networked activism campaign, the banality of everyday walking turned into a powerful political statement against the ban on Pride March events in Turkey (Kilic, 2023, p. 739). This is an interesting case of activism as it entangles public spaces with digital space. Kilic observes that activists increasingly use Twitter instead of Facebook and Instagram, as it allows them to connect with a wider public through hashtags. By exploiting Twitter's architecture that allows hashtags to interlink with videos, images and short texts, the campaign was very successful, becoming a trending topic in the Turkish-speaking internet and allowing activists to gain greater online visibility (Kilic, 2023, p. 738).

Digital media technologies offer novel solutions to come together, exchange experiences and become visible when it is becoming increasingly difficult to gather in offline physical spaces. And yet, as Tunay Altay (2022) observes, social media in Turkey is increasingly becoming dangerous for queer online visibility as well. By adopting the concept of the "pink line", Altay argues that the current Turkish government blocks, censors and penalises LGBTI+ visibility in the digital public as a means of drawing a line between Turkishness and Westernness, in which LGBTI+ rights are considered to be alien (Altay, 2022, p. 63). What must be noted here is that the construction of queerness, as well as sexual and gendered "difference", as alien to Turkish values is by no means a form of oppression unique to the current Turkish politics and mediasphere (Arpacı, 2014; Yılmaz, 2017). The current Turkish state builds on the long history of drawing boundaries between supposedly Western values on sexuality and Turkish mores. For instance, the decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention in 2021 was justified with similar arguments, as the convention did not reflect so-called Turkish values on gender and family and supposedly promoted LGBTI+ rights. In such a hostile climate against LGBTI+ rights, online activists are becoming careful and implementing self-censorship, such as avoiding big social media platforms and using encrypted messaging apps to escape state surveillance (Oz et al., 2023).

NIGHTLIFE AS A NEW FRONTIER

Clubs and bars have also gained a new meaning in being the last resorts for queers in Turkey. Scholars working on queer nightlife have often addressed the dance floor as a space in which music, dance movements, performances and bodies are entangled with the impacts of politics. For example, Kemi Adeyemi's (2022) ethnography on Black queer parties in Chicago demonstrates how the dance floor promises a refuge for those who experience intersectional inequalities in everyday life and are subject to necrocapital oppression, state homophobia and transphobia. The dance floor, as a space where queers mutually listen to music and dance together, can function as a space for alternative politics when coming together outside the clubs becomes increasingly difficult and dangerous. When the possibility of queer social life narrows down, dance floors might also turn into places where queerness is not only experienced but also learned. Dance floors are effective; listening to music, dancing to favourite songs and looking at each other can trigger positive emotions. Adeyemi's ethnography shows, however, how the positive nightlife feelings are always fragile and short-lived, as the dance floor has always the possibility to cause negative feelings. What is happening outside the club often threatens the positive emotions in the club. State homophobia and transphobia, authoritarianism, racism and neoliberal corporate greed can quickly ruin the feeling of being in a refuge on the dancefloor. Adeyemi's ethnographic observation of Black queer women's experience on the dance floor resonates well with what is currently happening in Turkey's nightlife. Particularly since the increasing repression of LGBTI+ rights following the Gezi protests, nightlife has turned into one of the last spaces in which queers can come together. Nevertheless, Turkey's clubs and queer parties are not immune to the multiple challenges caused by authoritarianism, neoliberalism, commercial pressure, the impacts of pandemic and the increasing cost of living.

There is a slowly growing scholarship on queer nightlife in Turkey, particularly in Istanbul, which tries to grasp its entangled challenges. Within this context, Ilgaz Yalcinoglu (2020) not only explores the impacts of state repression and pandemic regulations on the queer nightlife, but also distinguishes the new queer nightlife of Istanbul from gay clubs that have been part of the city's nightlife since the 1990s. According to Yalcinoglu, the queer nightlife appealed mostly to cis gay men before the Gezi protests. Put in other words, the nightlife was not necessarily queer,

but shaped merely by corporate and commercial interests. After the Gezi protests, well-known trans and queer activists such as Seval Kilic, Üzüm Derin Sokak and Jilet Sebahat reshaped nightlife as a context to resist against heteropatriarchy and commercial oppression. As Yalcinoglu's interviews demonstrate, they all had their first experience in organising events and playing music for crowds within the context of activism—particularly at Lambdaistanbul's events. Therefore, unlike the commercial gay clubs before the Gezi protests, these activists had a different perspective on nightlife, which they saw as a way of creating safe spaces for marginalised communities in difficult times.

Jilet Sebahat and Üzüm Derin Solak often use their popularity within nightlife to shift public attention to LGBTI+ rights on digital platforms. For instance, in an interview with T24's YouTube Channel *Ayrik Otu*,¹ Jilet Sebahat critically describes the situation of the queer nightlife after the Gezi protests as a feeling of narrowing down the queer social life into a couple of small clubs. They argue that the queer nightlife in Istanbul has become political and transformed into a way of resisting the everyday reality of living in an authoritarian regime because of reduced spaces and possibilities for queer politics and social life. Similarly, Üzüm Derin Solak² points to the difficulties of merging politics and entertainment business in precarious times and distinguishes herself as an event organiser who brings together these two sometimes incompatible areas.

Although the recent discussions on nightlife underline the importance of queer clubs and parties as last resorts for queer social encounters, it is important not to forget the historical continuities. Turkey's nightlife has always been a context in which queerness could unfold despite state repression and the general public's homophobia and transphobia. Even before the emergence of a politicised LGBTI+ movement, late-night music clubs (*gazinos*) were the place in which the visibility of queerness was part of the public life—and even celebrated. Turkey's three most important queer figures—Zeki Muren, Bulent Ersoy and Huysuz Virjin—were all cultural products of *gazinos*. Eser Selen (2012) notes how the stages of *gazinos* operated as crucial spaces for negotiations of queerness. Despite the militarist Islamist nation-state's attempts to erase queerness from public life, Zeki Muren, Bulent Ersoy and Huysuz Virjin

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Ais38irmVk&t=159s>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWUkVx4R3Xg&t=399s>

have managed to perform queerness on the stage in a way that has been celebrated and respected by the public. Nevertheless, as Selen argues, the performance of queerness in nightlife and later on Turkish TV was tolerated as long as the performers and singers did not openly talk about it. Put in other words, they have sacrificed the possibility of openly talking about their queerness over performing queerness on stage. They denied association with queerness and, even in the case of Bulent Ersoy, they have publicly denied association with trans identity. And yet although they were not openly calling themselves queers, they were openly performing queerness on the stage. On the stage, in nightlife, queerness was managed and communicated with a wider audience, whereas in the streets it was suppressed and made invisible.

One might also argue that *gazinos* were not necessarily designed to be spaces for queer audiences. Although queer and trans performers and singers were always part of *gazino* culture, its audiences were assumed to be heterosexual. This changed particularly in the early 2000s with the emergence of the first queer organisations and the club and bar owners' discovery of queers as potential clients. Unlike the performers of *gazinos*, today's performers, DJs and singers use the stage not only to perform queerness but also to express their anger towards Turkey's politics. The drag queen performances of Akış, for instance, contain vomiting, performances of self-harm and "ugliness", acts that are difficult to detach from Turkey's current political climate shaped by right-wing politics, nationalism, racism (see K r kmez's chapter in this book), wars and the repression of LGBTI+ rights. As part of my current research on queer media practices of belonging, I have interviewed Akış. When I asked them why they decided to perform on the stage, they said that they see performance not necessarily as entertainment, but as storytelling. But they did not enjoy telling their stories in a conventional drag queen act:

Then I realised I wasn't into entertainment either. I'm doing it, I'm really good at it, but I'm not into it. At some point, I was doing lip sync shows, but I still wasn't lip syncing. I was doing weird stuff. I was a little more like a monster. I have a monstrous side in me, and I love it. I don't like living the norm.

This is a parable that could be read at many levels and from many points of view. It also shows the breaking point from the long historical continuity of Turkey's queer performers and nightlife starting from

the *gazzino* era. Unlike performers who please the crowds by doing the predictable, Akış veered away from expectations in order to question every norm that is entangled with nightlife. Unlike performers of *gazzino*s who became mute about their queerness to please the crowds, Akış not only questions social norms but also norms within queer nightlife. They see the drag queen/queer performance not only as entertainment, but as a way of speaking, telling stories and talking about politics.

CONCLUSION

The queer struggle in Turkey's more than 100 years of history has been characterised by steps and turning points that do not always lead to better times. As I have summarised in this chapter, events such as the military coup of 1980 and the increasing authoritarianism after the Gezi protests have led to restrictions of queer rights, spaces and visibilities. Yet these events have also opened the way for new and creative strategies of queer resistance. In this chapter, I have focused on digital media and nightlife as two areas in which Turkey's queer struggle creates new forms of political resistance against the sociopolitical climate. While digital technologies allow queers, to a certain degree, to escape the Turkish state's attempt to erase queer visibility from the mediasphere, queer clubs and bars have emerged as the last safer spaces for encounters and political expressions in public. I have also discussed the ambivalences and fragilities of these new frontiers. While Turkish state surveillance is increasingly using social media platforms to oppress queers, clubs and bars are not detached from the impacts of larger circumstances such as the cost of living and the government's attempts to regulate nightlife.

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What Does It Mean to Win? Revisiting Environmental Movements in Turkey

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental conflicts emerge across scales in configurations transcending temporal and spatial boundaries in search of new materials and energy sources to fuel growth-dependent economies. The increased visibility and politicisation of socio-environmental debates today also place the focus on the winners and losers in these conflicts. Turkey, with its expanding societal metabolism in its centennial, is a hotbed of contestation in such conflicts (Şorman & Turhan, 2023). Despite the already existing tensions over the rollout of developmentalism much earlier, the two decades under Erdoğan's rule have led to both the emergence and transformation of place-based environmental movements against the state-facilitated energy boom and mining rush. While the environmental movements in Turkey spent much of this period opposing hydropower, mines, and breakneck-speed urban transformation, today there appears to be an increased frequency of environmental conflicts across the country in a time when the legal checks and balances on its non-human environment are being dismantled more than ever. Then for the scholars of environmental movements, the question becomes: What does it mean to win? In an attempt to reflect on this question, our aim here is to examine the changing nature of environmental conflicts in parallel with the transforming political landscape of Turkey. We argue that the recent rise in both fossil fuel and renewable infrastructure conflicts was all but unexpected. In a time when oppositional politics is largely constrained, our findings also hint at the emergence of antagonistic and intersectional environmental politics as an avenue of manifesting broader societal dissent.

Mirroring a global trend, the past three decades in Turkey have witnessed a surge in environmental conflicts concerning the unequal distribution of the risks of dangerous and toxic waste and the use of environmental resources. This escalation has coincided with the country's embrace of aggressive neoliberal economic policies and its re-positioning within the larger world system (see Akbulut's chapter in this book). Prioritising rapid urbanisation (see Arslanalp's chapter in this book) and industrialisation over environmental protection, public opposition to these policies manifested itself through numerous environmental mobilisations. Communities across Turkey have taken a stand against mines (Özen & Özen, 2011), dams (Akbulut et al., 2018), thermal and nuclear

power plants (Aydın, 2019), waste disposal practices (Tuçaltan, 2019), and food and agriculture policies (Kavak, 2024; Medeiros Ribeiro, 2023).

Several of these movements have garnered national and at times international attention. The Bergama movement in the 1990s, for instance, fiercely resisted a gold mining project that threatened not only the environment but also the region's cultural heritage (Özen, 2009). Similarly, the Gerze movement in the 2000s rallied against the construction of a coal-fired power plant, highlighting growing concerns about air pollution and its impact on public health (Arsel et al., 2015). Struggles against Ilisu Dam that submerged the 12,000-year-old history of Hasankeyf (Dissard, 2021) and the 3rd bridge in Istanbul (Paker, 2019) are among other internationally well-known cases of environmental movements from the country. These are just a few prominent examples; countless local communities throughout Turkey are engaged in similar struggles. Their fight encompasses a broad spectrum of issues, including dam construction and energy projects planned for protected areas, the bypassing of mandatory environmental impact assessment (EIA) reports for large-scale projects, and the weakening of legal safeguards surrounding agricultural lands, forests, and coastal regions (Aydın, 2019; Özkaynak et al., 2015).

This chapter does not aim to be an exhaustive historical record of every environmental movement in Turkey. Instead, our focus is on dissecting the victories and setbacks experienced by some of these movements, analysing them within the context of Turkey's ongoing political, social, and economic transformation. While some movements, like those in Gerze and Gezi Park, achieved tangible successes in halting or altering environmentally destructive projects, others, like those in Akkuyu and Hasankeyf, appear to have fallen short of their immediate goals. However, we argue that even seemingly unsuccessful movements can contribute significantly to a broader societal transformation. The opposite also holds true; some seemingly successful movements also end up serving and reproducing the status quo and, therefore, stand in the way of deeper transformations.¹ Through raising awareness, fostering public discourse

¹ Despite the numerous environmental campaigns implemented in Turkey over the years, including tree planting, maintaining cleanliness, and promoting energy-efficient light bulbs, which have successfully engaged a broad audience and raised environmental awareness in society, these efforts have inadvertently postponed a more comprehensive systemic transformation by confining activism to the individual/behavioural level and prioritizing technical solutions.

on environmental issues, and challenging the status quo, environmental movements can lay the groundwork for future successes, even if their initial objectives are not fully met. By revisiting some of these movements, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between environmental activism, public policy, and the evolving political landscape in Turkey.

In the remainder of the chapter, we will briefly explore the progression of environmental activism in Turkey by examining three distinct movements that have played crucial roles in shaping the country's environmental movement landscape. We will begin by exploring the anti-nuclear movement, a pioneering force that emerged as one of the first large-scale environmental movements in Turkey. We will trace its historical trajectory, highlighting its significance in laying the groundwork for subsequent environmental activism. Next, we will shift our focus to the water rights and anti-hydropower movements, which we contend have been instrumental in transforming environmental activism into a rights-based struggle in Turkey. Finally, we will turn our attention to the anti-fossil fuel movement, which we argue represents the broadest and most interconnected environmental movement in Turkey today, given its ability to mobilise across different scales, and its potential to drive a transition towards a more sustainable and equitable energy future for the country. Our hope here is to illuminate the challenges and opportunities faced by environmental movements not only in Turkey but also in other countries grappling with similar issues of development and environmental protection.

A STEPPING STONE: ANTI-NUCLEAR MOVEMENT IN TURKEY

Despite being one of the world's oldest, Turkey's nuclear programme has notably been unsuccessful (Jewell & Ates, 2015; Şahin, 2011). Since the 1960s, successive governments have aspired to build nuclear power plants but faced persistent obstacles: financial limitations, insufficient administrative, or technical capabilities, and perhaps most importantly, strong civil society opposition with local roots and global reach (Aydın, 2020). However, as we move past the centennial of the republic, Turkey seems to be finally getting the nuclear power plant it has been dreaming of for a long time. Akkuyu nuclear power plant, located in a contested,

earthquake-prone location in southern Turkey, is already under construction by subcontractors of Rosatom thanks to an intergovernmental agreement signed with Russia (see Sağlam's chapter in this book). At first glance, the decades-long civil opposition seems to have failed, but taking a closer look at the history of the movement, we argue that the anti-nuclear movement in Turkey remains one of the most successful environmental movements in the country, and maybe in the world.

Consecutive Turkish governments have been promoting the construction of a nuclear power plant since the late 1960s, mostly basing their arguments on the necessity of nuclear power for the country's economic development, particularly in terms of energy independence and technological advancement (Aydın, 2020). Consequently, in the early 1970s, a little cove on the eastern Mediterranean coast, Akkuyu, was chosen as the site for the first nuclear power plant in the country. However, this initial attempt elicited an immediate response from civil society, citing controversies surrounding the risks of nuclear accidents, waste management, and the effects on the environment and health, linked to issues of ecological complexity, uncertainty, and irreversibility. Even before the Chernobyl and Three Miles Island catastrophes, the seeds of the anti-nuclear movement in Turkey were already sown.²

Turkey attempted to resurrect the Akkuyu project on numerous occasions following the initial failure. The most outspoken and extensive mobilisation of the opposition civil society was initiated against the revival of the plans in the early 1990s. The Turkish Green Party organised a popular demonstration in Silifke, Mersin (Şahin, 2011). In 1993, a nationwide movement gained momentum, and over one hundred civil society organisations, including unions, political parties, independent activists and individuals, professional organisations, and environmental NGOs, united to form a comprehensive coalition that was subsequently referred to as the "Anti-Nuclear Platform"³ (Şahin, 2011). The platform became the national anti-nuclear movement's flagship for the following

² The first-ever awareness-raising campaign against nuclear plants was initiated by Arslan Eyce, the chairman of the local fishing cooperative, and his two journalist friends, Ömer Sami Coşar and Örsan Öymen. They informed the fishermen in the region about the potential risks and dangers this plant posed, drawing inspiration from the anti-nuclear movements in France (Künar, 2002). Consequently, they were able to attract the attention of both local and national civil society by holding conferences and gatherings, as well as by communicating their opinions through newspapers and posters.

³ "Nükleer Karşıtı Platform" or NKP.

decades, organising several successful protests, rallies, direct actions, conferences, publications, and festivals to maintain public awareness and forge a robust opposition (Künar, 2002; Şahin, 2011).

The Anti-Nuclear Platform played an important role not only with its street activism but also with its lobbying activities at the parliamentary level and the lawsuits it filed against the regulations, tenders, and EIAs conducted for the construction of nuclear power plants. For instance, the platform convinced the Turkish government, led by then-Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, to cancel the project for good against the backdrop of a financial meltdown in 2000. After this achievement, the platform temporarily dissolved itself until it had to reorganise after the Erdoğan government revitalised the plans for nuclear power in 2005 (Aydın, 2020). The anti-nuclear movement, through court cases and parliamentary action, caused such significant legal trouble that the Turkish government finally had to resort to a bilateral international agreement with Russia, thereby bypassing its own environmental legislation. While the agreement itself is immune to legal action, the movement still succeeded in delaying the construction of the project by taking the EIA report to court (Aydın, 2020). As of writing, the Akkuyu nuclear power plant is still under construction, with the first unit expected to become online on the 100+1st anniversary of the republic (TRT, 2024).

Even though the Akkuyu nuclear power plant is about to start operating, it would not be correct to say that the anti-nuclear movement has failed in its struggle. Especially considering the authoritarian-neoliberal transformation that the country has experienced in the last 20 years and the consolidation of political power in the AKP government, even the decades-long delay of the power plant has been an important gain for the environmental movements in Turkey. Yet a counterpoint here is the absence of such mobilisations against the announced nuclear power plants in Sinop and İğneada (Niphi & Ramana, 2023).⁴ While not succeeding in annulling the plans, the Anti-Nuclear Platform served as the stepping stone for many other environmental movements and sowed the first seeds of the anti-fossil fuel movement and the national climate movement in Turkey—many of the constituents forming the NKP later became important actors in energy justice movements, carrying the knowledge and

⁴ While NKP is categorically against all nuclear power plant projects in Turkey, the main focus mostly remained on Akkuyu, while Sinop and İğneada projects, both still important, remained rather in the background.

experiences in political and legal actions. Hence, the significant international reach, the cross-scalar nature, and the highly political character of the anti-nuclear movement in Turkey undoubtedly paved the path for future coordinated mobilisations over how energy needs to be framed, produced, and controlled.

DEFENDING LIFE: STRUGGLES OVER THE RIGHT TO WATER

Turkey has been largely reliant on hydroelectricity since the 1950s, when the public infrastructure agency, State Hydraulic Works, began constructing dams with substantial reservoirs to promote the nation's technical and economic advancement. The role of water and hydropower in the country's developmentalism practice and discourse is probably most evident in the Southeastern Anatolian Project (*Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi*, GAP in its Turkish acronym), which aimed to build dozens of dams for the purposes of irrigation and hydroelectricity production on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Bilgen, 2019; Çarkoğlu & Eder, 2005; Harris, 2009).⁵ While GAP has been rigorously studied for its role in the country's developmentalist ambitions and the contestations of large-scale infrastructure, the past two decades have also seen the rise of environmental contestation against run-of-river hydropower plants.

Emerging in the 2000s after the liberalisation of the energy sector, the gold rush to run-of-river hydropower generation in Turkey found its first and most fierce opponents on the Black Sea coast (Erensü, 2015; İslar, 2012). One of the earliest examples of local anti-hydropower resistance was in the late 1990s, against a series of planned small run-of-river type hydropower projects (HPPs) in the Fırtına Valley in the Eastern Black Sea region. Local protests against HPPs expanded around the nation from the mid-2000s (Aksu et al., 2016). Some emblematic resistance, such as Yuvarlakçay (Western Anatolia), Munzur (Eastern Anatolia), and Hasankeyf (Southeastern Anatolia), precipitated the contemporary form

⁵ Bilgen (2019) argues that one of the main aims of the GAP was to enhance the quality of life of the Kurdish people in the region through economic means. As such, the Kurdish population would eventually acknowledge the legitimacy of the state and separatist attempts would cease to exist. This highlights the significance that hydropower is assigned in the country's political discourse in solving ethnic, economic and social problems.

of the ecologist movement in Turkey. This led to the formation of nationwide coalitions such as the Fraternity of the Rivers Platform.⁶ Erensi (2013) also points out that the Gezi Park protests in 2013 might be interpreted as the culmination of a decade of environmental unrest, particularly around those HPPs (Özkaynak et al., 2015). As a result, the anti-hydropower movement served as a model for grassroots environmental opposition and became an inspiration for other urban–rural place-based mobilisations while simultaneously shaping the repertoires of contention of contemporary environmentalism in Turkey.

Despite the massive build-up of hydropower capacity in different parts of Turkey, which seems to be reaching its saturation point today, it would be a mistake to consider the anti-hydropower struggles as a lost cause. At least two aspects require attention here. First, there has been a remarkable contribution of the anti-HPP movement in struggles for the right to water by catapulting the role of women in leadership positions. It is not an exaggeration to say that gendered notions of environmental resistance appeared to be much more prominent and visible thanks to the anti-hydropower movement in the country (Yaka, 2017, 2019). Second, urban–rural connections, in part due to the involvement of middle-class urbanites, ethnic belongings, and place attachment, have played a considerable role in putting these struggles on the political agenda. Despite the evergreen urban–rural divide in environmental justice struggles (Sayan, 2017), a multitude of actors with cross-class alliances in both urban and rural spaces fighting against the water grabs and claiming for right to water have successfully bridged the political agendas over grassroots environmentalism (Kavak, 2021, 2024). As such, it would be a mistake to call the hydropower movement’s strength in catapulting place-based environmental mobilisations to the national political agenda anything less than a win.

⁶ In Turkish, “Derelerin Kardeşliği Platformu” (DEKAP), and also translated in some texts as the “Sisterhood” or “Brotherhood” of Streams/Rivers.

A GROWING ROAR: ANTI-FOSSIL FUEL MOVEMENTS IN TURKEY

The trajectory of anti-fossil fuel activism in Turkey stretches back decades, revealing a rich tapestry of resistance woven with threads of environmental consciousness and social justice. The first stirrings of this movement emerged in the 1980s and 1990s when local communities began to grapple with the adverse impacts of coal-fired power plants. The country witnessed emblematic demonstrations against coal-fired power plants in Yatağan, Gökova, and Aliğa in the Western Aegean region (Orhan, 2019). In these formative years, anti-fossil fuel protests were often single-issue movements, and often arose in response to specific projects and their immediate consequences, highlighting mostly the detrimental effects of air pollution, water contamination, and forest cover loss. While some of these initial resistance movements managed to temporarily or permanently stop the fossil infrastructure projects (as in the case of Aliğa, see Turhan et al., 2019), others failed to prevent the materialisation of the fossil infrastructures that are still plaguing the country with their environmental impacts (as we recently witnessed in the destruction of Akbelen forests; Reuters, 2023). Despite their fragmented and single-purpose natures, these early-generation environmental protests represent the foundational roots of an anti-fossil fuel movement that would blossom into the powerful force we witness today. They did so by acting as laboratories for developing key tactics and strategies, generating knowledge and expertise, and helping the building of various networks and alliances through which diverse groups of people could come together.

The historical transformation of the anti-fossil fuel movement is closely associated with the discourses and politics of energy transformation in the country. Two main discourses were heavily used to justify the local (and also global) costs of fossil infrastructures: the “modernisation” discourse, in which increased energy consumption is perceived as a prerequisite for the country’s economic development, and the “need” discourse, where population growth was used as the main excuse for the expansion of such infrastructures in a rather quick and dirty manner, with urgent expropriation decisions, expedited licensing procedures, and exemptions from EIAs (Özkaynak et al., 2020). The majority of energy projects and policies in Turkey were and still are substantiated by grandiose nationalistic narratives that are closely tied to the nation’s destiny. In the meantime, protesters and civil society organisations frequently encounter

state violence and intimidation and are frequently marginalised by being labelled as terrorists.

Global climate summits in Copenhagen (COP15) and Paris (COP21) proved to be significant milestones for Turkey's anti-fossil fuel movements, as Baykan (2019) argues, leading to a frameshift from issues of local/national significance to matters of global significance. Simultaneously, further consolidation of the anti-fossil fuel movement in the country occurred against the backdrop of the Erdoğan government's push to maximise energy production from domestic lignite and imported anthracite. By the mid-2010s, Turkey announced around 80 coal-fired thermal power plants to be in the pipeline, leading to serious local unrest. Although many of these investments eventually faltered due to financial shortcomings, local opposition movements across the country caused significant concern for investors and the government alike. Fuelled by concerns over environmental degradation, health risks, and, perhaps more importantly, climate change, the anti-fossil movement has gained momentum through various key moments and actions, where we witnessed other emblematic struggles in Gerze (Arsel et al., 2015), Yırca (Turhan, 2015), and more recently in Akbelen (Ikizkoy Environmental Committee, 2023). Merging with the climate change and climate justice agenda linked these initially local resistances to international networks and also led to the creation of many national platforms such as *İklim Ağı* (Climate Network), *Fossil Yakıt Karşısı İnisiyatif* (Anti-Fossil Fuel Initiative), and *İklim Adaleti Koalisyonu* (Climate Justice Coalition).

In subsequent years, campaigns against coal capacity expansion intensified as activists targeted prospective coal-fired power plants as well as existing facilities, supporting local street protests with high-profile lobbying campaigns, petitions, and court cases, amplifying the anti-coal sentiment nationwide. While the organisational support from national and international networks and civil society was critical, it was the grassroots mobilisation that played a pivotal role in the anti-fossil fuel movement with communities organising protests, blockades, and direct actions against coal infrastructure. From villages threatened by coal mining to urban neighbourhoods plagued by pollution, affected residents joined forces with national and international activist circles, and more importantly with pro-bono lawyer networks such as Lawyers of Environmental and Ecologist Movements (ÇEHAV) to defend their rights and environment. Environmental activists pursued legal avenues to challenge fossil fuel projects and hold government agencies and corporations accountable.

Despite an uneven sum of defeats and victories, the anti-fossil fuel movement in the country has successfully managed to build strong links and ties with regional and global environmental justice movements, thereby catapulting their local woes to the global audience. These achievements followed in the footsteps of the earlier environmental movements in the country against mega-dams (as in the case of the Southeastern Anatolia Project), which still maintain their legacy within the global environmental justice movements. As such, the anti-fossil fuel movement in Turkey can be counted among the most prominent examples of social movements building bridges across local, national, and global scales. The future of Turkey's energy landscape hinges on the ongoing struggle between proponents of fossil fuels and those advocating for a cleaner, more sustainable future. The anti-fossil fuel movement's future success will depend on its ability to navigate these challenges and build a more robust and unified force for change.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we go back to our evergreen question: What does it mean to win for the environmental movements after the centennial of the Republic of Turkey? The answer to this question is neither straightforward nor static. The tactics and strategies deployed by environmental movements in Turkey range from grassroots activism on the streets to engagement within parliamentary politics and legal battles in courtrooms, creating a wide palette of impacts, albeit not always long-lasting. Societal recognition of environmental issues as legitimate political concerns requiring legal and policy solutions, however, has strengthened its standing in national politics in the past decades. While immediate causes may have been lost at times, the overall impact of these movements has been profound. If not providing a societal transformation in and of themselves, these environmental movements succeeded in emphasising the need for transformation in societal values and imaginaries towards a focus on "defending life", away from the traditional emphasis on development and modernisation of the national. Arguably, this shift is becoming more and more evident in the broader public discourse and the increasing integration of environmental concerns into policy discussion. Environmental concerns, once relegated to the fringes of political debate, are now being more and more

mainstreamed into oppositional politics, demonstrating the growing influence of environmental movements and the broader acceptance of their concerns as legitimate political issues.

The convergence of mass popular mobilisation, confrontational legal struggles, and parliamentary support frequently resulted in the earlier generation of environmental conflicts being resolved (or, at the very least, escalating the local issues to the national stage). However, the environmental opposition's options have been significantly constrained by the progressive loss of political effectiveness of the parliament, the increased erosion of the rule of law, and the rapid criminalisation of street mobilisations. This continues to be an important political conflict in Turkey as Erdoğan's authoritarian rule almost completed its capture of the entire state apparatus. At this junction, environmental movements in Turkey must be both propositional and oppositional to confront an authoritarian-neoliberal state that is unafraid of employing coercion and vilification tactics in the absence of the rule of law. One of the critical inquiries at this point is whether the political pendulum will ever return to democratic principles rooted in the rule of law following the inevitable disintegration of the current regime. And if so, what will be the environmental movement's involvement in this transition? We argue that local agency has and will continue to exert influence over the national policies. Ultimately, it is this agency that will determine the kind of afterlives that environmental movements may experience following their successes and failures in pursuit of political opportunities for sustainable and equitable societal futures.

Looking ahead, the environmental movements in Turkey face even bigger challenges after the centennial of the republic with the loss of the rule of law and executive aggrandisement. One of the most important successes of environmental movements in Turkey can be viewed as a form of decolonisation of the societal imaginary, by challenging established ways of thinking that prioritise the exploitation of nature and human dominance over the environment. During the latter half of the past century, the environmental movements in Turkey reached significant milestones despite facing numerous obstacles, thanks to their ability to adapt, evolve, organise against and critically engage with different avenues of political power. However, as Turkey starts navigating the complexities of its second century, the role of environmental activism remains as crucial as ever in shaping a sustainable and equitable future for all and the question of "now where?" still lingers as an important challenge.

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CHAPTER 15

Urban Politics in the Republic of Exceptions: Politics of Informal Housing in Istanbul

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“Oh, Mevlut, haven’t you learned, rights don’t matter in the city, only profits,” said Vediha, smiling. “Give it ten years and what you’ve earned will become yours by rights. Now sign. You’re getting everything you asked for, so don’t complain” (Pamuk, 2016, p. 561).

INTRODUCTION

“Exceptional” modes of government have been one of the durable characteristics of the Turkish Republic since its foundation. In its 100 years, nationwide or regional emergency rule under both civilian and military governments has periodically suspended the normal constitutional order and inflicted severe rights violations (Yılmaz, 2019; Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020a). Recent research also shows that the securitising logic of exceptions has long gone beyond “temporary derogations” to seep into the ordinary functioning of its administrative-legal order via a dispersed set of laws, decrees, regulations, and interpretive discretion (Parslow, 2016; Yılmaz, 2019). Authoritarian transformation under the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) modified and expanded such techniques (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020b; Kaliber, 2023) to the point of mutating the republic into a “dual state” (Tekin, 2022).

As important as they are, these insights into the “Schmittian” face of the republic offer only a partial understanding of how the Turkish state has made use of legal exceptions to govern its population and maintain the sociopolitical order. This chapter delves into Turkey’s long history of informal urbanisation since the late 1940s to explore the different politics of exceptions in Istanbul that have been constitutive of state-society relations. I argue that the state’s use of legal exceptions to property and zoning laws complicates the “Schmittian” modality while also reinforcing some of its core tenets. These legal exceptions in favour of “gecekondu” dwellers (urban squatters) have been pivotal in garnering popular consent for the state’s rule by transforming legal transgressions into semi or full property ownership in discretionary, fragmented, and uneven manners. Viewed through the lens of property law, the Turkish state appears flexible and accommodating, particularly to its Muslim-Turkish majority, producing a mode of power relationship defined less by

sovereign violence than precarious governmental negotiations.¹ Consequently, studying urban politics gives us an understanding of exceptions that extends beyond the suspension of laws that violate the rights of citizens (Agamben, 2005) and reveals a murkier realm of governmental interventions that distribute resources based on legally precarious strategic calculations (Chatterjee, 2004; Holland, 2017; Roy, 2009).

My contention in this chapter is that this modality of resource distribution has in many ways complemented and reproduced the republic's failure to establish a sociopolitical order based on rights-based citizenship, even when it has proven crucial for facilitating social integration and mobility. Urban politics of exception have channelled grassroots collective action into clientelistic negotiations over the fulfilment of property promises, generated legal landscapes of uneven and precarious legal statuses, and ultimately marginalised demands and visions for institutionalising social citizenship. Although the AKP's urban renewal programme initially disrupted this pattern, paving the way for grassroots mobilisation of "insurgent citizenship" (Holston, 2008) that resist renewal, its subsequent efforts to govern the surging tensions eventually reintroduced key elements from the historical modality of state-gecekondu relations, albeit in a mutated form. The chapter illustrates these arguments by drawing on my nine months-long fieldwork in Istanbul (2011–12, 2013) including field observations and semi-structured interviews with officials, experts, and residents in Başbüyük, Gülsuyu-Gülensu, and Derbent neighbourhoods.

RULE OF EXCEPTIONS DURING MASSIVE URBANISATION

Post-World War II, Turkey experienced a rapid process of capitalist urbanisation, resulting in a demographic shift from a predominantly rural society to one where over 80% of the population lived in urban areas within a span of seven decades. This massive urbanisation transformed Istanbul from a city of one million to a megacity of more than 15 million by 2023. Like many burgeoning metropolises in the global periphery, Istanbul's influx of rural migrants found housing through the informal occupation of public and, to a lesser extent, private lands in the absence

¹ A violent history of dispossession defines the state's relationship to the property rights of its non-Muslim and non-Turkish citizens.

of adequate social housing policies or affordable formal land provision (Tekeli, 2013). The phenomenon of what is colloquially known as *gecekondu*, initially observed in the 1930s in Ankara and Istanbul (Şenyapılı, 2004, p. 114), burgeoned into organised settlements by the 1940s (Tekeli, 2013, p. 156), and by 1963, approximately 660,000 people lived in Istanbul's 120,000 *gecekondu*s (Tekeli, 2013, p. 219). Their numbers swelled in the subsequent two decades under import-substituting industrialisation (Tekeli, 2013), which transformed Istanbul and its wider region into the country's primary manufacturing hub. According to one estimate in the 1980s, *gecekondu* neighbourhoods were home to around 70% of Istanbul's population (Buğra, 1998, p. 307) and their population continued to grow in the 1990s with another wave of migration spurred by the violent conflict in the Kurdish southeast (Işık & Pınarcıoğlu, 2001).

Similar to other contexts with relatively high state capacity, informal urbanisation in Turkey depended on the political exercise of forbearance (Holland, 2017) towards property and land-use violations. However, the involvement of the Turkish state in informal urbanisation has transcended mere toleration or ad hoc municipal service provision. Early on, successive governments adopted a strategy of incorporation by implementing legal exceptions, notably through "building amnesties". These amnesties, framed as one-time exemptions for existing informal settlements, partially legalised their status while sanctioning the demolition of future ones. As the latter provision was rarely enforced, successive amnesties were regularly passed to incorporate new squatter settlements. Over ten such amnesties were enacted between 1948 and 1990, frequently overlapping with election cycles (see Arslanalp, 2015, p. 71 for a list). In the meantime, the Turkish state has not carried massive slum clearance programmes like those implemented in other developing countries such as Argentina in the 1960s and 70 s, even under military rule.

Consequently, bargaining over property and construction rights have become a key aspect of electoral politics in *gecekondu* neighbourhoods, with pioneers of informal urbanisation even becoming founding members of the municipal governments in some peripheral districts (Buğra, 1998; Erder, 1996; Işık & Pınarcıoğlu, 2001). Officials in such municipalities actively promoted illegal occupations on unpermitted lands through informal networks and later formalised them using "improvement plans". Such practices extended beyond impoverished peripheries, as municipalities utilised laws originally targeting *gecekondu* dwellings to legalise

encroachments on forest lands by upscale gated communities for rent-seeking (Buğra, 1998, p. 315).

The routine use of legal exceptions had significant implications for mobilisation dynamics within gecekondu communities. They increased gecekondu dwellers' sense of tenure security, facilitated access to urban services, encouraged household investments in dwelling upgrades, and served as gateways to formal property ownership. Since the 1950s, many gecekondu residents have become legal owners of the lands they occupied, especially on public lands (Buğra, 1998; Tekeli, 2013) and even when they could not, many converted their original dwellings to multi-story buildings (Işık & Pınarcıoğlu, 2001). In the absence of large-scale immediate threats to their residential conditions, prolonged contentious episodes rarely arose in gecekondu neighbourhoods. Consequently, residents rarely formed alliances with other neighbourhoods or established connections with dissident civil society organisations to mobilise against the state or property-owning classes. This does not imply the absence of collective action. On the contrary, from early on many settlements established neighbourhood beautification and hometown associations to make claims on authorities, engage in patronage networks, as well as to protest when necessary (Erder, 1996; Şenyapılı, 2004; Tekeli, 2013). Nevertheless, insurgent politics of social rights remained underdeveloped, with collective action by squatter communities instead focusing on influencing authorities to enact and apply exceptional measures that would integrate them into the existing property regime.

During the late 1970s, there was a notable departure from the typical pattern of squatter mobilisation, as socialist revolutionaries orchestrated organised land invasions to construct collectively planned egalitarian settlements (Aslan, 2004). These neighbourhoods were exceptions to the general pattern of squatting and experienced severe state repression both before and during the military regime (1980–83). Nevertheless, they were not eradicated. Instead, they were incorporated into the general framework of informal urbanisation under the auspices of the 1980s' amnesty laws (Aslan, 2004; Dere & Kuyucu, 2023). As one former revolutionary from one such neighbourhood, Gülsuyu-Gülensu, reflecting on this transformation, lamented “nothing remained of the land invasion that aimed for a bottom-up, collectively planned neighbourhood” by

the time he got out of prison in 1987.² Yet, such neighbourhoods have continued to preserve the ideological and organisational legacy of those years, which later played important roles in the mobilisation of *gecekondu* neighbourhoods in the 2000s (Dere & Kuyucu, 2023; Gündoğan, 2019).

In essence, while exceptions defused tensions and integrated *gecekondu* dwellers, they also paved a legally precarious and territorially uneven path from encroachment to ownership. Dependence on local political discretion for implementing these measures left many *gecekondu* neighbourhoods with incomplete legal recognition and unfulfilled promises of property ownership as enduring features. By the early 2000s, residents with title allotment documents, such as those in Başibüyük in Maltepe, had awaited land titles for over two decades despite repeated electoral promises and even court rulings.³ Moreover, as they grew, *gecekondu* communities became internally stratified with respect to legal status due to amnesty-imposed cut-off dates that excluded newcomers from their provisions, the occupied subdivisions' property status (i.e. public vs private; municipal vs Treasury) or zoning status (i.e. forest zones, rural estates, Bosphorus zone), resulting in significant legal ambiguities open to abuse in their relationship with the state (Kuyucu, 2014). These legal disparities intertwined with the increasing commodification of informal housing, exacerbating internal socioeconomic inequalities (Işık & Pınarcıoğlu, 2001). As the twentieth century came to a close, five decades of exceptions, crucial as they were in giving a foothold and enabling social mobility, had resulted in an unequal landscape of state-society relationship, defined by particularism, precariousness, and inequality.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE DURING STATE-LED URBAN RENEWAL

A notable shift occurred in Istanbul's urban politics with the AKP coming into power in 2002, as there was a significant change in policy preferences regarding *gecekondu* areas that disrupted decades of populist politics of exceptions. The new ruling party embarked on an ambitious state-led

² Author interview with Ahmet, Gülsuyu-Gülensu community activist, 27 July 2012. All interviewee names are pseudonyms unless they are full names.

³ Kartal 2. Asliye Hukuk Mahkemesi (Kartal 2nd Civil Court of First Instance) case no. 1997/2 E. 1997/7K.

urban development agenda, driven by a crony capitalist state-business alliance and fuelled by international capital (Gülhan, 2022; Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010; Lovering & Türkmen, 2011; Üçoğlu, 2021). “Urban transformation” of gecekondu areas has been one key pillar of this neoliberal urbanism. The new policy framework aimed to eradicate existing settlements, redevelop cleared lands through public–private partnerships, and relocate “entitled” residents to public housing under subsidised mortgage agreements, as the government’s urban development czar Erdoğan Bayraktar (2006, pp. 198–199) outlined. In the words of then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the nascent government was “determined to remove the ‘gecekondu order’ from Turkey’s urban fabric” (Sabah, 2006).

The institutional politics behind this policy shift simultaneously employed enforcement and exceptions to facilitate the “state-led property transfer” (Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010). The new criminal code criminalised municipal tolerance of new illegal constructions, to put an end to the longstanding policy of local-level forbearance.⁴ Additionally, local governments were granted authority to execute urban transformation projects (UTPs) in gecekondu areas, while the national Mass Housing Agency (TOKİ) underwent restructuring to spearhead these interventions in an expedited and discretionary manner.⁵ These legal changes were accompanied by a stigmatising official discourse that marked gecekondu areas as illegal territories (Gündoğan, 2019;). Erasing their complex histories shaped by state practices of exceptions, UTP protocols labelled neighbourhoods like Başbüyük as “public lands under intense encroachment”,⁶ while authorities claimed that amnesty measures were nullified by the new laws.⁷ In other instances like Gülsuyu-Gülensu, new urban plans disregarded existing built environments, implying demolitions and evictions if enforced.⁸ In neighbourhoods with gecekondu over private

⁴ Law no. 5237, article n.184

⁵ Laws no. 5216, 5393, 5366, 5609, and 5783.

⁶ İstanbul Maltepe Kentsel Yenileme Projesine İlişkin Protokol, 24 February 2006.

⁷ Author interview with Ali Ergün, Director of Urban Design Department in İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality and Former Deputy Mayor of Maltepe Municipality, 29 August 2012; Author interview with Mahmut Kocameşe, lawyer, İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, 9 July 2011.

⁸ Author interview with Ali Rıza Kocabey, muhtar of Gülsuyu neighborhood, October 5, 2011.

subdivisions like Derbent, municipal authorities sought to enforce eviction decisions mandated by the courts (Şen & Ünsal, 2014).⁹

Yet amid this new discourse of law and order, the legal framework of urban transformation has largely served to carve out exceptional legal spaces outside the urban development and zoning law, where executive discretion is intended to hold absolute sway (Kahraman, 2021). These measures, according to the former chairman of the Istanbul Chamber of Urban Planners Tayfun Kahraman,¹⁰ completely “disintegrated the urban planning process”.¹¹ They also centralised it by endowing entities like TOKI and later the Ministry of Urbanism with the authority to bypass municipalities in preparing plans for urban transformation zones. In the words of one senior TOKI official, this usurpation of powers was justified since “things proceed much quicker in this way... the whole plan-making process used to take almost three years but now the municipalities have to either approve or modify in three months”.¹²

However, it is not just the normal planning process that UTPs circumvent. In renewal zones, property and housing rights face various violations through exceptional measures such as urgent expropriation. Such practices gained further legal reinforcement after the enactment of the Law on the Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk (6306) in 2012 following the Van Earthquake in 2011. This law, armed with a revitalised emergency discourse to prepare the city against the looming Istanbul Earthquake, introduced legal categories such as “risk zone”, “risky building”, and “reservoir area”. Territories under these designations are subject to an expanded set of executive prerogatives that weaken the legal protections of individuals compared to normal planning areas. The law articulates a Schmittian emergency logic with a biopolitical imperative (Güney, 2024) as the following quote from a senior official of the Ministry of Urbanism depicts:

⁹ Author interview with Remzi, community activist in Derbent, July 12, 2011.

¹⁰ As of June 2024, Kahraman is serving 18 years of imprisonment for being one of the spokesperson in the protests against the demolition of Gezi Park in 2013. Along with Can Atalay, Osman Kavala (life imprisonment), Mine Özerden and Çiğdem Mater Utku, he is sentenced for attempting to overthrow and/or obstruct the government, in spite of rulings by European Court of Human Rights.

¹¹ Author interview with Tayfun Kahraman, chairman of Istanbul Chamber of Urban Planners, 15 September 2011.

¹² Author interview with senior official at TOKI’s Istanbul office, 4 October 2011.

These laws are enacted to accelerate the process. There is no need for them if they don't serve that purpose. Property rights, housing rights, these are of course important, but is the safety of life less important? For instance, when you go to a doctor and learn that you have atherosclerosis, do you challenge the doctor who wants to do an angiography? I have never heard of such a situation. This is a similar situation. We also save lives here...¹³

In contrast to these medical metaphors of biopolitical care, however, a decade after the enactment of this law, evidence suggests that these exceptional powers have been primarily used for advancing “disaster capitalism” rather than disaster preparation (Güney, 2024). Among the 69 earthquake risk zones declared by the national executive in Istanbul, only two overlapped with the 142 zones identified as top priority by the metropolitan municipality's risk assessment. Surprisingly, no risk zones were declared in the eight high-risk districts. Instead, neighbourhoods with lower risk assessments were designated as risk zones, and luxury housing was developed on reservoir zones intended for those relocated from high-risk areas (Istanbul Planlama Ajansı, 2024, pp. 11–12).

CLAIMING RIGHTS, NEGOTIATING EXCEPTIONS

The first decade of the 2000s saw a surge in grassroots mobilisation in *gecekondu* areas in response to this drastic shift in *gecekondu* policy, which posed a direct threat to inhabitants' current and anticipated housing tenure conditions. Fearing evictions, unbearable mortgage debts and/or the indefinite loss of property ownership prospects and the community to which they belonged, *gecekondu* residents engaged in acts of insurgent urban citizenship (Holston, 2008). They founded or reactivated neighbourhood associations, held assemblies, sought professional aid, and established contact with dissident parts of urban civil and political life to engage in extra-institutional and legal acts such as organised rallies, pickets, petition drives, collective litigation, and in some cases, like Başbüyük and Derbent, even physical confrontations with authorities. While most mobilisation remained fragmented and locally confined,

¹³ Author interview with Yusuf Koç, Deputy General Manager of Urban Transformation Department in the Ministry of Urbanism and Environment, Ankara, 28 June 2013.

there nevertheless emerged some successful initiatives like Sariyer Neighbourhood Associations Platforms to unite these struggles at a broader scale.

These contentious episodes have created a space for the development of a new discourse of rights, drawing upon a mixed and sometimes contradictory set of normative foundations to justify their claims. Both in private interviews and public statements, many residents have invoked conceptions of rights stemming from long-term residency and the effort invested in achieving decent living conditions in their self-built neighbourhoods (see also Gündoğan, 2019). For instance, residents of Başbüyük echoed this sentiment when asserting:

the administration ignores the existence of the inhabitants who have been living in the neighbourhood for more than half a century...we were born in Başbüyük, we want to die in Başbüyük... we object to this project that takes away the houses, which we had built with our own labour in 30–40 years...¹⁴

Others have emphasised the complicity of the state and the legal recognitions it has granted over the years through measures such as passing amnesties, issuing title allotment documents and collecting residential taxes. Such exceptional measures, they argued, entitled them to property rights and they in fact cited them as legal grounds for their litigation against the projects.¹⁵

We do, however, also see particularly among the more activist community leaders the references to social rights frames, which in some cases even alluded to the right to the city. One such activist from Gülsuyu-Gülensu, Erdoğan Yıldız, illustrated this when he said:

if we are the citizens of this country like other citizens who serve in the military, pay their taxes, then like all other people living in the city, we have a right to benefit from the opportunities of the city. We cannot be deprived of the most basic human right like the right to shelter.¹⁶

¹⁴ Başbüyük Doğayı ve Çevreyi Koruma ve Yaşatma Derneği, Press release, 30 January 2007.

¹⁵ See for example Başbüyük neighborhood association's petition of appeal to the Danıştay 6. Daire Başkanlığı (Council of State, 6th Division).

¹⁶ Author interview with Erdoğan Yıldız, Gülsuyu-Gülensu, 31 May 2011.

Movements occasionally tried to put such more universalistic and egalitarian principles into action. For example, the Başbüyük association submitted an alternative project ordinance to Maltepe Municipality in which they demanded the free allotment of housing to all households whose monthly income was less than double the minimum wage and the inclusion of 800 tenants who lived on the project site in the project.¹⁷ In a more radical vein, Derbent residents created a participatory housing cooperative to gain collective ownership of the land.¹⁸

Despite appeals to broader conceptions of social rights, demands for individual titles and construction permits have often taken precedence in neighbourhoods facing renewal projects, as activists and experts invested in more transformative visions observed with disillusionment.¹⁹ In an urban political economy in which home ownership has been crucial for social security and upward mobility (Baslevant & Dayıoğlu, 2005), gecekondu residents were primarily concerned with the implications of these projects for their ownership prospects. A long history of exceptions precisely shaped and fostered this orientation by making full ownership over squatter lands an ambivalent yet possible outcome. To the extent that authorities showed a willingness to accommodate such demands, as Karaman (2014) underlines, incipient insurgent citizenship was often channelled into fragmented and uneven local negotiations over compensations and property values. This also partially explains why gecekondu struggles during this period ultimately remained disconnected from the struggles to protect urban commons, which reached their highest point in the 2013 Gezi Park protests. Limited political opportunities for legal reform to expand collective housing and urban rights amid centralised urban governance (Kuyucu, 2022; Tansel, 2020) and deepening auto-cratism (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020b; Tekin, 2022) reinforced this trend in the following decade.

¹⁷ See Maltepe Municipal Assembly Legal Commission Report evaluating Başbüyük Association's proposal, report no. 2008/26, September 3, 2008. I also observed similar egalitarian proposals in Gülsuyu-Gülensu community meetings.

¹⁸ Author interviews with Remzi, community activist in Derbent, 12 July 2011 and Erbay Yucak, community lawyer, 23 June 2011.

¹⁹ Author interview with Murat Cemal Yalçınan, activist academic in urban planning, 14 June 2011; Author interview with Kemal, community activist, Gülsuyu-Gülensu, 25 July 2012. Field notes in Gülsuyu-Gülensu community meeting, 10 August 2012 and 4 January 2013.

Nevertheless, resistance from *gecekondu* communities has been more impactful than commonly acknowledged. Authorities frequently failed to execute large-scale renewal projects at least partially thanks to mobilisation by communities, NGOs, and professional chambers, which used the courts effectively (Kuyucu, 2022). Yet, electoral politics have also played a significant role for *gecekondu* communities, who were able to use their voting power as a bloc to raise their concerns on the electoral agenda (Arslanalp, 2018). In the 2009 local elections in Istanbul, the AKP lost control of three municipalities (Maltepe, Kartal, and Sarıyer) with significant *gecekondu* populations to the CHP, where urban transformation was a hotly contested issue. Neighbourhood associations in Başibüyük and Gülsuyu actively opposed AKP candidates during this election and successfully elected their representatives to the municipal council. In the subsequent elections, *gecekondu* communities successfully lobbied for postponing the annulment of amnesty law 2981 and in some cases like Sarıyer pressured municipal candidates to publicly declare their commitment to their list of demands.

The AKP responded to these challenges in two seemingly contradictory yet ultimately complementary ways. First, as discussed earlier, it enacted legal changes that deepened the centralisation of urban governance and expanded executive prerogatives through exceptional measures to overcome legal-procedural hurdles (Kahraman, 2021; Kuyucu, 2022; Tansel, 2020). This authoritarian strategy also involved constitutional changes to weaken and pack the administrative courts. However, despite increasing autocratisation, the persistence of electoral competition rendered a purely coercive approach to urban renewal electorally risky, particularly as the AKP's winning margins declined after 2011 (Arslanalp, 2018). Consequently, authorities restored the practice of negotiating exceptions to incorporate urban squatters into property ownership in unequal and precarious ways. This was not merely a return to the status quo, but rather a pursuit of what one TOKI official termed an "equilibrium" in urban renewal projects, aiming to secure sufficient consent and defuse resistance.²⁰

Efforts to achieve this "equilibrium" are evident both in project implementation and policy formulation. In instances such as Gülsuyu-Gülensu,

²⁰ Author interview with senior official at TOKI's Istanbul office, 4 October 2011.

renewal plans were postponed, while in others like Başibüyük, authorities revised project terms. This included offering exceptional monetary compensations to holders of title allotment documents or eligibility for multiple apartments in the new buildings.²¹ As analysed by Kuyucu (2014), such measures exploited existing legal ambiguities in gecekondur areas, often benefiting powerful community actors and leading to movement fragmentation. For example, in Başibüyük, I encountered a resident initially opposed to the project who later supported it after revised terms, running a pro-renewal neighbourhood association from the basement of the new TOKI building to gather support for the second phase of the project while accusing those who continued to oppose with “politicising”.²² Moreover, co-opting such influential community actors also incorporates disadvantaged members through hierarchical community networks (Kadiođlu Polat, 2021). As mobilisation weakens, socially and legally vulnerable gecekondur residents may view what the administration offers as the best available option (Karaman, 2014; Kuyucu, 2014).

At a broader policy level, authorities have increasingly promoted so-called “*yerinde dönüřüm*” (in-situ transformation), suggesting that entitled residents would be property owners in newly constructed and ostensibly more valuable buildings on the site of their old homes instead of being relocated to peripheral TOKI housing projects. The in-situ transformation thus implied sharing a portion of the economic value generated through renewal with some of the existing residents. One extreme example of this approach was experimented with in the Fikirtepe renewal project initiated in 2011 under former IBB mayor Kadir Topbař (2004–17). Topbař (and later the Ministry of Urbanism after declaring the area a “risk zone” in 2013) followed a renewal strategy that aimed to incentivise direct negotiations between gecekondur owners and private contractors by granting exceptional development rights that allow the construction of high-rises. Unsurprisingly, this approach led to an extremely speculative construction process characterised by numerous deadlocks during bargaining, bankrupted contractors, and displaced residents due to unfulfilled promises, resulting in a renewal project still incomplete after 13 years

²¹ Author interview with senior official at TOKI’s Istanbul office, 4 October 2011; Author interview with Adem Kaya, chairman of Başibüyük neighborhood association, 27 May 2011.

²² Author interview with Necmi, Başibüyük resident and chairman of pro-UTP association, 18 September 2011.

(Güney, 2024; Kahraman, 2021). Nonetheless, from the administration's perspective, this approach succeeded in overcoming potential opposition to the renewal project by channelling the majority of residents into individualised negotiations over property values, enriching some while dispossessing others. Similar instances of “negotiated” renewal have also occurred in middle-class neighbourhoods, where the “disaster law” fuelled construction activity after 2012 through direct bargaining between private contractors and property owners, resulting in a significant rise in wealth for some, while displacing the pensioner, lower income, and tenant residents (Güney, 2024, p. 7). In essence, urban renewal efforts have operated through the selective inclusion/exclusion of different segments of the community, leading to disparate socioeconomic impacts.

The enactment of the so-called “building peace” (*imar barışı*) law three months prior to the 2018 presidential elections, later extended twice to coincide with the 2019 local election cycle, underscores the extent to which electoral calculations have prompted Erdoğan's AKP to revive the populist politics of exceptions, despite having maximised executive power during the two-year state of emergency. This first nationwide building amnesty law of the AKP era covered all kinds of building irregularities and illegalities. Of the 7.4 million applications that were submitted for the programme, over a quarter originated from Istanbul (Erensu, 2024, p. 213). Similar to previous amnesties, this measure granted use rights to gecekondu communities without direct ownership, instead offering a formal path to ownership. However, both use and ownership rights are contingent upon administrative action. Use rights remain valid until the initiation of an urban renewal project, while formal ownership of squatter public lands depends on the sale of titles by public authorities (Erensu, 2024, p. 225). Thus, this exceptional measure, like its predecessors, does not provide full tenure security but instead as Erensu (2024, p. 227) underlines “essentially initiate lingering negotiations over rights and value” in which authorities will continue to leverage their exceptional powers of renewal while communities resort to precarious protections and piecemeal recognitions to secure better bargains.

CONCLUSION

The tragic scale of death and destruction in the wake of the Kahramanmaraş earthquake on 6 February 2023 lay bare the exhaustion of the urbanisation model that has defined republican history. According to

official records, more than 60,000 people died and entire districts were razed to the ground in 12 provinces. The devastating consequences of the earthquake also revealed the utter failure of the AKP governments in creating earthquake-resilient cities that can protect the most basic right to life despite emergency-fuelled massive urban development for two decades. The deepening crisis of affordable housing in the metropolitan areas only amplifies the scale of this policy failure. The government, however, has only doubled down on the same path since its 2023 electoral victory by further expanding the executive's urban renewal prerogatives (İstanbul Planlama Ajansı, 2024).

Regardless of its distributive consequences, what is clear is that this very modality of state-society relations ultimately generates and reinforces a relationship that is devoid of the kind of egalitarianism, law-boundedness, and solidarity that the notion of citizenship entails. In the shadow of the atomising, fragmenting, and hierarchical dynamic revolving around the possibility of property ownership, what is lost is the possibility of forging a more egalitarian and solidaristic urban community. Yet, a subterranean tradition of socially just and egalitarian urbanism spanning from the grass-roots planning initiatives of the 1970s to the Gezi Park protests (see Erkmen's chapter in this book) still exists. During the tenure of CHP mayor Imamoglu, some of its inputs like participatory planning have been incorporated into metropolitan policies under the influence of new local technocratic cadres with backgrounds in the urban rights struggles of the 2000s. The results of the 2024 local elections provide an unprecedented opportunity to deepen and expand such policies for alternative urbanism within and beyond Istanbul. Ultimately, however, in an authoritarian context where the most vocal voices of this vision are in prison and any semblance of institutionalised local autonomy is obliterated, the struggle for urban social citizenship will be intimately tied to the broader struggle for inventing a democratic republic.

Declarations

Ethics The researcher confirms all ethical and legal requirements of the country where it has taken place. It was reviewed by the IRB and granted exemption (STU00049163).

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PART IV

Structural Problems of the Republic

Political Economy in Turkey: Between Continuity and Break

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“If this is about energy, we have already given our water for energy production. We have given up our rivers, our aorta. This is not about energy. This is about getting rid of the people here”.

“I cannot help but wonder if the actual issue is to depopulate the region as a whole. In order to use the water more freely, to extract the mines more easily (...) There is so much the state can do for people not to migrate, to keep them in their villages. But when you look at what is being done instead, one inevitably thinks they are trying to dislocate the people from the villages”.

INTRODUCTION

These words were spoken by locals in Ardanuç, an eastern township of Artvin provincial region, during interviews we were conducting as a part of our fieldwork in the region in 2012.¹ While the immediate referent of these accounts was the micro-hydro power plants that have mushroomed in the region after the energy market liberalisation of the mid-2000s, the broader dynamic they were pointing to was how the flow of extractive investments into the region was dismantling the conditions that sustained rural communities and pushing them to seek livelihoods in urban centres. This framing of the interlinked processes of environmental destruction and hydropower development as a more comprehensive—and intentional—project of “depopulation” to convert Artin into a region of raw material and energy production was repeated by local residents and environmental activists alike throughout our research.

This dynamic of dislocation-dispossession, however, was by no means limited to Artvin; it is rather one that has marked the last decades of Turkey’s political economy. In an interview on the politics of deforestation in Kurdistan, Rojhat Dilsiz and Agit Özdemir point to a similar

¹ While the initial impetus for our focus on the region was the widespread local resistance against hydropower plants (Akbulut et al., 2018), our subsequent research analysed the dislocation and transformation of labour, raw materials and energy from the region towards the Western urban centres (Akbulut et al., 2020). The fieldwork we conducted intermittently between 2012 and 2018 comprised of participant observation and 42 in-depth interviews with local residents, administrators, and environmental activists, in addition to locals who migrated to Western industrial centers.

All quotes cited are from these interviews unless otherwise noted. Many of the ideas discussed in this chapter have been developed as a part of this work and my years-long collaboration with Fikret Adaman and Murat Arsel.

process of depopulation as an inherent component of capital accumulation. Describing how depopulation through deforestation paves the way for mining operations to take hold in the region, Dilsiz and Özdemir reveal not only the prevalence of this dynamic but also its historically changing forms:

There has always been a policy of deforestation at work in Kurdistan. The geography of Kurdistan, the mountains, the forested areas are always portrayed as a disadvantage for the state (...) Forest fires were only about burning. [But] now they are not only burning, they are cutting down [the forests] and making profits out of it (...) This all emerges as a continuation of the politics of deforestation. What this politics aims at is depopulation. In the displacements of the 1990s, we'd see the following: 'drain the water, the fish would die'. Today the same strategy continues in a different guise. It is not only the guerrilla but the entirety of people seen as the enemy. While in the 90s people could not enter the forcibly depopulated villages even with special permits, mining companies can [now] go into these areas with eminent domain orders. The lands and orchards in villages have been plundered by construction vehicles. A veiled forced displacement policy is in place today. In the 90s people were displaced forcibly by security forces, but today it becomes an exigency with the destruction of the social space in which people can live with tree cutting and forest fires, when there is no living space left. Animal husbandry, for instance, cannot be practiced anymore due to the designation of special security zones and prohibitions on accessing meadows (...) The forced migration is not justified through a directly militarist discourse as it did in the 90s, but through 'I am building dams, I have to produce energy; I am running a mine, I am making an economic contribution' (*Ormansızlaştırarak insansızlaştırma*, 2023).

This chapter takes this entry point to delineate the interlinked processes of continuity and break (within the broader history of the republic) that constitute the political economy of contemporary Turkey. The first thread of continuity-break is that of developmentalism. Developmentalism has served, and continues to serve, as the primary mechanism of acquiring consent by the Turkish state's claim to rule, and in particular to displace or neutralise grievances based on the socially, economically, and ecologically disruptive impacts of the regime of accumulation operationalised within the last three decades. Yet the form and mechanisms through which developmentalism has been set in motion differ significantly in contemporary Turkey, evidenced not only by the prioritised sectoral "engines" but

also by the changing forms of the state's participation in accumulation processes, as well as its spatial organisation.

The second thread is that of dispossession, as punctuated by the above quotes' references to a policy of depopulation, which is shown to span different geographical regions and time periods. Dispossession and displacement have indeed been a historically continuous and constitutive element of Turkey's political economy. While the role of dispossession in reproducing capital accumulation has reached a particular visibility within the last two decades, the processes through which dispossession is realised and its aftermath is organised reveal significant differences.

The chapter takes up these two threads in turn. The next section describes the particularly extractive form that developmentalism takes in contemporary Turkey, emphasising its articulation with neoliberalism and authoritarianism. The section operationalises the Gramscian notion of state hegemony and national-popular outlook to reveal and explicate the persistence of developmentalism in Turkey's political-economic history. Section three, in turn, takes up dispossession, conceptualising Turkey's contemporary economic regime as one of accumulation by dispossession. After illustrating the continuity of dispossession throughout the history of the country, the section delineates how contemporary dynamics represent a break. The concluding section addresses how the threads of developmentalism and dispossession are linked within the contemporary era, and locates the Kurdish Freedom Movement's project of Democratic Economy as a paradigm-shifting alternative.

EXTRACTIVE DEVELOPMENTALISM: NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES

While the political economy of contemporary Turkey can be explicated from different entry points, it can hardly be disputed that the hallmark of this era has been the ascent of extractive sectors such as construction, energy, and mining. Underlying this unprecedented ascent was the explicit and visible role that the state assumed, particularly through realising a series of critical changes in the legal infrastructure. The restructuring and liberalisation of energy markets, which were consolidated under AKP rule, opened fields of energy investments previously inaccessible to the private sector, most notably coal and hydropower. This was coupled with the consistent relaxation of environmental legislation that could halt the development of the sector as well as the provision of a variety of

incentives such as market assurance and credit subsidies. In the case of construction, legal revisions were made to allow state expropriation of land for purposes of redevelopment and to unleash lands previously under protection into development, buttressed with direct state involvement and support through public–private partnerships.

Concomitant with this liberal turn was an authoritarian one of centralisation, top-down decision-making, and heightened use of coercion.² Most visibly through a heavy reliance on executive measures, such as governmental decrees and eminent domain, existing legislation on land governance, zoning, and environmental protection was modified, eliminated, and/or sidetracked (Tansel, 2019). Governmental decrees have been used systematically to amend land zoning provisions and designated protection statuses to allow energy, construction, and mining investments and/or to provide exemptions for particular projects. Eminent domain has become a commonplace practice under the AKP regime, with an overwhelming majority of land expropriations carried out for construction, infrastructure, or energy projects (Kaya, 2016; Toker, 2014). Such streamlining and centralisation of decision-making also served to quell social opposition by blocking existing venues of social contestation, coupled with the heightened use of force against urban and environmental movements.

If the visibility of the state’s role is the first common thread that ties the rise of these extractive sectors, the appropriation of space—land, resources, living spaces—inherent to their functioning is the second. A particularly striking manifestation of this is the proportion of land cover licensed for mining exploration and operations. According to data compiled by the Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion, for Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA), 92% of all provincial lands in Kütahya, 74% of those in Ordu, 71% of those in Arvin, and 59% of those in Muğla were under mining licences for exploration or operation as of early 2024. Concomitant to such unprecedented appropriation of space and resources has been the proliferation of urban

² Erensü and Madra (2022) argue that neoliberal reforms indeed almost always necessitate use of force and normalisation of violence inflicted upon certain populations. They discuss the radical transformation of urban and rural space under AKP rule within this context, demonstrating the interlinked processes of legal transformation, dispossession, marginalisation of working class Kurds and Alevis, and the revival of patriarchal violence.

and environmental resistances, unprecedented in scope and public visibility (Adaman et al., 2017; Aksu et al., 2016; Arsel et al., 2015). Seen in this light, the overlap of extractivism and authoritarianism is no coincidence: the rise of energy, construction, and mining relied fundamentally on the state's ability to claim and redirect land to these sectors through direct expropriations, revision of zoning designations, and privatisation of public resources, while effectively shielding itself from social opposition. In this sense, authoritarianism has been inherent to, and a prerequisite of, the contemporary political-economic regime in Turkey (see Tekin's chapter in this book).

Yet authoritarianism was not alone in this latter function of neutralising social contestation. The developmentalist appeal of extractive sectors has been integral to reproducing popular consent in the face of the extensive dynamics of dispossession and dislocation brought on by this regime. Within a context shaped historically by the power of developmentalism, the material and symbolic significance of these sectors have garnered broad-based support and legitimacy. Construction, energy, and mining projects initiated in this period have unexceptionally been cast as key contributors to economic growth and defended in terms of their employment creation, which helped pacify social contestation through the promise of an equal sharing of the benefits of growth (Akbulut et al., 2018). While the distribution of rents especially from the construction boom (i.e. material concessions in the form of direct transfers, expansion of urban consumption possibilities, as well as opportunities to appropriate urban rent) reproduced the consent of large sections of the society, monumental projects such as the third bridge and the third airport resonated closely with modernisation in the social imaginary and reinforced the image of the state as the deliverer of growth and prosperity, receiving admiration from different sections of the society (Adaman & Akbulut, 2021).

The strength of developmentalism is the first axis of continuity-rupture that constitutes Turkey's contemporary political economy. While the forms and mechanisms through which it was put to work differ historically, developmentalism has been a motif that shaped the social and political imaginary in Turkey like no other (Akbulut et al., 2020; Arsel, 2005). Seen in a Gramscian light, the strength and persistence of developmentalism can be located within the making of state hegemony in Turkey (Akbulut, 2011, 2019; Akbulut et al., 2018). Gramsci famously theorised hegemony as "consent backed by force" to emphasise the

amalgam of practices and discourses through which states seek to elicit the active consent of the ruled. The constitution and reproduction of a national-popular outlook play a crucial role within this context (Gramsci, 1971). Through such a construct, it becomes possible for the state to appear as a neutral institution that represents the collective interest of the society and thus justify its claim to rule. The illusion of a collective interest also cements unity (albeit always temporary and incomplete) among different social forces and masks fragmentations within the social sphere, reinforcing the image of the state as an impartial actor.

From this perspective, Turkey's political-economic history can be read as an ongoing rearticulation of a hegemonic project within which economic development has been operationalised as the collective interest. The history of the republic is indeed marked with narratives that portray economic development (*qua* modernisation) as the collective interest of the Turkish society, whose achievement is an arduous task that requires a unified nation and whose benefits are going to elevate all Turkish citizens (Akbulut, 2019). By the promise of fulfilling this collective interest, the Turkish state could represent itself as a neutral actor and elicit the consent of the society to its claim to rule. The constitution of this general/collective interest also involved the portrayal of society as a homogeneous entity with no internal divisions, unified behind the goal of development, which allowed the Turkish state to pre-empt opposition that mobilised around issues such as social justice and distribution.

While state-society relationships in Turkey have undergone significant changes within the last two decades, not least with the neoliberal restructuring consolidated under AKP rule, the appeal and strength of developmentalism remains intact. While previous forms of state involvement in the economic sphere have largely been eroded, the Turkish state has not given up on its claim on developmentalism or its active engagement with the economic sphere. On the contrary, it participates in and mediates accumulation processes, in particular through constructing markets, providing incentives, and structuring participant actors, and indirectly mobilises labour, resources, and capital towards industrial centres. Inherent to this is the remaking of rural space as a resource and people as labourers to be directed to where they will be most efficiently used. This corresponds to a particular form of developmentalism shaped under authoritarian neoliberalism that is distinct from earlier eras (Akbulut et al., 2020). Rather than a developmental state following a Rostowian logic (i.e. explicit state action to direct resources to particular ends through

sectoral reorganisation and economic planning), the Turkish state emerges as a choreographer that arranges markets and incentives in a particular way to reach its developmentalist aim.

AN ECONOMY OF “GRABBING”

Writing on the recently codified amendment to the Law on the Transformation of Areas under the Risk of Disaster (*6306 Sayılı Afet Riski Altındaki Alanların Dönüştürülmesi Hakkındaki Kanun’unda Değişiklik*), known colloquially as the Reserve Area Law, which effectively expands the state’s ability to reclaim and redevelop the urban housing stock, Tanil Bora (2023) uses the term “the economy of grabbing (*mülke çökme*)”. Identifying the Law as the most recent link in a broader set of practices that transform land into a resource to be included in circuits of capital, he delineates how the rise of “an economy of construction and energy” depends fundamentally on the expropriation of space and land. This, for Bora, exemplifies the persistence of primitive accumulation, accelerated particularly through the destructive dynamic of capitalism that has become discernible within the neoliberal era.

Indeed, many have invoked the concept of primitive accumulation or accumulation by dispossession in explicating Turkey’s contemporary political economy (Akbulut, 2017b; Özgür, 2023, 2024). In Marx’s original formulation, the term primitive accumulation is used to describe how enclosures of common property formed the origins of and conditions for subsequent capitalist accumulation. Through the separation of direct producers from their means of production on the one hand, and the transformation of commons into private property on the other, enclosures produced the two prerequisites of capitalist accumulation: a population forced to sell their labour power and a surplus wealth that can be put to production as capital. The concept has been reworked by David Harvey (2003) as “accumulation by dispossession” to underline that this process is not limited to a specific temporality but is rather continuously employed to restore accumulation by opening outlets of investment (new venues of capital accumulation) and providing cheap input supplies. The series of practices Harvey mentions as means of accumulation by dispossession include commodification and privatisation of land, conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, public) into exclusive private property rights, privatisation of public assets, and commodification of nature and culture (Harvey, 2003).

This conceptualisation reveals the dynamics of the accumulation regime that marks Turkey's contemporary political economy. As discussed earlier, the rise of this era's hallmark extractive sectors has depended on an extensive process of dispossession through enclosures of urban and rural commons and the commercialisation of public lands and resources, which were consequently incorporated into circuits of accumulation (see also Erensü & Madra, 2022). While this process crystallised most visibly in the appropriation and privatisation of rural commons such as forests, pastures, and rivers for mining and energy investments, it was paralleled by enclosures of urban commons such as streets, neighbourhoods, architectural structures, and cultural symbols, which are constituted by collective use and social relations (Firat, 2011). In both contexts, common rights to space and resources were eradicated, through which the latter are made into capital and their users are dispossessed. Inherent to this process of dispossession has been the undermining of non-commodified forms of provisioning and (re)production of livelihoods that provided a degree of independence from the market. The appropriation of land, space, and resources that formed a fundamental basis for reproducing social life, whether in the form of material subsistence or immaterial relations and practices of reproducing everyday life, meant heightened reliance on wage labour, commodified means of subsistence and, more broadly, the mediation of market. In that sense, dispossession has implied not only a change in control and use of resources but, more importantly, the decimation of spaces of social (re)production which had previously been relatively autonomous from the mediation of the market (Akbulut, 2017b).

Yet, to the extent that the analytic of dispossession is invoked as an exceptional means of accumulation particular to the neoliberal order consolidated under the AKP rule, it risks overshadowing both the historical forms of dispossession that lay at the foundation of the republic and the contemporary dynamics of accumulation that go beyond those normally invoked by the term dispossession. Dispossession should instead be located as an axis of continuity/break—the second one that this chapter delineates—that constitutes Turkey's contemporary political economy.

Karataşlı and Kumral (2019), in their work on the development of capitalism and class formation in Turkey, mobilise an understanding of accumulation by dispossession as a continual process punctuated particularly by waves of violence, wars, and geopolitical conflict since the late nineteenth century. In doing so, they delineate waves of dispossession

through which the properties, land, capital, and networks of non-Muslim and Kurdish communities have been appropriated, emphasising the “multiple and diverse paths of primitive accumulation”. Violence against Armenians, which culminated most egregiously in the Armenian Genocide, led to a massive plunder and transfer of wealth which paved the way for the emergence of a new and specifically Muslim capitalist class. In the words of Harootunian (2019, p. 128), “[w]hile the genocide’s program of dispossession – theft – and expropriation began earlier”, notably through local acts of plunder at periods of anti-Armenian violence (Kurt, 2021), “it became policy by 1915 and continued in different forms after the massacres and deportations and well into modern Turkey’s history”.³ This economy of plunder, as Kurt (2021) dubs it, through which Armenian property was seized and reassigned to Turks, served the double objective of Turkifying the empire and the construction of a purely Turkish national economy, the ideological evolution of which is traced by Üngör and Polatel (2011). Similar processes of dispossession and confiscation were realised by the displacement of the Greek population throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, as well as the wealth tax instigated by the People’s Republic Party in 1942 (Karataşlı & Kumral, 2019).

That is to say, the dispossession of non-Muslim populations and the appropriation of their capital, land, property, and economic networks lie at the foundation of the republic, through which a new domestic capitalist class was forged. Added to this is the massive displacement of nearly 1.5 million Kurdish people in the early 1990s through village and forced migration (see Dinç’s chapter in this book), the majority of whom became urban proletariat in Western cities. While there is no systematic account of if and how the lands and assets that Kurdish communities were forced to abandon were incorporated into circuits of capital accumulation, the displacement and dispossession of the Kurdish population have served, and continue to serve, the domestic capitalist class as they have been integrated into circuits of capital as a racialised and largely precarious segment of wage labourers (Karataşlı & Kumral, 2019).

³ The legal and executive organisation and orchestration of this process by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), as well as its reverberations into the Republic, is well documented (Kurt, 2021; Üngör & Polatel, 2011).

While this reveals the historical continuity of dispossession as a constitutive element of Turkey's political economy, the dynamics of dispossession and its role in capital accumulation within the contemporary era go beyond those captured by the analytic of accumulation by dispossession. That is to say, the processes of dispossession at work within Turkey's neoliberal extractive capitalism have been realised through distinct forms and mechanisms that represent a break with earlier, historical forms of dispossession. Here I take up two aspects of this break: the variegated forms of alienation that fall outside of direct dispossession of producers from means of (re)production, and the dynamics that not only comprise dispossession but also the dislocation and mobilisation of labour, energy, and materials to urban industrial centres.

As elaborated throughout this chapter, the most evident mechanism of dispossession in Turkey's contemporary era has been the expropriation of land, resources, and space associated with extractive investments. Yet a less visible, but equally prevalent, dynamic has been the dismantling of the conditions of production and subsistence, through which an indirect process of dispossession was set off (Akbulut et al., 2020). This additional dynamic is an inherent consequence of extractive activities and their transformation of space, as put succinctly by a villager in Artvin regarding the construction of a hydropower plant:

Water is everything here [...] If they build [the hydropower plant], there won't be any produce in the garden, there won't be any water in the pastures. If the pastures dry out, there won't be any hay to give to the livestock; if the grass dries out, that will put an end to livestock. If livestock ends, I'm asking you, how are we going to make money?

Reduced availability of water with the construction of hydropower plants, pollution, and environmental degradation associated with energy and mining, and disruption of social networks and relations by expropriation and transformation of space severely undermine the (spatial) conditions of the social (re)production of life (see Aydin and Turhan's chapter in this book). As the material and immaterial foundations of existing livelihood practices are eroded, communities are forced out of their traditional networks and bases of livelihoods and subsistence, making them more dependent on—although not automatically integrated within—wage labour. As such, this process functions as a form of separation or

dislocation from the spatial conditions of production and subsistence, which ultimately, if indirectly, dispossessed urban and rural communities.

This distinct form of dispossession is echoed also in the quotes cited at the beginning of this chapter, with phrases such as “a veiled forced displacement policy”, “an exigency with the destruction of social space”, “when there is no living space left”, “this is about getting rid of the people here” and “depopulate the region as a whole [i]n order to use the water more freely, to extract the mines more easily”. These accounts attest first to how the dismantling of the conditions of the reproduction of life functions as dispossession. However, they also shed light on how the subsequent dislocation of dispossessed communities perpetuates capital accumulation. Through displacing populations and severing their social relations to land and space based on access, use, belonging, and history, this process empties space, by which social opposition is hindered, and paves the way for its incorporation into circuits of capital. This aspect of dislocation is obviously not novel: as Dilsiz and Özdemir elaborate in their interview quoted earlier, the strategy to “depopulate” in order to fragment communities and rupture the social infrastructures they rely on has always been integral to the Turkish state’s policy towards oppositional forces, particularly the Kurdish Freedom Movement. Yet the contemporary dynamics of dislocation differ significantly, Dilsiz and Özdemir state, in that such counter-insurgency strategies are now being used to pave the way—almost literally—for capital accumulation.

Second, as alluded to earlier, the contemporary regime of accumulation in Turkey relies not only on the expropriation of resources and dispossession of communities but also on their dislocation and transformation. That is to say, it comprises not only dispossession but also the dislocation and mobilisation of the dispossessed (labour), as well as the extracted materials and energy, away from their immediate surroundings to urban industrial centres—a regime that we have dubbed “accumulation by dislocation” elsewhere (Akbulut et al., 2020). This regime has been driven by broader processes produced and mediated by the Turkish state, including the comprehensive wave of agricultural liberalisation with the rollout of the Agricultural Reform Implementation Program (ARIP), the ongoing eradication of rural infrastructure and extensive commodification of rural commons, and labour market policies that incentivise various forms of precarious employment. This was coupled with the state-led commodification of land and housing in urban centres, to which energy and labour

power were mobilised, and which “energised” and enabled the construction boom. As such, both the spatial organisation of dispossession and that of its aftermath are closely tied to the role played by the state, especially under its authoritarian form.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explicated Turkey’s political economy by delineating two axes, developmentalism, and dispossession, that embody a continuity and a break throughout the history of the republic. I have argued that both developmentalism and dispossession have persisted as foundational motifs of the country’s political economy, yet the forms they have taken and the mechanisms through which they have been articulated have been significantly different in the contemporary era. While the notion of development continues to carry as much force as before, particularly as an illusory collective interest of the society, the role that the Turkish state assumes towards fulfilling its developmentalist ambitions has been more of a choreographer which mobilises markets and incentive mechanisms. Dispossession, on the other hand, has taken distinct forms and mechanisms in contemporary Turkey, which represents a break with its historical forms, notably in the indirect processes of alienation through the dismantling of the conditions of production and subsistence.

While the chapter addressed these two motifs largely separately, developmentalism and dispossession have been hinged closely together within the contemporary political economy of Turkey. On the one hand, contemporary processes of dispossession are framed within a developmentalist rhetoric and justified through the promise of bringing development, employment, or rural infrastructure. While this is not necessarily novel (Akbulut et al., 2018; Evren, 2016), that it is replacing, at least on the surface, an overtly militarist discourse in Kurdistan is worth consideration (Ormansızlaştırarak insansızlaştırma, 2023). On the other hand, the particular ways in which the Turkish state has been participating in and mediating the contemporary processes of dispossession points to motivations beyond those of a passive instrument of capital and rather to the reproduction of its own existence and legitimacy; that is, the promise of delivering economic development constituted as the collective interest of society.

The Kurdish Freedom Movement’s project of Democratic Economy emerges as a paradigm-shifting alternative within this political-economic

context. Concomitant to the Kurdish Freedom Movement's political vision of democratic autonomy is the construction of a communal economy along the principles of women's liberation, ecology, and democracy (Aslan, 2016; Aslan & Akbulut, 2019). Democratic Economy is envisioned explicitly as non-accumulationist, where economic relations are oriented towards the fulfilment of needs and collective and equitable access to the means of social reproduction is prioritised over profit-making. This is buttressed by the positing of nature as the non-commodifiable common heritage of all living creatures. Some of the more concrete proposals put forth include the minimisation of fossil fuel consumption; de-commodification of land, water, and energy; equity and ecological limits to be established as the basis of governance of natural resources; and material extraction to be limited by needs and use value rather than exchange value and profit (Akbulut, 2017a).

Although a broad-based debate towards a clearer and more concrete articulation and operationalisation of this project was initiated in 2013, it was abruptly (and violently) undercut by the Turkish state's offensive starting in 2015. The project of Democratic Economy is noteworthy nonetheless, as an imaginary if not as an institutionalised set of practices. Against the backdrop of a political economy imprinted with the continuity of dispossession and dislocation justified by the idea of development, this vision deconstructs the imperative of development, which is otherwise seen unquestionable, and puts the historical and contemporary dynamics of dispossession into sharp relief, both historically and contemporarily. The project of Democratic Economy thus denotes an alternative political economy not only for Kurdistan, but also more broadly for Turkey.

Note on Ethics Informed consent was obtained from research participants and the publication of their statements.

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Autocratisation Through Emergency Rule

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INTRODUCTION

Turkey's political transformation under AKP rule is often seen as a prime example of gradual autocratisation, and for good reasons. But the Turkish case also features sharp turning points, marked by extensive use of emergency powers, which provided a stepping stone for rapid autocratic change. In particular, both the episode of extralegal curfews in 2015 and the state of emergency that was declared a year later in response to the failed coup attempt of July 2016 paved the way for a new and much more intense phase of autocratisation.

Justified as an “authorised” and “temporary” deviation from legal norms in the face of alleged existential threats, emergency rule typically endows the executive with extraordinary powers and restricts or suspends certain constitutional safeguards. As such, it creates an enabling environment or an “opportunity structure” for political actors seeking autocratic change (Lührmann & Rooney, 2021). In the Turkish case, both the specific modality of rapid autocratisation from 2015 onwards and the type of regime it tends to promote are closely linked to such an opportunity structure. The AKP government exploited the state of emergency to create a political configuration in which temporary emergency powers have acquired a permanent character.

While the conceptual lens of emergency rule sheds light on a crucial aspect of Turkey's political transformation over the past decade, it also highlights a deep-rooted continuity. Indeed, emergency rule has been a persistent phenomenon in Turkey's political and legal history since the early years of the republic. In what follows, I begin with an overview of its pedigree, briefly underlining three mechanisms: constitutional provisions for temporary emergency rule, permanent prerogative institutions operating at the sub-constitutional level, and the diffusion of extraordinary powers into ordinary legislation. I then discuss what is new about the AKP government's use and abuse of emergency powers, particularly in the 2015 episode of extralegal curfews and beyond, and elaborate on the nature of the new regime it has fostered.

A REPUBLIC OF PROLONGED EMERGENCY RULE

Turkish constitutions have regularly provided for emergency rule under the rubric of “state of siege” (*örfî idare* or *sıkıyönetim*) and “state of emergency” (*olağanüstü hâl*). Despite various and significant differences

in formulation in the 1924, 1961 and 1982 constitutions, these provisions have several common traits. They specify the necessary conditions of emergency rule, the procedure for its declaration, and the maximum period for which it can remain in force unless extended by the parliament. While the authority to declare an emergency rests with the executive organ, the parliament may approve or reject it, or shorten its duration. Extension of the emergency rule is also subject to parliamentary approval. As for the limitation or suspension of freedoms during an emergency, one finds a list of derogable rights in the 1924 Constitution and a list of non-derogable rights in the 1982 Constitution, while the 1961 Constitution is silent on the subject. All three constitutions, however, provide that further regulations regarding emergency rule are to be specified by law.

Throughout the history of the republic, governments rarely hesitated to invoke constitutional emergency provisions. They officially declared emergency rule on a variety of occasions, not only in response to armed rebellions and external military threats but also to repress worker and student demonstrations. The use and effects of emergency powers often went beyond the purpose of the emergency and spilled over into social and political life. The duration of emergency rule was almost always repeatedly extended, far exceeding the original time limit provided in the constitution, sometimes to such an extent that it would simply make no sense to speak of emergency rule as something “temporary”. A striking example is the case of four Kurdish provinces (Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Şırnak and Tunceli), where emergency rule officially remained in force for more than 23 years from 1979 to 2002 (Üskül, 2003, p. 162).

The overall figures are no less striking. Turkish governments declared a “state of siege” 11 times under constitutional provisions, and only once was it rejected by parliament. The total duration spent under a state of siege, whether in a specific region or the entire country, amounts to 25 years, 9 months, and 18 days (Üskül, 1997, p. 71). The last state of siege was lifted in 1987, but it was immediately replaced in several Kurdish provinces by another form of emergency rule, the “state of emergency”, which was also provided for in the 1982 Constitution (see Göral’s chapter in this book). Extended every four months, the state of emergency in the Kurdish provinces lasted for another 15 years, 4 months and 11 days until 2002. Finally, in response to the failed coup attempt in July 2016, the AKP government declared a nationwide state of emergency that remained

in force for two years. All in all, over the 101 years of the republic, emergency rule has been implemented in some or all parts of the country for more than 43 years.

PREROGATIVE INSTITUTIONS AND EMERGENCY RULE BY ORDINARY LEGISLATION

While noteworthy in its own right, prolonged emergency rule under constitutional provisions is only part of the larger picture. A less noted mechanism is the establishment of prerogative institutions operating below the constitutional level.

The office of the “general inspectorates” (*umumi müfettişlikler*) is a case in point. A peculiar phenomenon in the administrative history of the republic, general inspectorates were instituted in 1927 and remained active throughout the single-party period. Despite the somewhat misleading title of the office, general inspectors were not simply “inspectors”; rather, they were bearers of the ultimate state authority in specific territorial units composed of several provinces as need be. During the single-party period, four general inspectorates were established at different times, beginning with the Kurdish-populated eastern provinces.¹ Even though they had a variety of functions, including social and economic development, their first and foremost task was to ensure “public order” (*asayiş*) in turbulent areas (Koçak, 2003, pp. 72–81). Accordingly, they were endowed with vast powers that placed administrative, judicial and military institutions at their disposal. Standing above and operating alongside the ordinary governors in their region, general inspectors could suspend them from office, call up military units, and request that the Ministry of Interior impose a state of siege in certain areas under their jurisdiction.

The 1921 Constitution provided for the institution of general inspectorates, but the Grand National Assembly did not put them into practice during the War of Independence. By contrast, while the 1924 Constitution contained no such provision, the First General Inspectorate was nonetheless established in 1927 through ordinary legislation. The main reason was to substitute the first state of siege in the history of the

¹ Apparently, a short-lived fifth inspectorate was also established as late as 1947 (Koçak, 2003, pp. 272–275; Keskin, 2007, p. 340). The operations of general inspectorates were suspended in 1948, and the institution was officially abolished in 1952.

republic, declared in eight provinces in February 1925 in response to the first Kurdish rebellion (Tunçay, 1981, pp. 174–175; Koçak, 2003, pp. 53–67). Extended several times, the state of siege lasted 2 years and 9 months until it was officially lifted in December 1927. However, with the establishment of the First General Inspectorate around the same time, the provinces under the state of siege came into the jurisdiction of this new administrative body. The state of siege, a form of *temporary emergency rule* provided by the 1924 Constitution, was thus replaced by a *permanent prerogative institution*.

The general inspectorates continued to function for two decades until 1948. Although they were not replaced by another prerogative institution per se, the Provincial Administration Law (*İl İdaresi Kanunu*, Law No. 5442), which restored and expanded the powers of regular governors, came into effect in 1949. Explored in detail below, the law contained some vague clauses, which were to be exploited to claim extraordinary powers during the episode of curfews in 2015. Significantly, these clauses found their way into the legislation right after the suspension of the general inspectorates. While it is difficult to determine conclusively whether they were indeed intended to enable certain prerogative functions, the pedigree of the Provincial Administration Law suggests that this might be likely (Keskin, 2007, pp. 306–307; Alada, 1995).

In any case, the diffusion of extraordinary powers into the texture of ordinary laws is a recurring pattern in Turkish legal history. As such, it reveals another less drastic but perhaps more subtle mechanism of emergency rule, which has also been described as the “prosaic politics of emergency” (Feldman, 2010). As Joakim Parslow (2016, p. 29) perceptively observes, “ever since the single-party regime of the interwar years, cabinets have wielded wide powers to suspend rights and exercise discretion concerning both security issues and property and finance regimes”, resulting in a “legal system that, barred from explicitly embracing executive prerogative as a matter of principle, has instead dispersed ‘exceptional’ powers throughout the fabric of the statutes, temporary laws, regulations, and decrees with which the state articulates its authority”.

FENDING OFF THE CONSTITUTION

Taken together, the foregoing mechanisms—constitutional emergency provisions, permanent prerogative institutions and the diffusion of emergency powers into ordinary legislation—form a complex structure of

emergency rule that has been part and parcel of the republic since its formative years. It is a structure that has evolved over time, adapted to changing political and socioeconomic circumstances, and remained operational with varying degrees of intensity throughout the political history of modern Turkey (Yılmaz, 2019). While there is no single factor that can explain its persistence for more than a century, the seldom interrupted continuity of emergency rule in the Kurdish region suggests that both its formation and evolution are closely linked to the contradictions of the nation-building process and the repressive institutional patterns that emerged in the course of coping with these contradictions.

Given this historical background, one cannot help but ask: what, if anything, is new about the use and abuse of emergency powers under AKP rule? I think the answer, or rather part of the answer, has to do with the demise of constitutionalism. More specifically, President Erdoğan and the AKP government have deployed emergency powers not only in an explicitly unconstitutional manner but also in order to dismantle Turkey's constitutional structure and permanently uproot constitutionalism as a fundamental political principle.

While the constitutional architecture of Turkey had salient authoritarian features in general, and certainly accommodated a multi-layered structure of emergency rule in particular, it was not just a veneer of prerogative power. Rather, intertwined with the social and political dynamics of modernisation (including nation-state formation, capitalist development and the fluctuating advance of democratic politics), the evolution of Turkish constitutionalism played a complex role in processes of both system integration and social integration, thereby taking root in state-society relations (Tanör, 1998). This is why a prominent constitutional jurist such as Bülent Tanör, despite his criticism of the authoritarian elements of Turkish constitutionalism, was able to assert the following in the early 1990s:

Notwithstanding all deficiencies and arbitrary leanings, there exists [in Turkey] a notion of “constitutional government” along with its institutions and rules. The separation of powers and the parliamentary regime are factual realities. The 1982 Constitution did not abolish them. Although there have been setbacks in the areas of the rule of law, judicial independence, and judicial review (i.e., administrative courts and the Constitutional Court), the existing safeguards and resources are still of considerable degree. (Tanör, 1994, p. 149)

Although these remarks provide a fair description of Turkey's constitutional reality at the time, they are in stark contrast to the current situation. Neither an established notion of "constitutional government", nor the "parliamentary regime", nor even a basic "separation of powers" is a factual reality today (Özenç, 2020). Under the rule of the AKP, Turkey has undergone a gradual process of "deconstitutionalisation" (*anayasasızlaştırma*), and the very notion of constitutional government has become a thing of the past. The concept of deconstitutionalisation, coined after the violent repression of the Gezi Park protests in 2013 (Kaboğlu, 2013), refers to a process in which the constitution is deprived of its binding force as a result of systematic violations by constitutional organs and actors who refuse to comply with certain constitutional provisions without facing legal consequences (Gözler, 2016). Put differently, in a process of deconstitutionalisation, the constitution is not suspended but rather loses the ability to constrain political power due to intense and deliberate practices of "constitutional bad faith" (Pozen, 2016).

Since deconstitutionalisation is not an "event" like a coup, but rather a "process", it is difficult to determine when exactly it begins to gain ground. Nevertheless, several events have facilitated its progress. First, as a prime example of what has been called "abusive constitutionalism" (Landau, 2013), the 2010 constitutional amendments fostered deconstitutionalisation by crippling checks and balances and allowing for the formation of a partisan judiciary (Gözler, 2017). Second, the parliamentary negotiations between major political parties from 2011 to 2013 aimed to produce a new constitution from scratch, but the consensus requirements were so unrealistic that the negotiations were destined to fail from the outset (Tomuş, 2019). As a result, despite their seemingly democratic credentials, the negotiations facilitated deconstitutionalisation because they ultimately served to undermine the legitimacy of the existing constitution without replacing it with a new one. Third, the AKP government further undermined the supremacy of the constitution by responding to the Gezi protests with widespread and extralegal police violence in 2013, thereby de facto suspending civic rights for millions of citizens (see Erkmen's chapter in this book). Fourth, after winning the 2014 presidential election, Erdoğan consistently disregarded the constitutional norms of the parliamentary system, asserting that Turkey's system of government had practically changed with a popularly elected president in office, and the constitution must adapt to this fact, not vice versa

(Hürriyet Daily News, 2015). Therefore, the process of deconstitutionalisation was already well underway as Turkey approached what turned out to be a critical juncture in 2015.

DECONSTITUTIONALISATION MEETS EMERGENCY POLITICS: THE CASE OF CURFEWS

When negotiations for a peaceful solution to Turkey's longstanding Kurdish question came to an abrupt end in July 2015, violence between the Turkish armed forces and the PKK resumed. Lethal clashes took place in a number of Kurdish cities, mostly in residential areas. As part of the military operations conducted by Turkish armed forces, provincial governors systematically imposed round-the-clock curfews for specific or indefinite periods, claiming that this was a "necessary measure" to protect civilians, track down armed militants and restore public order.

According to a fact sheet by the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (2016), over the six months from August 2015 to February 2016, provincial governors (*vali*) and sub-governors (*kaymakam*) in the region declared round-the-clock curfews at least 58 times, for periods ranging from several days to several weeks, in at least 19 districts of seven provinces, affecting an estimated total of 1,377,000 civilians. Human rights organisations also documented severe abuses by security forces during the curfews, including "excessive use of force; killings; enforced disappearances; torture; destruction of housing and cultural heritage; incitement to hatred; prevention of access to emergency medical care, food, water and livelihoods; violence against women; and severe curtailment of the right to freedom of opinion and expression as well as political participation" (OHCHR, 2017, §2).

The legal status of curfews was disputed from the outset. As expressly stated in Article 11(a) of the State of Emergency Law (*Olağanüstü Hal Kanunu*, Law No. 2935), the emergency measures to ensure general security and to prevent the spread of violence may indeed include a limited or full curfew. However, this legal provision would apply *only when* a duly declared state of emergency was in force. Hence the question: was there an official state of emergency at the time? Intriguing as it may sound, the answer is no. Upon the start of the armed clashes, the government could indeed legally declare a state of emergency, but it did not. The 1982 Constitution provided for emergency rule in the case of "extensive acts of violence and serious disruption of public order".

Instead of employing this constitutional instrument, however, the government chose not to declare a state of emergency, while at the same time deploying in practice severe emergency measures, including curfews.

From a report by the Venice Commission (2016, §56), we learn that Turkish authorities sent a written communication to the rapporteurs, in which they confirmed that “necessary legal conditions were met to declare a state of emergency” under the relevant provisions of the 1982 Constitution, but that the authorities abstained from this course of action because—in their own words—they wanted “to avoid any backsliding in the field of fundamental rights and freedoms”. Whether one takes this statement by Turkish authorities as a sincere justification or a typical instance of state cynicism, the fact remains the same. As the Venice Commission rightly emphasised, not invoking constitutional emergency provisions was a “political choice” on the part of the government—a choice, however, with a legal consequence: the curfews were clearly unconstitutional and extralegal.

The government nonetheless insisted on the legality of the curfews by invoking some vague clauses in the Provincial Administration Law (*İl İdaresi Kanunu*, Law No. 5442), which was originally enacted in 1949, as mentioned above, after the suspension of the general inspectorates. According to the relevant clauses of the Law (Art. 11a and 11c), the governor is the superior of all law enforcement units in the province and takes “necessary decisions and measures” to protect public order, prevent crime, and ensure personal immunity and the safety of property. From a legal point of view, the crucial question is of course whether the phrase “necessary decisions and measures” can be interpreted in such a way as to authorise governors to impose curfews and thus restrain a set of fundamental freedoms for millions of citizens as they deem fit. More generally, how are we to understand the scope of this authority anyway, granted to governors by such a vague phrase? Does it mean *anything and everything* that the governor deems “necessary” to cope with a concrete situation?

There is a variety of sound and incisive legal arguments explaining in detail why the law cannot be interpreted this way, and why the governors are not legally authorised to impose curfews in the absence of a duly declared state of emergency in force (Ardıçoğlu, 2015; Demir-Gürsel & Dinçer, 2021; Gözler, 2016; Şirin, 2015). To argue otherwise is to assume that a piece of *ordinary legislation* regarding provincial administration simply grants *extraordinary and potentially unlimited powers* to governors. As it turns out, this was exactly what the AKP government

assumed when it insisted on the legality of the curfews. This assumption inevitably raises drastic questions: if, under certain circumstances, a governor can deem it a “necessary measure” to impose, say, indefinite curfews, why should we not assume that, under other circumstances, another governor can also deem it a “necessary measure” to carry out summary executions? One might want to say that it does not go *that far*, but where exactly is the dividing line? Or rather, is there a dividing line at all?

At a fundamental conceptual level, the question hinges on the political theory of emergency powers. Are they “legal” powers, not only in the narrow sense of having been provided by the law but also in the deeper sense that they have to be exercised in the *medium* of the law? Conversely, are they “extralegal” powers in the sense that they are granted as a prerogative regardless of the extant law, thereby enabling executive actors to identify an emergency situation and respond to it by any means they deem necessary under the concrete circumstances of the case? Put in a nutshell, the former refers to the legalist theory of emergency powers, whereas the latter refers to the extralegalist theory (Scheppele, 2008).

Despite a constitutional framework consistent with the legalist theory of emergency powers, the government acted squarely in accordance with the extralegalist theory during the curfews. The episode also provides a unique vantage point from which to look backward and forward at the same time. From a backward-looking perspective, given the deep-rooted pedigree of emergency rule in the history of the republic, the phenomenon was all too familiar, that is, another link in a long chain of repression and state brutality enabled by emergency powers. But from a forward-looking perspective, the extralegal modality of state action during the curfews was unprecedented even for the Kurdish region (Pişkin, 2021) and as such a clear sign of things to come. More specifically, it marked the beginning of a new phase in Turkey’s gradual autocratisation under the AKP, a phase in which emergency politics was to be firmly intertwined with the process of deconstitutionalisation.

AUTOCRATISATION THROUGH EMERGENCY RULE

Once intertwined, emergency politics and deconstitutionalisation became mutually reinforcing (Tekin, 2022). The more the constitution lost its ability to constrain the government, the easier it became for the government to securitise the entire public sphere, criminalise political

opponents and use counter-terrorism measures against any dissenting voices in civil and political society. In other words, deconstitutionalisation facilitated the expansion of emergency politics. The latter, in turn, provided the government with a convenient excuse to act outside the law in increasingly reckless ways by invoking alleged necessities of national security. Thus, emergency rule politically legitimised deconstitutionalisation. This self-perpetuating cycle quickly evolved into a de facto *regime* during the nationwide state of emergency that was declared—this time officially—after the failed coup attempt in July 2016.

The state of emergency remained in force for two long years, during which the AKP government went far beyond constitutional provisions. More specifically, the executive usurped legislative and judicial authority through statutory decrees (*Kanun Hükmünde Kararname* or *KHK*), which were systematically deployed both for creating an extralegal sphere of “civil death” (Tekin, 2019, p. 91) and for making numerous permanent changes in the existing legislation.

The first decree of its kind (KHK No. 667, dated 23 July 2016) established a set of unprecedented provisions for the immediate dismissal of public employees without any due process, who were “deemed” to be affiliated with “terrorist organisations or those structures, formations or groups that were determined by the National Security Council as acting against the national security of the state”. According to the official statistics,² a total of 125,678 public employees were stigmatised as “affiliated” (*iltisaklı*) to terrorist organisations during the two years of emergency rule, thus dismissed from civil service for life and stripped of several other civil rights, all by means of statutory decrees bypassing due process and judicial ruling.

The government also made extensive use of decrees to introduce permanent changes to existing law, a practice that resulted in more than a thousand amendments to national legislation. A comprehensive study of these amendments shows that most had nothing to do with the official purpose of the state of emergency and that their actual function was to “restructure state-society relations in such diverse areas as national defence, internal security, state personnel regime, economy and social security, administrative structure, education, and health” (Akça et al., 2018, p. 7).

² Released by the State of Emergency Inquiry Commission (2020), but cf. İHOP (2018).

Equally important was the compliant attitude of the Constitutional Court. In October 2016, deviating from its previous jurisprudence, the court ruled that it had no authority to review emergency decrees. Indeed, Article 148 of the 1982 Constitution states that executive decrees issued during a state of emergency or time of war may not be brought before the Constitutional Court alleging their unconstitutionality. However, the court's previous jurisprudence, developed in the early 1990s, held that Article 148 applied *only if* emergency decrees *actually* complied with the constitutional provisions regarding the “purpose, place, and duration” of the state of emergency (Göztepe, 2018). In other words, the executive could not issue emergency decrees for reasons unrelated to the official purposes of the state of emergency, or to be applied outside its declared location, or in such a way as to be valid after the state of emergency ended. Otherwise, according to the court's opinion at the time, emergency decrees could be used to create an extralegal sphere and to entrench the arbitrary rule of the executive. Indeed, they were used in exactly this way when the court changed its opinion in October 2016 and ruled that Article 148 was unconditionally applicable.

While the state of emergency was in full swing, the AKP government also pushed through a major constitutional amendment. Ratified in a controversial referendum in April 2017, the amendment replaced the longstanding parliamentary system with a hyper-presidential one, granting the president vast powers and leaving the executive virtually unchecked. In doing so, it certified the new paradigm of government that was born in the context of an unbridled state of emergency. The presidential system was designed from the outset to perpetuate extraordinary powers in a different guise, and only after its official inauguration was the state of emergency finally lifted.

CONCLUSION: LAW AND POLITICS IN THE DUAL STATE

Autocratisation through emergency rule is prone to generate a system of domination along the lines of a “dual state”. Originally coined by Ernst Fraenkel (1941) in a classic study of the same title, the concept refers to the concurrent existence of a “normative state” (*Normenstaat*), which somehow keeps functioning in accordance with extant legislation, and a “prerogative state” (*Maßnahmenstaat*), which acts arbitrarily on political decision without being constrained by legal norms.

In my interpretation of Fraenkel's work, the normative and prerogative aspects of the dual state are not two institutionally distinct bodies with their own specific organs and agents, but rather two modalities of state action dynamically located within the same institutions (Tekin, 2018, 2020). The same court may adjudicate ordinary property disputes in accordance with existing laws, thus acting as an agent of the normative state, while at the same time ruling in favour of arbitrary property confiscation in the case of individuals and groups targeted by the prerogative state (see Akbulut's chapter in this book). In the dual state, all major public institutions function on two tracks simultaneously. The concept is therefore best understood as an ideal type that illuminates the institutional logic and patterns of permanent emergency rule, in which prerogative measures and decisions encircle legal norms.

As I have argued elsewhere, Turkey's political transformation displays characteristic features of a dual state from 2015 onwards (Tekin, 2019, 2022). There are several aspects to this interpretation, but I would like to highlight one of them here, namely the drastic erosion of the *principle of legality*. The erosion has been increasingly evident both in the decisions of the courts and in the actions of the administration (Akman & Sevinç, 2021; Arslanalp & Erkmén, 2020; Davas & Tekin, 2021). The concept of the dual state allows us to put it into perspective in concrete institutional terms. The sphere in which law continues to somehow operate is by no means stable in the dual state. Its boundaries are constantly drawn and redrawn, contracted and expanded, according to the shifting priorities and ad hoc interventions of the prerogative exercise of political power. This, in turn, makes the validity and applicability of the law highly erratic, precarious and unpredictable.

A number of mechanisms are currently at work to undermine the principle of legality. Let me briefly mention some, without claiming to provide a comprehensive overview. (1) *Anticipatory deference*. Taking into account the expectations of the prerogative state, courts increasingly renounce their power of judicial review in favour of executive and administrative discretion. (2) *Corrective non-compliance*. When the prerogative state disapproves of a court decision, administrative organs "correct" it by refusing to implement the decision, a clear warning suggesting that judicial decisions are "binding" as long as they do not frustrate the expectations and priorities of the prerogative state. (3) *Selective application*. Legal norms are applied or omitted selectively in accordance with prerogative considerations, resulting in widespread ambiguity about when and

where someone or some action is or is not protected by the law. (4) *Deformative adaptation*. Once incorporated into legislation, prerogative measures acquire a de facto supreme status, to which the rest of the legal system is increasingly adapted and subordinated, thereby deforming the hierarchy and integrity of legal norms.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. Nor am I suggesting that these practices are entirely new. Some, if not all, have clear precedents in the history of the republic. What is new is rather the context in which they operate and intertwine as *mechanisms* that systematically undermine the principle of legality and entrench the dual state as Turkey's paradigm of government.

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CHAPTER 18

Higher Education Reforms: A Century of State Interventions in Turkish Higher Education

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INTRODUCTION

Education has played a pivotal role in disseminating state ideology and moulding the younger generation since the establishment of the Turkish Republic.¹ Over time, the nature of state intervention in higher education has oscillated between periods of stringent control and periods of relatively greater autonomy. Nevertheless, the underlying state ideology has consistently remained the guiding force shaping national education policies, and governing authorities have been keen to mould universities in alignment with their own ideological perspectives. While these ideologies often share common themes, they are also influenced by the prevailing requirements and political agendas of the time. At certain junctures, the regulation of universities has been enforced through legal measures, serving as a means for authorities to assert control. Furthermore, academics, particularly during times of political turmoil such as in states of emergency following coups, have frequently faced arbitrary dismissal, indicative of the government's efforts to maintain its grip on higher education.

Since the establishment of the first modern university in 1933, higher education has been periodically interrupted by military and ideological interventions; with each intervention, governments introduced reforms to align universities with the institutional order. Universities in Turkey have never had complete autonomy and academic freedom, regardless of whether civilian or military governments were in power, except for very short intervals. The primary goal of higher education was—and still is—not to contribute to universal knowledge production and educate critically thinking individuals but rather to cultivate generations that are ideologically aligned with the prevailing beliefs of the time and create a political climate that would reinforce the ideology of the state and the ruling government.

This chapter highlights the historical trajectories of higher education spanning the hundred-plus years of the Turkish Republic. I aim to delineate the similarities and differences in interventions in universities, crises, and challenges across different phases of Turkish history. I begin with the period beginning just before the declaration of the republic and focus on

¹ I am grateful to Serdar Tekin for his feedback and recommendations for the first version of this text.

the single-party period. In the second section, I cover the multi-party era up to the 1980 military coup.

In the final section of this chapter, I delve into the changes and challenges faced by higher education during the tenure of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*—AKP). I focus on this period specifically not only because the AKP has been in power uninterrupted for a long time—accounting for almost a fifth of the republic’s history—but also because the AKP government has radically transformed higher education economically, politically, and in terms of content. The interventions, which intensified after 2015, brought along damage that is quite difficult to repair. While discussing the destruction created by the AKP government in its efforts to control and suppress universities and their components, I also show the historical traces of these pressure and control mechanisms that have existed since the establishment of the first higher education institution, Darülfünun.

EARLY REPUBLIC YEARS: FROM DARÜLFÜNUN TO THE FIRST UNIVERSITY

The origins of higher education in the Turkish Republic trace back to the nineteenth-century Tanzimat period, as a facet of the Ottoman Empire’s efforts towards modernisation. The initial institution of higher learning, Darülfünun, was established in 1863 but ceased operations after a brief two-year period. A second Darülfünun was founded in 1869 but closed down by 1871. Finally, Darülfünunu Sultani, the third institution offering engineering and law diplomas, opened in 1874 and shuttered its doors in 1882 (Dölen, 2008). A fourth attempt to establish Darülfünun took place in 1901, on the 25th anniversary of the accession of Abdul Hamid II to the throne, and although it was not closed, its regulations were completely changed with the declaration of the Second Constitutional Period between 1908 and 1920 (Öztürk, 2019). On 21 April 1924, by Law No. 493, Darülfünun was granted legal personality, and its name was changed to *İstanbul Darülfünunu*. Academic autonomy and the participatory board system, implemented through a regulation change in 1919, were preserved (Hatiboğlu, 2000). Nevertheless, despite its limited academic and institutional autonomy, Darülfünun lacked control over its movable and immovable properties, as well as the authority to regulate its budget (Arslan & Selçuk, 2008).

The Temporary Primary Education Law of 1913, which remained in force until the Primary Education Law of 1961, facilitated children's enrolment in schools and also defined the ideal citizen as "one who is devout to their religion, recognizes their nationality, educated, and enlightened patriot" (Üstel, 2016, p.37). The motto of higher education was no different. In the aftermath of the republic's declaration in 1923, there was considerable public and political discourse emphasising the need for educational reforms to align with the objectives of the recently formed republic. The notion of the ideal citizen of the Turkish Republic has not changed much since the beginning, and public education was the most important tool to craft them.

Darülfünun survived only 10 years after the republic's declaration. Criticism towards Darülfünun started to amplify in 1929, and the nature of the criticism was not limited to academic insufficiency. For example, it was considered improper for some faculty members to participate in the Free Republican Party (*Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*) in 1930, while in the elections of 1931, Darülfünun's refusal to support the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) was not well received. Between 1930 and 1933, the debate on Darülfünun reached its peak, and the criticisms of the group organised around Kadro Journal were particularly harsh (Dölen, 2010a, b). The critics argued that Darülfünun, due to its opposition to statism and its advocacy of "liberalism and the principles of law", was a "heretical" institution, in addition to allegations that it had failed to fulfil its duties in the face of reforms (Arslan & Selçuk, 2008, p.356). In 1933, it was shut down, and almost half of the professors were dismissed.² Darülfünun became İstanbul University, which was accepted as the first modern university of Turkey. The main goal of this reform/purge, dubbed the "university reform" by the new regime, was to align higher education ideologically.

In 1932, Professor Albert Malche, a professor of pedagogy at the University of Geneva, was invited to İstanbul to prepare an extensive analysis of Turkish higher education (Katipoğlu, 2010). Malche described İstanbul Darülfünunu as "a vast institution operating to produce low efficiency"; however, he also noted the potential for improvement in efficiency, and he found the efforts expended to be commendable, speaking

² Hatiboğlu (2000) states that 157 of 240 professors expelled, Dölen (2010a) 89 of 150, and Mazıcı (1995) 92 of 151.

highly of the achieved level (Arslan & Selçuk, 2008, p. 356). President Atatürk and senior officials thoroughly examined Malche's initial report yet chose not to proceed past the initial report, opting instead for substantial changes in the educational system. Despite Malche's subsequent visit, during which he actively participated in the 1933 Darülfünun reform, his original report on higher education remained undisclosed to the public until 1939. In 1933, while summarising Malche's report and sharing it with the public, Reşit Galip, the Minister of Education, omitted some of the originally reported issues and presented his own views as if they were part of the original report (Dölen, 2010a). His notes on the report revealed that Atatürk did not find Malche's "reform" project sufficient despite finding it beneficial (Kocatürk, 1984, p. 6). According to Atatürk, the concern did not solely revolve around university issues; it also pertained to restructuring Turkish national education in alignment with the ideals of the Turkish Revolution. Furthermore, he asserted that "even highly accomplished foreign scientists or scholars cannot elevate the Turkish people to their rightful stature" (Mazıcı, 1995, p. 56).

At the core of this urgent need for reform concerning Darülfünun lay not only the need to rapidly modernise higher education by likening it to contemporary examples and increasing academic and scientific production but also the inadequacy of Darülfünun in aligning with the state ideology and meeting the new expectations of the regime. Particularly during the 1930s, when the statist approach was strengthening, the circle around the *Kadro Journal*³ targeted Darülfünun with criticism and smears, portraying it as an obstacle to the revolutionary aspirations of the young republic. According to *Kadro* circles, "it was necessary for science to be at the command of revolution", and academic freedom and autonomy should be revoked for an interventionist approach (Arslan, 1994, p. 357). The political stance of the CHP from 1923 to 1945 was never inclined towards liberalism, and with the strengthening of the party-state, CHP governance systematically eliminated any individual or organisational endeavours that conflicted with the official ideology (Mazıcı, 1995). While the government framed the dismissal of professors from Darülfünun as resulting from the academic weaknesses and inadequacies of the scholars, the actual

³ *Kadro Journal* was a short-lived yet influential nationalist and Kemalist political publication. It emphasised anti-imperialism, independence, opposition to liberalism, and statism as part of its alignment with the Kemalist movement. See Bora (2016) for detailed information on *Kadro Journal*.

reason behind the purge was personal animosities and ideological differences (Dölen, 2010a); a pattern that was to be repeated many times in the future.

THE MULTI-PARTY PERIOD AND MILITARY COUPS

Since the republic's establishment, the autonomy of universities in Turkey has been more or less restricted in response to political circumstances and there has never been a period in which universities experienced full administrative, economic, and academic autonomy. The transition to a multi-party system and the social and political climate of the postwar era came with new university regulations. The law of 1933 had seen Darülnun become İstanbul University, structurally and financially governed by the Ministry of Education. However, in 1946, Law 4936 restored administrative autonomy and defined universities as research and educational institutions with scientific and administrative autonomy and legal personality (Hatiboğlu, 2000). Nevertheless, defining universities as autonomous institutes did not prevent criticism and interventions by politicians. How universities should be governed was repeatedly discussed in the National Assembly, and it was expected that the university should be the cradle of nationalism, not yielding to influences from the right or left, and that the scientists raised by the Turkish revolution should behave according to the principles of the Kemalist regime (Arslan, 2002).

In late 1946, allegations emerged that socialist faculty members at Ankara University's Faculty of Language, History, and Geography were speaking against nationalism and propagating communism during their lectures. These allegations led to years of debate involving the Ministry of National Education, the university senate, members of parliament, as well as the rector and deans. In the end, the CHP government ultimately cancelled the tenures of professors Pertev Naili Boratav, Behice Boran, Niyazi Berkes, and Mediha Berkes, and expelled them from Ankara University in 1948 (Ak, 2015; Çetik, 2008; Dölen, 2010b; Öztürkmen, 2005), thus annulling the university's autonomy.

The Democrat Party (DP) emerged victorious in the 1950 national elections, becoming the first party to govern after displacing the CHP. The positive yet delicate initial relations between the government and universities began to deteriorate when the DP proposed an amendment to the University Law, aiming to criminalise professors' political activities (Dölen, 2010b). The DP's tenure ended on 27 May 1960,

when the military's National Unity Committee seized power, leading to an eighteen-month military regime. Not surprisingly, the new regime targeted universities, revising the University Law and dismissing 147 academics (Dölen, 2010b; Timur, 2000).

During the 1960s, a new left movement emerged globally, and its presence in Turkey was notable for two reasons. First, universities had a pivotal role in overthrowing Prime Minister Menderes and shaping the 1961 Constitution, leading students and teachers to perceive themselves as agents of social change. Second, this notion aligned well with the Kemalist vision of an enlightened elite driving a revolution from above (Zürcher, 2017). With the 1961 Constitution, universities gained constitutional status for the first time, ensuring their scientific and administrative autonomy (Öztürk, 2019). However, akin to prior legal regulations, constitutional assurance did not make a major difference, and the autonomy and academic freedom of universities were subsequently suspended or not implemented on numerous occasions.

The military ultimatum of 12 March 1971 had a minor impact on universities directly. However, on 27 April, the National Security Council declared martial law in 11 provinces, including all the big cities, which lasted for the next two years. During martial law, the military government pursued a witch hunt targeting individuals with leftist or even progressive liberal leanings (Zürcher, 2017). In the late 1970s, the country witnessed increased polarisation and public frustration, accompanied by heightened economic and political instability. Terrorist attacks began targeting leftist academics and intellectuals, as well as Alevis, who were accused of being communists by the ultra-nationalist Grey Wolves (Ahmad, 1993).

On 12 September 1980, the armed forces once again seized political power and dissolved the parliament (see Akça's chapter in this book). Chief of General Staff and National Security Council Chairman Kenan Evren declared that “[t]he purpose of the operation is to maintain the integrity of the country, ensure national unity and solidarity, prevent a potential civil war and fratricidal conflict, restore state authority and existence, and eliminate the factors hindering the functioning of the democratic order”.⁴ Subsequently, all political parties were suspended, political party leaders were arrested, and a state of emergency was declared nationwide.

⁴ <https://bianet.org/haber/12-cylul-darbesi-nin-arsivi-0001-muze-283821> *Bianet*. 12 September 2023. Retrieved 14 February 2024.

Under the military junta, 650,000 people were detained and subjected to torture, with the deaths of 171 under severe torture officially documented. Additionally, the death sentences of 124 people were confirmed by the Military Court of Appeals, resulting in the execution of 50. Millions were profiled as communist, Alevi, Kurdish, or Islamist. Furthermore, approximately 30,000 people were dismissed from their jobs for being “objectionable”, and another 30,000 people went abroad as “refugees⁵”. It was no surprise that the military regime targeted the universities. It began to revise the University Law to centralise the higher education system and established the Council of Higher Education (*Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu*—YÖK) with the authority to appoint rectors and deans. In separate purges, more than a thousand academics were dismissed from universities without pensions and the right to work in the public sector again (Dölen, 2010b; Güvenç, 1990; Hatiboğlu, 2000; Zürcher, 2017). Even though the establishment of the Council of Higher Education was proposed in 1973, the Constitutional Court annulled the proposal in 1975 (Öztürk, 2019). However, this time, YÖK was opened for good, and 2024 marked its 43rd anniversary.

Once again, academic freedom in teaching and research was restricted, this time under the guise of constitutional protection. Article 130 of the Turkish Constitution states that universities, members of the teaching staff, and their assistants may freely engage in all kinds of scientific research and publication. However, the subsequent sentence firmly establishes the boundaries of freedom by stating that “this shall not include the liberty to engage in activities against the existence and independence of the state, and against the integrity and indivisibility of the nation and the country” (p. 99).⁶ Additionally, the constitution ensures that education “shall be conducted along the lines of the principles and reforms of Atatürk, based on contemporary scientific and educational principles, under the supervision and control of the state” (Article 42, p. 49). The objective of higher education, as outlined, involves teaching students a commitment to Atatürk’s nationalism, reforms, and principles (Article 4),

⁵ Human Rights Association. (11 September 2020). The trial of the September 12, 1980 military coup continues. Human Rights Association. <https://www.ihd.org.tr/12-eylul-1980-askeri-darbe-davasi-suruyor-2/>

⁶ https://www.anayasa.gov.tr/media/7258/anayasa_eng.pdf *Constitution of the Republic of Turkey*. Retrieved 14 February 2024.

and shaping educational strategies to guarantee conformity with these reforms and principles (Article 5).

The damage created by the 1980 coup and subsequent 6 November 1981 University Law was not limited to the purge of the dissident academics and restricted university autonomy and academic freedom; it radically altered the structure of universities. The new legislation reorganised all educational institutions, encompassing institutes and vocational schools overseen by the Ministry of Education, under YÖK's authority. This centralised the educational system (Birler, 2012) and abolished university autonomy once more. The law stipulated the appointment of administrative staff, including rectors, deans, and department chairs, instead of holding elections and regulating academic promotions through YÖK. Previously, the powers of the committees had been shifted to single-person bodies, thereby rendering the distinction between election and appointment meaningless (Öztürk, 2019). As the number of universities grew, existing universities were also fragmented into multiple new institutions.⁷ Faculty members were compelled to adhere to a rotation system, which required them to move from established universities in central areas to those newly established in the periphery. This rotation system was often seen as a form of punishment for dissenting academics rather than a measure to enhance the quality of education in newly established universities (Verşan, 1989). For example, in 1982, Ege University was divided into two, and many faculties and colleges were transferred to the newly established Dokuz Eylül University. In addition, the faculties and colleges of Ege University in various provinces and districts formed the first faculties and colleges of Afyon Kocatepe, Pamukkale, Celal Bayar, and Adnan Menderes Universities.⁸

With the 1980 coup, the dominant ideology of the state shifted from statism towards neoliberal economics, and universities, previously centres of revolutionary and left activism, would also be part of this transformation. The situation of Turkish universities under the implementation of

⁷ A similar regulation was introduced once again in 2018. Some departments from 13 institutions, including the historic Istanbul and Gazi Universities, were absorbed into the new universities to be established. <https://bianet.org/haber/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-13-universitenin-bolunmesini-onayladi-197264> Retrieved 14 August 2024.

⁸ Ege University. (n.d.). From yesterday to today: Ege University. Ege University. https://ege.edu.tr/tr-1/dunden_bugune_ege_universitesi.html Retrieved 30 August 2024.

the neoliberal transformation was analogous to the notion of the university of the Keynesian era; as Önal states, “instead of catering to the immediate labor needs of the bourgeoisie, served its historical interests in the class struggle. Now that this function is no longer considered to be needed, the university designed to this end is seen as a burden by neoliberal capitalism. This burden is shaken off in a simple ‘quantity over quality’ model: 1. The programs are redesigned to be ‘vocationally relevant’ and as short as possible, with each course consisting of ‘modules’ corresponding to specific vocational skills. 2. The access rate to tertiary education is greatly increased through ‘massification’” (Önal, 2012, p. 128).

This shift came with the opening of the foundation/private universities. According to the 1982 Constitution, foundations may establish higher education institutions provided that they are not for profit and that they comply with the procedures and principles established by law.⁹ Higher education institutions established by foundations had to demonstrate their financial and administrative self-sufficiency in their opening applications. At the same time, the establishment of foundation universities was supported by laws that would allow them to benefit from financial support and tax exemptions (Katoğlu, 2007; Öztürk, 2019). In 1984, the first foundation university, Bilkent University, was established by the president of YÖK and one of the architects of the higher education law, İhsan Doğramacı. Since then, the two-tier system (public and foundation/private universities) has continued with an accelerating number of institutions. According to Ahmad (1993), the discredited state sector lost its ability to attract young graduates, leading them to seek employment in the private sector. In line with this shift, higher education underwent restructuring to cater to the expanding private sector. University Technology Transfer Offices emerged, which primarily handle tasks such as licensing and patenting and ultimately serve the commercialisation of products developed within universities, facilitating the commercialisation of scientific production itself (Kalkan, 2019). “Elite universities”, where instruction was conducted in English, were tasked with producing the emerging managerial and technocratic elite. Fluency in English became indispensable for success in various fields, prompting parents to make considerable effort to ensure their children acquired proficiency in the

⁹ Relevant provisions of the Turkish Constitution <https://www.yok.gov.tr/kurumsal/mevzuat/ilgili-hukumler> Retrieved 15 August 2024.

language. As a result, old universities experienced a decline as they mainly enrolled students who could not gain admission to “elite universities”, while religious schools attracted students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds with fewer qualifications (Ahmad, 1993).

Since 1984, and particularly since 2000, there has been a significant surge in the number of foundation universities. Despite the increase in staff and student enrolment during the 1990s, public universities still outnumbered foundation universities (Birler, 2012; Öztürk, 2019), with only 20 foundation universities until the 2000s. In the new millennium, however, their number experienced a sharp increase, tripling during the first decade of the 2000s (Birler, 2012).

THE AKP YEARS OF HIGHER EDUCATION—YEARS OF “JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT” IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The AKP has been in power since 2002, during which time it has brought about significant transformations in Turkey. Numerous studies demonstrate significant changes in the party’s representation of itself and its policies during this period (Toktamış, 2021; Yılmaz & Bashirov, 2018). Erdoğan and his close associates initiated reform efforts that established a new political platform, appealing to the centre-right while also accommodating Islamist voters (Ceran, 2020). European Union (EU) accession talks provided the AKP with an opportunity to implement its political agenda, which aimed to bring the state under control by aligning with the EU’s demands. Turkey had to implement extensive political and judicial reforms focused on establishing democratic oversight, transparency, and legislation prioritising human rights and civil freedoms to qualify for EU membership (Zürcher, 2017). According to Arat “... a process of democratic backsliding began around 2010, and the regime moved steadily in an authoritarian and conservative direction in the following years. While it is impossible to pinpoint dates of regime change precisely because of the incremental nature of the backsliding process, scholars working on Turkey had begun defining its political regime as ‘competitive authoritarian’ by 2015 ... and, over the next few years, referred to it increasingly as ‘authoritarian’” (Arat, 2022, p. 912).

Contrary to the expectations of the liberal theory, which suggests that the expansion of higher education leads to increased democratic

potential and decreased authoritarianism, under AKP rule, the remarkable growth of higher education coincided with the expansion and intensification of authoritarian rule (Alemdaroğlu, 2022). In the academic year 2023–2024, there were 207 universities, 129 of which are public, 75 of which are foundation universities, and four of which are foundation vocational schools.¹⁰ Because the AKP has never been shy about behaving opportunistically, its educational perspective is always some combination of neoliberalism and conservatism to varying degrees, depending on the requirements of the time. At the beginning of its tenure, the AKP government reinforced the establishment of new foundation universities. The elimination of the mandate to establish a faculty of sciences or humanities for a new foundation university led to a surge in their number, encouraging shareholders to open new departments that enhance collaboration between the industry and the university. The number of professions-oriented universities, particularly those focusing on health sciences, medical training, and vocational schools, has experienced significant exponential growth.

Another facet of the AKP era's agenda for higher education involves the Islamisation of the education system. Erdoğan's project of raising pious generations, which he has spoken of on several occasions, was not only manifested in the religiousisation of primary, secondary, and high school education but also in the Islamisation of higher education. The giant size mosques on campuses were erected on the demand of Erdoğan, cancelling cafeteria lunches during Ramadan, invitations known to be forced to attend Friday prayers, opening Quran courses and assigning spiritual advisers to public dormitories, and the increasing role of the Presidency of Religious Affairs in universities (Tekerek, 2023) are some examples of this Islamisation. Birler (2012) argues that one of the defining features of the AKP era has been the opening of theology faculties in foundation universities. These faculties show how foundation universities transitioned from simply commodifying education to actively supporting a religious/conservative/Islamist agenda that aligns with Turkey's neoliberal economic system. Foundation universities belonging to foundations established by individuals and companies known to be Islamist are another important characteristic of this epoch. As noted by Birler (2012, p. 147) "[e]mphasizing their commitment to Islamic values in their strategic

¹⁰ <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> *Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi*, Retrieved 15 February 2024.

plans, these FUs [foundation universities] do not differ in terms of their reliance on student tuition fees and the accountability of their financial outputs. In this regard, they represent the hegemonic formula of neoliberalism: political conservatism combined with market liberalism”. Other Islamist foundations such as Önder İmam Hatipliler Derneği, İlim Yayma Cemiyeti, Ensar Vakfı, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Vakfı, and Türkiye Gençlik Vakfı are involved in higher education by providing scholarships and accommodation options for students.¹¹

The most prominent example of the Islamisation of higher education, and even the takeover of universities by religious sects, is the Gülen sect, with which Erdoğan’s AKP was once closely associated. As Tee (2016) explained, Fethullah Gülen advocates for his followers to gain influence in civil society (and in the bureaucracy) rather than seeking power directly through public parliamentary channels. Gülen’s supporters achieved a significant presence in the bureaucracy, police force, judiciary, media, and Turkey’s economy until a rift with the AKP in late 2013. As Değirmencioglu (2012) stated, “Gülen schools served as a springboard for the Gülen movement in Turkey. In less than 20 years, the Gülen movement built a network of schools, tutorial institutions, student dormitories and guesthouses, and several publishing companies, as well as a major daily newspaper, several radio and television channels, and a news agency. This expansion and the power it generated inspired other religious movements to start their own schools and student housing arrangements” (p.186).

Universities never completely regained full autonomy and freedom after the 1980 coup, nor did academics achieve satisfactory working conditions. Nevertheless, sporadic assaults on scholars or research subjects intensified to a whole new level in 2016. Following the publication of an open letter titled “We Will Not Be a Party to This Crime!” addressed to the Turkish state, urging an end to violence and human rights violations in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Erdoğan accused the signatory academics (known as “Academics for Peace”) of treason, branding them as “ignorant”, “so-called intellectuals”, “dark forces”, and even likening

¹¹ The pro-government Yeni Şafak newspaper has advertised certain religious foundations providing inexpensive accommodation for university students under the guise of news: <https://www.yenisafak.com/ekonomi/konforlu-ve-fiyatları-daha-uygun-vakif-yurtları-cep-yakmıyor-3843171> Konforlu ve fiyatları daha uygun: Vakıf yurtları cep yakmıyor, 15 August 2022. Retrieved 14 February 2024.

them to a “fifth column”. In response to Erdoğan’s remarks, the Board of Higher Education swiftly issued a statement asserting that the peace petition could not be considered a protected exercise of academic freedom. Subsequently, academics were detained, and their residences were raided by anti-terror police (Abbas & Zalta, 2017).

15 July 2016 marked another significant turning point in the country. Following an unsuccessful coup attempt, President Erdoğan declared a state of emergency, which lasted until July 2018, during which 37 statutory decrees were issued. These successive decrees brought about permanent changes to the universities (Tekin, 2019) and eroded what remained of their institutional autonomy (Taştan et al., 2020). Amid this prolonged state of emergency (see Tekin’s chapter in this book), the government abolished rectorate elections, granting the president the authority to appoint rectors. Through statutory decrees, the largest purge in universities in the history of the republic took place: 6,081 academics were dismissed from universities without explanation or due process of law.¹² All 1,576 deans from public and private universities were required to resign from their positions, and academics were subjected to months-long travel bans without justification (Aydın et al., 2021). Additionally, 15 FUs, allegedly affiliated with the Gülen sect, were seized, and their students were forced to enrol in other universities without informed consent, often as “special students”, with some even compelled to attend segregated classes (Namer et al., 2018).

Four hundred and six academics who signed the peace petition were also dismissed through statutory decrees.¹³ Despite the Constitutional Court’s ruling that the petition is a form of freedom of expression, many of them have not been reinstated. Some administrative courts have rejected all applications, while others have ruled in favour of reinstatement. However, a significant number of the petitioners who were reinstated were subsequently dismissed again due to appeals made by the universities. The essential values of higher education like academic freedom, university autonomy, or campus integrity have been violated repeatedly since the state of emergency. In addition to direct interventions carried out by the state and state-appointed university leaderships,

¹² <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/node/705> Retrieved 20 February 2024.

¹³ Rights Violations Against “Academics for Peace” <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/node/314> Retrieved 20 February 2024.

academics are also negatively affected by the atmosphere of oppression and fear (Hünler et al., 2024; Taştan & Örddek, 2019).

CONCLUSION

These recurring cycles of restrictions and interventions on universities have had a detrimental impact on higher education. They have hindered the creation of safe environments for critical discourse, with political authorities lacking the intention or strategy to foster democratic spaces that encourage academic freedom and university autonomy. Instead, educational regulations and practices are increasingly centralised, with statutory and presidential decrees assuming the role of legislation, particularly after the coup attempt. The erosion of the rule of law, coupled with the arbitrary nature of political decisions and implementations, has propelled the regime in a more totalitarian direction. This contraction of democratic spaces is central to the post-state of emergency period.

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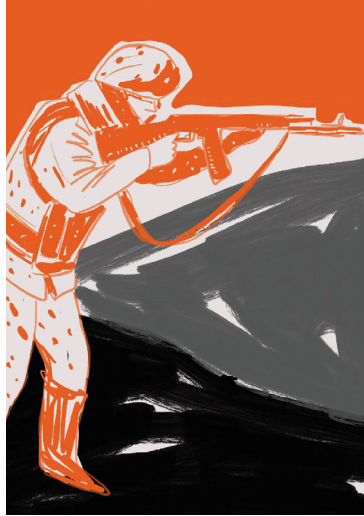




CHAPTER 19

The Military in Turkish Politics: The Centennial Balance Sheet and the Legacy for the Next Century

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INTRODUCTION

The military has been one of the most influential actors in Turkish political life and has held a decisive position within the institutional architecture of the state and among its apparatuses of coercion. For decades, the military has held various sources of legal, institutional, ideological, and economic power, including through the National Security Council (MGK), the General Staff Presidency, martial law and state of emergency (OHAL), the Supreme Military Council (YAŞ), the military judiciary, education in military schools, high military expenditures, the military industry, the military's economic ventures through the Armed Forces Mutual Assistance Foundation (*Ordu Yardımlaşma Kurumu*, OYAK), and the national security ideology and Kemalism (Akça, 2010; İnşel & Bayramoğlu, 2004).

Ever since the 27 May 1960 coup, this power has become more institutionalised with each subsequent military intervention. Bringing the military under the control of civilian political authority has been one of the main issues on the Turkish political agenda, especially in the last four decades following the 1980 military coup. Beginning in 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has brought the military under the control of civilian power through a combination of legal reforms and police-judiciary-centred repression mechanisms. However, this has not brought about democratic civilian control or an end to militarist policies.

In this chapter, I examine how the position and practices of the military within the political sphere and the state have been shaped in various sub-periods of the 100-year history of the republic. The causes and processes of military coups, and the practices of military regimes, were likewise formed within the sociopolitical power relations of these periods. Moreover, the various political-ideological or professional divisions and differentiations within the military, as well as the relations between the state apparatuses (especially between the apparatuses of coercion) are also important for understanding the position of the military in the political sphere.

LATE OTTOMAN AND EARLY REPUBLICAN PERIOD: THE MILITARY IN THE MAKING OF TURKISH CAPITALIST NATION-STATE

Like in many other parts of the world, the nineteenth century saw the rise of dependent capitalism in the Ottoman Empire, which also included the formation of a new centralised, capitalist state. Like all the other state institutions, the military also underwent significant changes in terms of organisation, training, technology, and sociopolitical functions. While new internal security apparatuses like the police and the gendarmerie were established as part of state restructuring, the military remained at the forefront of internal security functions. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, amid various internal and external wars including World War I and the War of Independence, the military became the central force in social, political, and economic life. The introduction of compulsory military service played a major role in transforming the relationship between the state and its citizens. Additionally, officers became politicised and actively engaged in national political affairs (Ergut, 2004; Turfan, 2000).

During the single-party period of the Republic of Turkey, the military continued to play a central role in sociopolitical control and internal security practices, but it operated under the control and guidance of the “civilian” political power. The struggle for national liberation was led by a power bloc consisting of Muslim-Turkish merchants, large landowners, local notables, and civil and military bureaucracy. While the military had a significant role in the War of Independence, its loyalty to the national will, specifically to the political power represented by the Congresses and the Grand National Assembly in Ankara, was consistently emphasised. The focus during this time was on establishing a regular army and overcoming divisions within the military (Çitçi, 2006, pp. 20–27).

The power struggle among political elites between 1923 and 1927, just after the declaration of the republic, also centred on control of the armed forces. In late 1923, a legal regulation was put in place to prohibit individuals from simultaneously holding the positions of officer and deputy in order to undermine the power of influential generals who were prominent figures leading the opposition in parliament, and weaken the opposition’s influence within the military. This led to the purging of opposition figures and the establishment of a more harmonious relationship between civilian power and the military, as often seen in single-party

authoritarian political regimes. The military gained a certain autonomy within the state and strengthened centralisation under the leadership of the Chief of General Staff. During this period, the Chief of General Staff held decision-making authority, while the Ministry of National Defence provided logistical support. Key steps included transforming the General Staff from a ministry to a presidency under the President of the Republic and granting autonomy to the armed forces through the Law on the Supreme Military Council, in charge of appointments and promotions, which consisted of 13 military officers out of 16 members. As a result, the military not only became a key player in military affairs but also influential in domestic and foreign politics (Bayramoğlu, 2004, pp. 59–73).

However, the republican regime's social base was severely limited, particularly among the small and medium peasantry, who made up the majority of the population, and the still relatively small working class. The regime relied heavily on the use of force due to its weak popular consent. Preventing and containing the mobilisation of workers and peasants was a priority for the single-party governments, which sought rapid capital accumulation and the creation of a national Sunni Muslim-Turkish bourgeoisie (Keyder, 1987, pp. 71–116). The containment of the Kurds, who resisted both administrative centralisation and the Sunni-Turkish cultural nation-building which denied Kurdish identity, was another main concern. The military played a vital role in repressing and maintaining control over these social forces also due to the limited capacity of the police forces. "Therefore, in terms of controlling the social and political opposition, the regime's army had to be both strong and subordinate to the political regime. The military had to be both kept out of politics in the narrow sense and politically functional in the broad sense" (Akça, 2023b, pp. 48–49).

The military also functioned as an ideological apparatus in the construction of the "acceptable citizen" of the new regime and in the production of docile and hardworking bodies. The main ideological framework of the regime consisted of an organicist understanding of society in which class and cultural differences were ignored within the framework of a solidarist-corporatist society-state-politics imaginary (Parla, 1993), and a Sunni-Muslim-Turk ethno-religious nationalism and national identity construction that also included the limitation of and control over the public uses of religion through policies of secularism (Ünlü, 2018; see also Öktem's chapter in this book). In this period, when literacy and schooling rates were low, the function of education

and the press as an ideological apparatus was also limited. Censorship also functioned as an ideological apparatus, first on male citizens and then on women within the patriarchal family structure (Altınay, 2004).

FROM THE 1950S TO THE 1980S: CLASS POLITICS AND THE MILITARY INTERVENTIONS

In the period from the late 1950s to the 1980s, the coercive mechanisms and apparatuses of the state were decisive in governing class relations at the economic and political levels. During this period, when the institutional, technological, and organisational capacity of the police apparatus was still limited in terms of its functions of social and political control, surveillance, and repression (Genç Yılmaz, 2020), the military had a decisive position within the institutional architecture of the state. Military interventions and subsequent military regimes, martial law, political control through the National Security Council (MGK), the use of military units in internal security and collective action control were among the main mechanisms.

The 27 May 1960 coup and military regime (May 1960 to October 1961) was a response to the crisis of the populist developmentalist project of a hegemonic bloc consisting of large landowners, the commercial bourgeoisie, and the small and medium peasantry, established under the political leadership of the Democrat Party (DP) in the 1950s. The DP's inflationary and unplanned policies to overcome the economic crisis and its move to an open repressive regime based on the majoritarian power in the parliament created a deep political crisis. (Akça, 2014a, pp. 259–275; Eroğul, 2003). The first military coup in the history of the republic was carried out by junior and mid-ranking officers. The DP's strategy to control the military by appointing high command members closely aligned with the party and the government proved unsuccessful against this non-hierarchical coup. Although there was a proto-fascist-corporatist radical wing among the coup-makers, aiming to stay in power for a longer period to undertake radical socioeconomic and political-administrative structural reforms, they were purged on 13 November 1960 (Akyaz, 2002, pp. 140–148).

The military regime was based on a new hegemonic project and bloc that was put forward in the second half of the 1950s. This hegemonic project had three pillars: an accumulation strategy based on import-substitution industrialisation (ISI) and planned development, social justice

based on the welfare state, and a relatively democratic political regime (including fundamental rights and freedoms, the principle of separation of powers, and independence of the judiciary). The coup was based on a social bloc consisting of the industrial bourgeoisie, the working class and the urban middle classes (e.g. students, professional middle classes), which were to be brought together within the framework of this new hegemonic project. Here, there was a political rationality based on security logic. Accordingly, economic growth based on planned industrialisation combined with the welfare state and the principle of social justice would prevent class conflicts, and thus a political regime that recognised rights and freedoms would be acceptable. The main objective was to prevent class conflicts by the economic inclusion of the working class. What prevailed in both the coup plotters and the social bloc that supported the coup was a kind of modernist-developmental optimism that capitalist development, when rationally planned, would not lead to class conflicts. What made this strategic assessment possible was the fact that the demands of the working class movement were still economic-corporative in nature. The main works of the military regime, particularly the establishment of the State Planning Organisation (DPT) and the 1961 Constitution, aimed at institutionalising this new capitalist hegemonic project. Nevertheless, the bourgeoisie and right-wing political representatives of the period, unwilling to compromise their narrow, short-term economic-corporative interests in favour of their broader political-hegemonic interests, were not convinced by this formulation. In particular, there was opposition to what the welfare state, social justice, and planning meant, as well as to the right to strike, and collective bargaining (Akça, 2014a, pp. 276–314). One of the main concerns of the military regime was to control the unlimited power of the executive through regulations such as the strengthening of the parliament and the establishment of the Senate and the Constitutional Court. The symbol of punishing the authoritarian regime established by the unlimited executive was the execution of the DP Prime Minister Menderes and two ministers.

The military regime also increased the political and economic power of the military. It carried out a comprehensive purge in the military within two months to reorganise the internal organisational structure. The General Staff was attached to the Prime Ministry in 1944 and to the Ministry of National Defence in 1949. With the 1961 Constitution, it was again made responsible to the prime minister. It established the MGK with the Constitution, which constituted the national security pillar

of this new state form as a safety valve against both executive deviations and the rise of social struggles. It also established OYAK which would become one of the largest conglomerates in Turkey and would form an additional mechanism to integrate the military into the capitalist order (Akça, 2023b, pp. 54–55).

The 1960s was a period when new dynamics emerged in Turkish politics, as socialist, revolutionary leftist social and political movements gained momentum. Workers, teachers, intellectuals, university youth, and the professional middle classes became more politicised and engaged in a struggle for rights (Atılğan, 2015, pp. 606–621). The demand for radical social change and left-wing politicisation also found a certain resonance within the military (Ulus, 2016). Towards the end of the 1960s, this politicisation of Turkish society was the main agenda of all wings of the power bloc: the bourgeoisie, political elites, and military elites. The ruling Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*, AP) argued that there was a crisis of ungovernability in the country and that the coercive capacity of the state was limited due to the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the 1961 Constitution. The solution was the authoritarianisation of the state without resorting to fascism or military dictatorship. However, the AP's hegemonic power with broad social support began to dissolve during and after the 1969 elections. On the one hand, there were political ruptures (the establishment of the Democratic Party) and the emergence of new radical right-wing political parties (the National Order Party and the Nationalist Movement Party), and on the other hand, the first crisis of ISI and the discontent of different segments of the capitalist class came together (Akça, 2017, pp. 254–258; Demirel, 2004, pp. 51–60).

However, the AP's thesis of "ungovernability" paradoxically undermined itself because it was shared by all the putschist cliques, so the AP itself was unable to govern. On the way to 12 March, there were three different currents within the military, each envisioning an intervention: those who advocated a non-capitalist statist-nationalist-revolutionary path; those who maintained the modernist-developmental optimism of 27 May and wanted the economic-social reforms envisaged by 27 May to be implemented; and those who advocated not reforms but the restoration of law, order and security through state's authoritarian measures (Akça, 2017, pp. 259–261). The AP's strategy of rapprochement with the military through anti-communism, effective use of the MGK, election of a military figure as President of the Republic, and meeting the demands of the military for equipment, weapons, housing, barracks, and

their employee rights failed (Cizre-Sakallıoğlu, 1993, pp. 59–92). On 12 March 1971, a memorandum signed by the Chief of General Staff and three force commanders was handed to the President of the Republic and the presidents of the parliament and the Senate, and the government was forced to resign. Until the 1973 elections, there was an interim regime in which parliament was open but technocratic governments were formed under the supervision and control of the military.

Although the text of the memorandum and the interim regime initially involved both the reformist and authoritarian groups within the military, the bureaucratic-authoritarian group quickly prevailed. With the 12 March 1971 military intervention, the dream of governing capitalist development through the economic and political inclusion of the working class was abandoned and an exclusionary governing strategy based on the bureaucratic-authoritarian state came into play (Akça, 2017). The main practices of this interim regime were the suppression of the revolutionary leftist social and political opposition under the martial law, the purging of radical leftist elements in the military, the revival of ISI policies, and the creation of an authoritarian state that limited democratic rights and freedoms through constitutional amendments. (Aydın & Taşkın, 2014, pp. 223–228). The declaration of martial law meant the *de facto* transfer of daily policing authority to the military. Socialists, revolutionary youth organisations, and intellectuals were the targets of the arrests, torture, and imprisonment that followed. Three revolutionary youth leaders (Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan, and Hüseyin İnan) were executed after the AP-dominated parliament approved the martial law court's decision.

The autonomous power of the military within the state and political structure was increased through the empowerment of the military in the MGK and YAŞ, and the introduction of martial law. New centralisation and control mechanisms were introduced to prevent non-hierarchical tendencies: the establishment of the Military High Administrative Court (AYİM), the first systematic definition of Kemalism in military books, and the use of OYAK to ensure socioeconomic homogeneity within the military through the economic benefits it provided to soldiers (Akyaz, 2002, pp. 331–401).

The military coup on 12 September 1980, and the subsequent military regime until 6 November 1983, marked a new era characterised by repression, violence, and a radical restructuring of the system. This coup was both a consequence of and a response to the escalating crises in capital

accumulation regime based on ISI and hegemony that had plagued the country since the late 1970s. Capitalist organisations in the post-1977 period blamed high wages and strong trade unions, which triggered an open and fierce class struggle. Another aspect of class politics was the rise of the revolutionary left movement, despite its fragmented organisational structure and ideological-political crisis. The ruling classes, right-wing political elites, and military leaders of the time perceived this crisis as a threat to the state, the constitutional order, and the security of life and property. Between 1978 and 1980, the transition to a new accumulation regime based on neoliberal economic policies was the main economic agenda for both the Turkish capitalist class and institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. The economic and political disciplining of the working class and the revolutionary leftist movement was a clear precondition for the implementation of the policies envisaged in the IMF-guided stability packages signed first in early 1978 and then on 24 January 1980. However, the two main centrist parties of parliamentary politics, CHP and AP, could not build a hegemonic project and bloc that could implement these policies and form a strong government. This meant that there was a crisis of hegemony as well as a crisis of capital accumulation (Akça, 2014b, pp. 14–16).

During this period, militarism came to the fore in its various manifestations: the use of political violence by the state with its legal and illegal apparatuses and the fascist (*ülküücü*) movement acting in organic relations with the state, the military's assumption of the function of daily social control and surveillance through martial law, the military's efforts to control both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary political activities through the MGK and the national security policy, and finally the direct seizure of power through the coup d'état on 12 September 1980.

The coup and military regime received support from various sectors of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes which sought law and order. The press and the Turkish right also backed the coup. The leaders of the coup and their supporters believed that the working class, youth, intellectuals, and the left were responsible for the pre-12 September crisis and aimed to prevent further politicisation of these groups to ensure that it would never occur again. This was crucial for the implementation of a new capital accumulation regime based on neoliberal policies, as reflected in the 24 January decisions. A key part of this agenda was the dismantling of organised labour, particularly the trade unions. The coup specifically targeted

the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions (DİSK) which advocated for independent class politics. DİSK leaders and representatives were arrested and tortured, and many were imprisoned for long periods. DİSK itself was eventually shut down. Political party activities were immediately halted, followed by the closure of all political parties.

While the state's short-term strategy against these social forces involved executions, torture, violence, and repression, the long-term plan of 12 September was to restructure the institutional architecture of the state in a way that would weaken the politicisation of the subordinated groups. The 1982 included unprecedented restrictions on fundamental, political, social, and trade union rights and freedoms, ostensibly to safeguard "the survival of the state, national security, public order, and public morality". The objective of establishing a strong state, particularly a strong executive, led to an imbalance of power, with the executive assuming dominance over the legislature and judiciary. Decision-making mechanisms within the executive were further centralised in institutions such as the prime minister's office, the presidency (which gained enhanced authority), and the National Security Council. To bolster the executive's power relative to the legislature, governance through decrees was prioritised over legislation. The erosion of judicial independence also weakened judicial oversight. Political parties found their ability to engage with society curtailed, as they were subjected to state control, limiting their activities and rendering them more susceptible to closure. The adoption of a new electoral law, featuring a 10 per cent national threshold, abandoned the principle of fair representation in favour of executive stability. The autonomy of universities was abolished, as they were entirely subordinated to the Higher Education Council (YÖK) and transformed into state entities. The 12 September military regime constructed an authoritarian state, with the military occupying a central role. The military bureaucracy was designated as a third executive branch, alongside the government and the president. The National Security Council was strengthened and empowered in all respects (Akça, 2023c).

THE MULTIPLE CRISES OF THE 1990S AND THE REPRODUCTION OF THE NEOLIBERAL NATIONAL SECURITY STATE

After 1983, the New Right politics of the Motherland Party (ANAP), led by Turgut Özal, did not bring about any significant changes in terms of the state's structure, the political regime, or the military's political power. In the 1990s, three factors were decisive in the military's reproduction of its active position in the state and political sphere in the form of the neoliberal national security state: the hegemony crisis of neoliberalism, the rise of political Islamism, and the militarisation of the Kurdish question (Akça, 2014b, pp. 23–29). The 1990s witnessed a crisis of hegemony with symptomatic expressions such as the crisis of representation in parliamentary politics, the fragmentation of the centre-right and left, and weak coalition governments. In this period, no political actor was able to produce hegemonic projects that could address the country's problems of class and identity politics, nor could they win the consent of broad social segments. The centre-right and left-wing political parties, which fully embraced the neoliberal policies originating from the IMF and the World Bank, could not solve the class dynamics of the hegemony crisis, and they accepted or even actively supported the military's moves to securitise the Kurdish question and the rise of political Islam (Öngen, 2002).

Politicising the vacuum created by the existing hegemonic crisis, the political Islamist Welfare Party (RP) gained the support of both some winners (the pious small-medium size bourgeoisie) and losers (the most precarious informal sections of the working class) of neoliberal capitalism, as well as the professional Islamist middle classes aspiring to rise up and the pious Kurds, through the discourse of the fairness of an Islamic social, economic, and political order (Gülalp, 2003). The RP's political Islamist hegemonic project was based on a culturalist and moral critique of monopolistic capitalism, Westernism (anti-US and anti-EU), and Kemalism. The RP, which came to power in a coalition government, displayed practices of Islamisation attempts in the bureaucracy, education, and national and international economy. This situation increased the active interventions of the military in the political sphere, which saw political Islamism as a threat and a security issue. On 28 February 1997, the military intervened in politics through MGK, receiving the support of the

determinant sections of the bourgeoisie represented by mainly three businessman associations, namely TÜSİAD, TOBB, and TİSK, trade unions representing organised labour to a large extent (DİSK, Türk-İş), and a significant section of the urban middle classes (Akça, 2014b, p. 27). The 28 February process aimed to destroy the political, economic, and cultural power of political Islamism and its influence in the fields of education and media, and to redesign Turkish politics around the centrist parties. As a result of the crackdown, the coalition government was dissolved in May 1997, the RP was dissolved by the Constitutional Court in January 1998 and its successor, the Virtue Party (FP), was dissolved after the 1999 elections (Bayramoğlu, 2001). During the 28 February process, the military introduced new tools and strategies to monitor Islamist activities. The General Staff created the Western Working Group (*Batı Çalışma Grubu*) and the Prime Ministry established the Crisis Management Centre (*Başbakanlık Kriz Yönetim Merkezi*). At the same time, efforts to gain active consent from society were intensified. The military provided briefings to MPs, university representatives, media personnel, employer organisations, and bar associations. To further control internal security, the military implemented the EMASYA protocol, which ensured that all security units involved in internal security operations and regions would be subordinate to the highest Land Forces Command unit in their respective regions (Cizre & Çınar, 2003).

In the 1990s, one of the most decisive factors for the power of the military in the state and political sphere was the militarisation of the Kurdish question. In this period, the “low-intensity warfare” strategy was adopted against the PKK, within which the organisational and technical restructuring of the army, the de-population of residential areas through forced migration to control rural areas, the expansion of the village guard system, the establishment of illegal structures such as JİTEM, unsolved murders, and human rights violations became a part of everyday life. Provinces with a predominantly Kurdish population were governed under a state of emergency between 1987 and 2002. The closure of the political sphere to the Kurdish question was also realised through practices such as the crackdown on Kurdish political parties and politicians, arrests, the lifting of parliamentary immunity, and the closure of political parties (Balta Paker & Akça, 2013; Göral, 2016).

The military played a central role in shaping the security policy of the neoliberal national security state. However, other key components of this state apparatus included the state security courts, higher judicial

bodies like the Constitutional Court, and the police organisation. Beginning in the 1980s, the police force underwent a restructuring process as a result of which it became increasingly militarised, both in terms of their weapons and vehicles and in terms of their organisational structure and methods of intervention. They were equipped with specialised units, such as the Police Special Operations Teams for combating the PKK, and Riot Squads for managing social protests and crowd control in urban areas. (Berksoy, 2007; Genç Yılmaz, 2020, pp. 148–150). This authoritarian and militaristic state form and security policy also targeted the growing labour movement (particularly the public labour movement), the student movement, and the radical left of the decade.

THE AKP PERIOD: AUTHORITARIAN CIVILIANISATION UNDER A POLICE-AND-JUDICIARY-CENTRED SECURITY STATE

The 2000s, particularly the post-2002 era under the AKP, witnessed the undermining of the autonomous political power of the military and the implementation of significant civilianisation reforms. The relationship between the military and the government underwent a restructuring that involved both constitutional and legal reforms and coercion-repression mechanisms through police operations and political trials (Kars Kaynar, 2023). The main two factors that characterised the general sociopolitical framework of the changing military-politics-state relations were the hegemonic capacity of the AKP and the course of the Kurdish question (Akça, 2019, 2023a).

The period from 2002 to 2013 was characterised by the existence of the AKP as a hegemonic political actor with an overarching hegemonic project and strategy, and the overt or covert existence of relative non-conflict and resolution processes in the Kurdish question. AKP's hegemonic project articulated neoliberal economic policies, political reformism equated with civilianisation, and a foreign policy in line with the United States and the EU. Thanks to this hegemonic project, AKP has actively gained the consent of most sections of the bourgeoisie, the new working class, the urban and rural poor, both conservative and partly “secular-modern” sections of the urban middle classes, Sunni-conservative Turks and Kurds, the liberal and even partly leftist intelligentsia, and the United States and the EU (Akça, 2014b; Özden et al., 2017). This hegemonic

power and capacity made AKP's political struggle against the military possible. The establishment of its political hegemony at the state level also depended on this struggle.

One of the most important issues that would weaken the AKP's hand in its struggle with the military was the Kurdish question. The AKP tried to keep the Kurdish problem under control by simultaneously using partial recognition of identity, limited cultural rights, socioeconomic opportunities, emphasis on Sunni Islamic identity, political repression, military operations, and negotiations (Aktan, 2014; Çiçek, 2011). Within the sociopolitical context facilitated by these two factors, the AKP first engaged in constitutional-legal reforms aimed at civilianisation, using the leverage of EU membership. The legal reforms were mainly aimed at breaking the power and influence of the MGK in the political arena and significantly weakening this legal-institutional mechanism in the hands of the military. In response, the military sought to maintain its influence by using the statements and actions of the Chief of General Staff to shape public opinion. Consequently, the General Staff assumed many of the functions previously held by the MGK, filling the void left by its diminished power (Akça, 2019).

Second, the AKP waged a political war through the “Ergenekon” and “Sledgehammer” (*Balyoz*) police operations and political judicial trials (Kars Kaynar, 2023). In these trials, a wide range of individuals—officers (including former chiefs of staff and force commanders), journalists, politicians, lawyers, businessmen, and academics (see Hünler's chapter in this book)—were arrested, tried, and given heavy sentences, including life imprisonment. The conformity of these political trials to the law and principles of a fair trial has always been a topic of debate. Finally, between 2014 and 2019, the Constitutional Court ruled that there were rights violations in both cases and released the defendants. Undoubtedly, one of the primary objectives of these political trials was to neutralise the AKP's political opponents, specifically the Kemalist-nationalist cadres within the military. Decisions on promotions and retirements within the military hierarchy were influenced by the Ergenekon/Balyoz cases. The YAŞ meetings that followed the trials saw the removal of a significant number of officers based on being suspects and defendants, even before the court's verdicts (Kars Kaynar, 2023).

This process was led through a new neoliberal security state centred on the police and the judiciary, which was also built to balance and subsequently replace the military-centred neoliberal national security state. The

police budget and personnel were expanded, its technological infrastructure for surveillance and control strengthened, and its legal powers increased in areas such as the use of weapons, force, and monitoring telecommunications. In other words, the police became autonomous from and substituted the military in terms of sociopolitical control and internal security functions (Berksoy, 2012, pp. 82–86; Genç Yılmaz, 2020, pp. 150–153). Another critical apparatus of the new security state was the judiciary, particularly the specially authorised courts. Political trial processes, in which political opponents were criminalised as terrorists under enemy law and exceptional trial procedures, were at the centre of the political struggle with the military. The police operations and political trials aimed at uncovering alleged coup attempts were made possible through a collaboration with the Gülen sect, which held influential positions within the police and judiciary (Akça, 2014b, pp. 38–39).

The sociopolitical context after 2013 was marked by a crisis of hegemony and state, which also involved a crisis of capital accumulation. The post-2013 crisis of capital accumulation, the crisis of economic redistribution, the Gezi uprising, the militarisation of the Kurdish question and the impact of the autonomisation tendencies in foreign policy on the AKP's international alliances were decisive in the contraction of its hegemonic capacity. Additionally, there was a significant militarisation through the implementation of a new military-political strategy in relation to the Kurdish question (see Şimşek's chapter in this book), starting in the summer of 2015, as well as the coup attempt on 15 July 2016. To address these crises, it became crucial to gain control of the coercive apparatuses and restructure the political regime and state. Throughout this process, the security apparatuses were reshaped and their position within the state's institutional framework was altered. The transition to a super-presidential political regime under the oppressive conditions of the emergency rule in 2017 undermined all the political and legal checks and balance mechanisms. The remilitarisation of the Kurdish question and the introduction of a new military-political strategy in 2015 were significant in both establishing the new authoritarian political regime and understanding the changing roles and functions assigned to the military (Akça, 2023a).

The state crisis that accompanied the crisis of hegemony emerged both through the failure to build a new line that would give the state apparatus an institutional and ideological internal integrity and through the struggle of different power groups for control of the state apparatus. The

main development that exacerbated the state crisis was the deepening of the conflict with the Gülenists, the allies of the previous period. The most violent moment of the state crisis was undoubtedly the 15 July 2016 coup attempt. The new alliances that had to be forged within the state further deepened the institutional fragmentation of the state, and the state crisis manifested itself as the “parcelling out of the state” (Bekmen, 2023). The various power networks within the state, especially within the apparatus of coercion, such as the ultra-nationalists, deep-state clusters, and the various religious communities were the main actors in this parcelling (Akça, 2023b, pp. 75–76).

After the coup attempt on 15 July 2016, the military’s autonomous political power was dismantled and placed under civilian control. This was achieved through extensive legal and institutional regulations, as well as political trials conducted during the state of emergency. The government issued decrees to carry out a large-scale purge of state institutions and public services, while simultaneously restructuring important state organisations. The Ministry of National Defence took over the Force Commands and the Chief of General Staff, while the Ministry of Interior took control of the Gendarmerie General Command and Coast Guard Command. The Secretariat General of the MGK, the Presidency of the National Intelligence Organisation (MİT), and the Presidency of Defence Industry were directly transferred to the Presidency. The General Staff’s powers were limited, including in areas such as promotions and inter-force coordination. The President of the Republic now has the authority to receive information directly from the Chief of General Staff, Force Commanders, and their subordinates, give direct orders to them, and immediately execute those orders without seeking approval from any other authority. The president also has decisive powers in the promotions and appointments of the military’s personnel. The YAŞ is now dominated by civilians, military schools have been closed, and military education has been transferred to the National Defence University, established under the Ministry of National Defence (see Akça et al., 2017). Consequently, the relationship between the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and civilian political power underwent a radical transformation. Military institutions and decision-making processes were centralised under the President and the Minister of National Defence, appointed by the president (Akça et al., 2017). Furthermore, the TSK underwent internal changes with the appointment of new personnel following the purges of tens of thousands of officers initiated during the state of emergency. The 15 July political

trials, in which hundreds of officers were tried, played a significant role in dismantling the military's autonomous political power (Kars Kaynar, 2023).

CONCLUSION: ONGOING FORMS OF MILITARISM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SECOND CENTURY OF THE REPUBLIC

As the Turkish Republic enters its second century, new forms of military politicisation under the super-presidential regime, heightened focus on militarisation in both foreign policy and the Kurdish issue, rapidly increasing military expenditures, a growing military industry, and the pervasive influence of ideological and cultural militarism in daily life and the political sphere remain central sociopolitical challenges.

The authority of civilian power over the military still contains various fragilities in terms of practical politics. First, an authoritarian-autocratic civilian control mechanism was established over the TSK within the framework of the super-presidential regime, dependent on the power of the president. Therefore, we are talking about a structure that is still closed to the democratic control of civil society and social actors, especially the parliament. Second, it is possible to say that the new super-presidential regime has turned the military into the object and the field of a new politicisation. In particular, the regime is trying to create a loyal officer profile through the mechanisms of retirement and promotion at the YAŞ, the use of career advancement as cooptation, interventions in military school entrance exams and the increase in the number of contract soldiers recruited from outside military schools (Kaya, 2020, pp. 10–19; Şahin, 2024). The fact that the crisis of hegemony and the crisis of the state necessitates alliances with the various power networks mentioned above in the political sphere and the state, and as a result, the existence of a neo-feudal parcelling in state institutions, brings up the possibility of the same situation regarding the military. The occasional news in the press about the organisation of various religious sects in the military and some form of “Kemalist” reactions to this (Şahin, 2023) should be seen as clues to this new politicisation dynamic. Third, although the police, gendarmerie and MİT have become more prominent and stronger in the architecture of the state's coercive apparatus, given that the crisis of hegemony and the crisis of the state still persists in Turkey, a political and democratic

solution to the Kurdish question is not on the horizon, and militarisation and securitisation are ongoing, the place of the military in the institutional architecture of the state and in internal security policies remains a live question.

A relatively new and powerful dynamic is the role of the military in foreign policy (see Sağlam's chapter in this book). Turkey's foreign policy has entered a process of militarisation, especially after 2013 (Ciftci, 2023; Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022). As of 2021, out of the 355,000 members of the Turkish armed forces, around 50,000 to 60,000 are serving beyond Turkey's borders (Erdem, 2021). The militarisation of foreign policy is a result of the security concerns triggered especially in the context of the Kurdish question and the quest to become a regional power to overcome the crisis of capital accumulation and hegemony. Operations Euphrates Shield in August 2016, Olive Branch in January 2018, Spring Shield in February 2020, and Peace Spring in October 2020 deployed the Turkish armed forces to a significant area in northern Syria. In May 2019, the Claw Operation against Iraqi Kurdistan was carried out due to security concerns over the Kurdish movement. In addition, a defence and foreign policy conceptualised by Cem Gürdeniz, a secular-nationalist (Ulusalci) admiral, in 2006 under the name *Mavi Vatan* (Blue Homeland), based on the military control of maritime areas in the Aegean, Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea through the use of military force, was also articulated by the Erdoğan government with an economic goal of accessing and controlling energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this area, Turkey started to use its military power much more intensively in foreign policy (Kaya, 2020, pp. 34–40). "Turkey's relations with countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, such as Greece, Egypt, and Israel, are also rhetorically or physically militarized through numbers of reciprocal and unilateral actions" (Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022, p. 26). In addition to its long-established military installations in Northern Cyprus, Albania, Afghanistan, and Kosovo, Turkey has recently established bases in Qatar, Somalia, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Syria, and Libya. It is currently conducting ongoing military operations in Syria, Iraq, and Libya. Its involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is particularly significant regarding the militarisation of foreign policy. When the NATO, UN, EU missions, and defence cooperation agreements with Albania, Azerbaijan, and Sudan are included, the picture in which the Turkish military plays a significant role becomes more complete (Adar et al., 2021).

In a context where the distinction between domestic and foreign policy has become increasingly blurred since the 2000s, it should not be denied that the new function of the military within the framework of the militarisation of foreign policy will also have consequences for domestic politics. If nothing else, the fact that “foreign policy has always been domesticated by [AKP] leaders as a critical issue in consolidating their position within Turkey’s internal power politics” (Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022, p. 27) will constitute one of the important axes of the militarisation of domestic politics in the forthcoming period. Whether this function in foreign policy will provide the military with a relatively autonomous room for manoeuvre in domestic politics, given the appropriate balance of power, is also a matter to be carefully monitored.

One of the most important forms of militarism in Turkey is military expenditures and the military industry. Turkey’s military expenditures have always been high but especially after the 1980 military coup they accelerated. After 1980, we can observe an almost continuous upward trend in military expenditures, with 2008 and 2015 marking specific turning points (Akça & Özden, 2021, pp. 18–25). In Turkey, the extra-budgetary Defence Industry Support Fund (SSDF), has had a significant impact on the military and especially equipment expenditures. The budget of the Fund jumped from 4.4 billion TL in 2015 to 76 billion TL in 2023 (Esin, 2023).

Although the building of a national military industry dates back to the 1970s, it has grown enormously especially since 2004. In 2004, to reduce dependency on foreign armaments, a model of domestic arms production replaced the model based on co-production through supply agreements. Since then, the rate of domestic procurement for the military’s needs rose from 25 per cent in 2003 to almost 80 per cent in 2023. The sector’s turnover, which was 1.337 billion USD in 2004, increased to 12.196 billion USD in 2022. Similarly, the total number of projects carried out by the SSB was 84 in 2004 yet exceeded 1,000 in 2024, going from almost 8 billion USD in value to 96.3 billion USD. The total export value of the sector rose from 196 million USD in 2004 to 5.545 billion USD in 2023. The number of companies in the defence industry grew from 56 in 2002 to more than 3000 in 2024 (SSB, 2024; Akça & Özden, 2021, pp. 34–44).

Last but not least, a strong militarism in the cultural-ideological field goes hand in hand with all these developments. An ideological climate in

which the use of military power is sanctified and normalised has developed around the existence of an economically powerful military industry and the frequent use of military power in foreign policy. Displaying the achievements of the military industry during election campaigns, accompanied by a discourse of techno-militarism, has become very effective in the political arena and is likely to continue.

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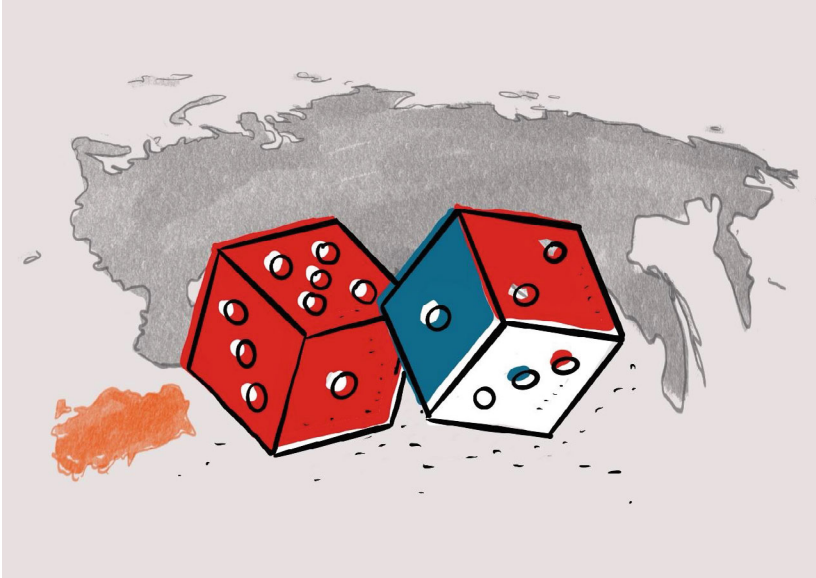




CHAPTER 20

Turkey–Russia Relations: Not an Alternative to the West but a Balancer

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INTRODUCTION

Relations between Turkey and Russia have had a significant impact on both states' self-definitions. From the Ottoman-Czarist rivalry to the Turkey-Soviet Union (USSR) relationship, to the present day relationship between Turkey and the Russian Federation, the development process has brought with it both continuities and ruptures.

In this context, this chapter examines the factors, historical dynamics and continuities that have shaped Turkey–Russia relations over the past century, since the establishment of the republic. To gain a comprehensive understanding of Turkey–Russia relations and to analyse their boundaries and development dynamics, it is beneficial to first examine the relations between Turkey and the USSR to then explore the factors that remain in the relations established with the Russian Federation.

TURKEY-USSR RELATIONS (1920–1991)

Years of Liberation (1923–1939)

The period between 1923 and 1939 was characterised by the challenges of establishing relations between the two countries. These challenges, which were intensified by the economic pressures of the time, had a significant impact on the bilateral relationship until the 1930s. Between 1930 and 1939, there was a notable shift towards establishing a foundation for cooperation, particularly in the economic sphere.

The primary objective of the foreign policy of the two countries was to establish a foundation based on the principles of recognition and survival. Turkey was established in 1923 following the defeat of allied states in the War of Independence, which began in 1919 (Tellal, 2016a). The USSR was established by the defeat of the White Army, which had been strengthened with the assistance of foreign powers, during the civil war. The circumstances of the two countries gave rise to a sense of vulnerability, with the possibility of being besieged or isolated from the international community.

Agreements between the two countries between 1920 and 1925 were primarily focused on border demarcation (Karakuş, 2023), and the aforementioned principles and concerns informed a non-aggression treaty signed in 1925 (Giritli, 1970). During this period, Turkey viewed the USSR as a source of support in addressing the Sheikh Said Uprising, the Mosul Question, and the unresolved issues with the West following

the Treaty of Lausanne (Tellal, 2016a). The agreement also held two significant implications for the USSR. First, although Moscow was able to secure its western border following the Locarno Treaty in 1925, its southern border remained uncertain. Second, although the Western countries recognised the USSR as a state, they retained exclusionary attitudes towards the USSR while regulating their relations among themselves reinforced the USSR's concerns. Thus, by promising to remain neutral in the face of third-party aggression and not to attack each other, Ankara and Moscow obtained a guarantee to deal with their own internal and external problems.

Additionally, the initial principle influenced relations during this period through the promotion of collaboration on an international scale. This principle was operationalised as follows. Primarily, both countries sought to obtain each other's approval when negotiating agreements with their neighbours or other countries. The practice of supporting each other, or at least informing each other beforehand, which began with the Treaty of Lausanne between Turkey and the USSR, persisted in this period as well (Bozdemir, 2019).

Subsequently, as the two states gradually guaranteed their border security and gained recognition, a third principle became active in their bilateral relations. The underlying rationale was that both parties would derive mutual benefit from a pragmatic approach. Although this principle was particularly evident in economic relations, it also manifested in the political sphere. First of all, with respect to the political sphere, the USSR followed a political line that included the Central Asian states during its establishment. The relations that these societies, the majority of which were Turkish and Muslim, would establish with Turkey carried the risk of threatening the order that the USSR wanted to establish. For this reason, Moscow not only secured its borders by establishing good relations with Ankara, but also ensured the prevention of turmoil within the country (Tellal, 2016a). Similarly, the Ankara government secured its eastern border by tolerating the establishment of Bolshevik rule in the Caucasus.

Another area where the principles of mutual benefit and pragmatism are clearly evident can be observed in the context of economic cooperation between the two countries. Turkey's economic shortcomings, coupled with limitations in available resources during the specified time period, reinforced its strategic alignment with the USSR. Indeed, the Trade Agreement of 1927 was succeeded by another in 1929. During

this period, exports of agricultural products from Turkey to its northern neighbour commenced. However, in contrast to the present situation, during this period, for instance, Turkey received an interest-free loan of 8 million dollars with a 20-year repayment period, which was used as collateral for the export of agricultural products. The loans received by Turkey were not solely financial, but also comprised technical equipment, the deployment of trained personnel to the country, and the establishment of factories (Hirst & Isci, 2020). These elements collectively served as a pivotal foundation for decades of interdependence and collaborative engagement between the two nations.

1945–1953: From Occupation Anxiety to Turkey Close to the West

A detailed examination of the postwar relations between Turkey and the USSR reveals that the relations remained largely frozen for eight years, constrained by the prevailing tension associated with Stalin's demands.

The demands that marked the relations were presented in such an environment and dynamic. In the wake of World War II, the advent of the Cold War and the USSR's encirclement by the United States compelled Moscow to pursue a range of strategies and avenues to maintain its position. One such demand was the control of the Istanbul and Dardanelles Straits, which the Soviet Union considered vital for its national security. However, the demands made to Turkey during the Stalin era also had an element of punishment (Družilovskiy, 2002). The USSR initially requested that Turkey modify the Montreux Treaty, which regulated the Straits regime. Secondly, the USSR declared its intention not to renew the Soviet-Turkish Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression, which had been signed in 1925 (Coş & Bilgin, 2010).

The USSR's demands from Turkey, particularly those concerning the Straits, resulted in a shift in Turkey's foreign policy that accelerated Ankara's rapprochement with the United States and the Western alliance (Kurban, 2014). In light of the aforementioned conditions, Turkey sought membership in NATO, in addition to the assistance it received from the United States (Tellal, 2016b). Conversely, given that Turkey became a member of NATO in 1952, it can be posited that two additional factors, beyond the USSR threat, rendered the alliance an attractive proposition for Turkey: the prospect of benefiting from the opportunities afforded by the alliance and the aspiration to become a part of the emerging global order (Isci, 2023).

*USSR as an Element of Balance in Relations with the West
(1953–1991)*

Nevertheless, the USSR's withdrawal of its demands after Stalin's death in 1953 created a period of relative diplomatic stability between the two countries. Turkey's accession to NATO in the post-World War II era paved the way for a new principle to be incorporated into its relations with the USSR. The USSR served as a counterbalance to the West. A more detailed examination of the relations within this framework reveals that some of the principles established during the founding period remained in place.

The US policy of containing the USSR in the Middle East, as outlined in the Eisenhower Doctrine, and Turkey's compliance with this policy, resulted in heightened tensions with Moscow. While Turkey became one of the participants of the Baghdad Pact in 1955 with the encouragement of the United States, the increasing influence of the Soviet Union in the region, particularly in Syria and Egypt, heightened the risk of conflict between Ankara and Moscow (Bagci, 2007). In 1957, the parties engaged in a confrontation over the Syrian Crisis, but the situation was de-escalated without a direct confrontation. Other factors that contributed to the strain in relations between Turkey and the USSR during this period included the U2 Crisis and the Jupiter Missile Tensions.

It is notable that, despite the persistence of these tensions, the principle of mutual interest/pragmatism, which was first articulated in the post-1953 founding period, remained in place throughout this period of diplomatic discord. Trade relations between the two countries underwent a significant recovery and continued to accelerate until 1991. While the USSR provided support to Turkey, particularly in the realm of heavy industry, Turkey continued to expand its agricultural exports to the North (Tellal, 2016b). For instance, the volume of trade between the two countries increased by over 15 times, from 1.2 million rubles in 1952 to 18.3 million rubles in 1958, during the political crisis. Furthermore, the 1970s saw the addition of energy as a new area of cooperation, supplementing the existing sectors of weaving and glass factories. To elucidate, the USSR initially conveyed Turkey's desire to construct a nuclear power plant to the USSR in 1976. In addition to the expansion of existing power plants, iron and aluminium plants, and the provision of an \$8 billion loan, the agreement also included the USSR's construction of a nuclear power plant in Mersin Akkuyu in 1979. Second, in 1984, Turkey entered into a 25-year

gas contract with the USSR, whereby a total of 120 billion cubic metres of gas was to be supplied (Tellal, 2016c).

Notwithstanding the political difficulties inherent in the bilateral relationship, Turkey views its northern neighbour as a crucial source of support for industrialisation. Turkey's decision to seek assistance from the USSR was influenced by the perception that it was an agricultural, rather than an industrialised nation. Conversely, the USSR's economic, technical, and energy collaboration with Turkey can be attributed to its objective of deterring a pivotal neighbour like Turkey from aligning entirely with the West and utilising it as a strategic manoeuvring space when necessary (Hirst & Isci, 2020).

Turkey's incorporation into the Western alliance did not eradicate the discrepancies between Turkey and the West. With Turkey's application to the European Economic Community in 1964, as set forth in the Ankara Agreement, relations with Europe began to exert an influence on Turkey's relations with the USSR. In the event of a crisis or issue with either the United States or the European Economic Community, Ankara would turn to Moscow, utilising the USSR as a balancing factor and leverage against the West. This behaviour was observed in nearly every crisis, thus becoming a new principle in the foreign relations of the two countries. For instance, in response to the embargo imposed following Turkey's intervention in Cyprus in 1974, Turkey swiftly pivoted to the USSR, intensifying economic cooperation. Furthermore, it sought to circumvent the embargo by attempting to procure weapons from the USSR, which was perceived as a rival. Following the lifting of the embargo by the United States, Turkey rescinded its arms purchases from the USSR (Ercan, 2005).

Another principle, which was evident in the relationship between the USSR and once again influenced Russia-Turkey relations in the 2000s, is the non-interference in internal affairs. In particular, following the 1950s, both countries abstained from interfering in each other's domestic affairs and instead sought to identify areas of mutual interest and cooperation. To illustrate, Turkey pursued a policy of repression towards leftist movements that gained significant visibility between 1960 and 1980. This ultimately resulted in a military coup. However, the USSR, as a state that reflected a leftist ideology, did not interfere in this policy and instead focused on areas of cooperation. Similarly, when the USSR intervened in the separatist Baku events in 1990, Turkey did not respond and continued to maintain its trade relations. In light of these developments, it can be

posited that this principle served to foster closer ties between the two countries.

In summary, the relations between Turkey and the USSR between 1920 and 1939, which can be referred to as the founding period, were based on principles such as recognition in the international system, struggle against imperialism, supporting each other against exclusion, and non-interference in internal affairs. The political and economic relations between the two countries were guided by the principles of mutual benefit and pragmatism. Following the Second World War, the Soviet Union's territorial demands led to a rupture in relations between Turkey and the USSR, which subsequently played an important role in Turkey's alignment with the Western alliance in the subsequent period. Subsequently, following the withdrawal of these demands in 1953, the relations between the USSR and Turkey were characterised by a dynamic wherein the USSR was perceived by Turkey as a counterbalance to the West, and by the USSR itself as a country with which good relations should be established and which should not be entirely left to the Western alliance. In this context, Turkey was regarded by the USSR as a problematic partner of the Western camp. Throughout the Cold War, economic relations between the two countries were characterised by loan agreements, particularly in relation to Turkey's pursuit of development goals with the support of the USSR.

TURKEY–RUSSIA FEDERATION RELATIONS

A comparative analysis of the relations between Turkey and the Russian Federation reveals the existence of several common points between the two states. In order to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the aforementioned relations, it is recommended that a concise overview of the common points be provided prior to the periodic analysis thereof. Firstly, following the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Russia continued with a semi-presidential system, although the subsequent nine-year period was characterised by significant political instability. In the 2000s, under the Putin government, the cult of the leader remained a prominent feature of the political landscape, and the leader demonstrated effectiveness in foreign policy, a trend that persists to the present (Ozdal et al., 2021). A comparable situation can be observed in Turkey between 1990 and 2002. With the AKP government in 2002, Erdoğan, who subsequently assumed the roles of prime minister and president, became

the most influential figure in foreign policy. Furthermore, Erdoğan, like Putin, engages in foreign policy through the utilisation of personal leadership skills and the establishment of relationships, rather than relying on the authority of established institutions. In this framework, it can be stated that both countries pursue a foreign policy oriented towards their respective leaders (Bardakci, 2021).

Another significant parallel in the relationship is the shift in their respective foreign policies during the 2000s, which directly influenced the trajectory of their bilateral relations. The Putin government, which began in 2000, marked a shift in Russia's 1990s pursuit of economic stability and a stable foreign policy. The primary foreign policy objectives are to utilise economic and energy resources to expand Russia's sphere of influence, to engage with multiple countries rather than a single centre, to deter threats to Russia's geopolitical interests, to conduct policy around specific interests with the principle of pragmatism, and to establish Moscow as a prominent centre within the global system (Cadier & Light, 2015). Similarly, a shift has been discernible in Turkey since the mid-2000s, coinciding with the advent of the AKP government. During Ahmet Davutoğlu's tenure, Turkish foreign policy was shaped around the concepts of soft power and neo-Ottomanism. Over time, this gave rise to the concepts of "centre country" and "strategic depth", and an active and role model policy was sought to be implemented (Uzgel, 2009). Furthermore, the "Zero Problem Policy", which prioritises economic and diplomatic strategies, was introduced (Ozcan, 2012). Both countries employed pragmatism in their bilateral and multilateral relations (Yesilot, 2021), focusing on the maximisation of economic and political benefits through the exclusion of problematic areas (Babaev, 2021).

The approach of the two countries towards the West represents another significant point of commonality that affects their bilateral relations. Both Ankara and Moscow perceive the West as a threat rather than each other (Ozdal et al., 2021). For Turkey, the Treaty of Sèvres, which was signed by the Ottoman Empire after World War I, has become the Sèvres Syndrome, representing a fear of partition, and the actions of the West have consistently been viewed with suspicion. The "foreign powers" frequently identified as a source of concern for Turkey are typically understood to represent the West in its entirety. A comparable scenario unfolded in Russia following the dissolution of the USSR. Russia frequently posits a scenario in which the West seeks to encircle it, alter

its political system, and ultimately disintegrate its state structure. Consequently, both actors are reluctant to allow Western involvement in their internal affairs and frequently accuse the West of attempting to do so. Moreover, when both actors implement stringent and authoritarian policies domestically and are met with opposition from the West, they often accuse the West of interfering in their internal affairs and leverage the anti-Western sentiment that is perpetuated in society to garner support for these policies.

Another factor that contributes to the growing proximity between Russia and Turkey is the fact that both countries prioritise national security and territorial integrity and rely on security policies that exclude liberal values (Hill & Taspinar, 2006). This perspective is predicated on both actors' perception of a robust state apparatus. In practical terms, this signifies that the response to an act designated as counter-terrorism is not subject to scrutiny. For instance, during the 1990s, both Ankara and Moscow publicly declared that they would regard the struggle against the PKK and Chechen separatists as internal affairs and would refrain from interference (Bechev, 2018; Yesilot, 2021). This common ground persisted into the 2000s, with Russia also considering Turkey's Euphrates Shield and Peace Spring operations in Syria within this context (Isachenko, 2021). At this juncture, censure of human rights and the rule of law, particularly from the Western bloc, is also regarded by both parties as an infringement on their internal affairs and an attempt to undermine their authority.

In light of the aforementioned general observations, an analysis of Turkey–Russia relations across three distinct periods will prove instructive in elucidating the nature and scope of the interaction and cooperation between the two actors.

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW WORLD ORDER: 1991–2000

The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 signified the conclusion of the bipolar structure that had been in place since 1945. A series of changes in the economic and political spheres, which compelled both the global environment and nation-states to reorganise during a period when the United States and the ideology it espoused were dominant, established the foundation and context within which the relations between Russia and Turkey were formed, and facilitate a more nuanced understanding of these relations (Hale, 2023).

With the dissolution of the bipolar system, the prevailing geopolitical equilibrium gave way to a complex web of regional and ethnic conflicts. The most intense of these conflicts, which pitted the United States against Russia and Russia against Turkey, occurred in the Balkans. A consideration of the relations between Russia and Turkey developed in this context would be beneficial.

The initial development that shaped the trajectory of relations between Turkey and Russia was the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness, and Cooperation, which was concluded during President Süleyman Demirel's visit to Moscow in 1992. The agreement was based on a mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and political independence, as well as consultation on regional issues, cooperation against terrorism, and communication on military matters (TBMM, 1993). However, the impetus for the signing of the agreement can be attributed to Russia's unease regarding Turkey's assertive role in the former Soviet Republics. This was evident in the US-backed "Turkish World from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China" initiative, which gained momentum following the dissolution of the USSR. Additionally, Turkey's notification to Russia that it was backing down further exacerbated the situation (Aydin, 2016). Similarly, the 1994 Treaty on the Principles of Relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey underscored the significance of collaboration in Central Asia. Additionally, the treaty is a non-aggression treaty. In accordance with the terms of this agreement, in the event of an attack on one of the parties, the other party is obliged to refrain from offering support to the aggressor and to take prompt action before the UN and other relevant international institutions to halt the attack and to mitigate its consequences (Tellal, 2016c). In essence, this agreement provides for collective action in the event of an attack.

In the mid-1990s, the Russian government published two key security documents: Russia's Near Periphery and Karaganov Doctrines. These documents shifted the focus of Russian security from the 1991 borders of the Soviet Union to the regions adjacent to Russia (Götz, 2022). In accordance with these two doctrines, Russia sought to secure greater economic and political advantages within this region (Lepingwell, 1994). Those states that did not adhere to this approach were subsequently characterised by Russia as pursuing "expansionist policies" (Tellal, 2010). As a consequence of these developments, Russia and Turkey encountered economic constraints and internal system problems, prompting Turkey to eschew its previously aggressive stance in Central Asia and instead pursue

a policy of enhanced cooperation with Russia in this region, particularly during the 2000s (Celikpala, 2013). These developments provide an example of how Turkey has steered clear of policies that, if pursued with greater assertiveness, could have resulted in a confrontation with Russia that might have escalated into a hot conflict. A comparable sequence of events was observed between the years 1945 and 1953.

In the context of the Cold War, the USSR was positioned as a balancing power in response to challenges with the West, particularly in relation to Turkey's NATO membership. A comparable phenomenon occurred between Russia and Turkey in the 1990s. However, in contrast to previous eras, Turkey has not merely regarded Russia as a pivotal strategic asset but has also transformed it into a viable alternative supplier. In particular, Turkey's human rights violations and its security-oriented stance on the Kurdish question resulted in an arms embargo by the West, most notably by Germany. On this occasion, Turkey purchased arms with the stated objective of combating terrorism (Tellal, 2016c).

The enduring pragmatic relationship between the USSR and Turkey in the realms of economics and energy also shaped the dynamics between Turkey and the Russian Federation. While the two countries continued to engage in trade and construction, the energy relations, which had been introduced to foreign policy as a new topic since the 1980s, were elevated to a more advanced level. The Blue Stream Project, which was designed to facilitate the direct transportation of natural gas from Russia to Turkey in 1997, serves as a tangible illustration of this phenomenon (Yesilot, 2021). In accordance with the terms of the agreement, Turkey was to purchase 16 bcm of gas from Russia for a period of 25 years (Kaynak, 2018).

In conclusion, the relationship between Turkey and Russia between 1991 and 2000 was characterised by a balancing of interests, pragmatism and economic-energy cooperation, similar to that observed during the Cold War period.

2000–2015: FROM COMPARTMENTALISATION TO RUPTURE

In 2000, which marked the beginning of a prolonged tenure for President Putin in Russia, the guiding principles of the country's foreign policy began to take shape. In the aftermath of the 1998 financial crisis, the Russian government sought to rapidly recuperate the domestic economy and to displace the oligarchs and local governors from their positions of power (Sakwa, 2020). In foreign policy, the government sought to

maintain control over the region it designated as its immediate neighbourhood, engage in cooperative relations with various countries and centres at the global level, and improve relations with China and the West (Light, 2015). Moscow sought to consolidate its power, particularly through economic, energy, and trade policies, with the goal of becoming an influential actor in the global system, akin to the weight of the USSR, which was its predecessor. During this period, programmatic approaches became a primary guiding principle of Russian foreign policy, while “interest-based cooperation” was also a significant guiding principle (Cheterian, 2023, Yesilot, 2021).

During the same period, a notable shift was observed in Turkish foreign policy, particularly following 2005. While some of this change is shaped by Turkey’s own internal dynamics, some of it is related to shifts in the United States and the global system (Tarcan et al., 2018). The United States plays a prominent role in shaping Turkey’s foreign policy, particularly in the pursuit of becoming a model country and exerting influence in the Middle East (Özbay, 2011). Turkey is presented as a model country, a predominantly Muslim nation with a market economy and democracy, in its efforts to prevent the strengthening of radical movements in the aftermath of the US invasions following the September 11 attacks. Additionally, Turkey’s maverick behaviour, occurring without consideration of its allies, and its subsequent attempts to prevent the strengthening of radical movements are noteworthy (Tuysuzoglu, 2013). This endeavour results in a divergence from Turkey’s previously established policy of status quoism and non-intervention in conflicts, also known as the principle of “peace at home, peace in the world”, in order to enhance its influence in the Middle East (Davutoğlu, 2014). The policies pursued during this period can be summarised as follows: Turkey has sought to navigate the complexities of globalisation through multilateral diplomacy. It has also implemented a soft power policy through institutions such as TIKA and the Presidency of Religious Affairs, with a particular focus on the Balkans, Central Asia, and Africa (Zalewski, 2013). Additionally, the government has prioritised fostering positive relations with neighbouring countries through partnerships rather than solely addressing immediate challenges. These policies had a direct impact on relations with Russia (Celikpala, 2015; Tanrısever, 2021).

In the context of Russian-Turkish relations during the early 2000s, the 1999 agreement between Russia and Turkey, which asserted that each country’s approach to the PKK and Chechen separatists was a

matter of national sovereignty and that neither country would intervene in this matter, facilitated a shift in focus from security-related concerns to economic, trade, tourism, and energy cooperation (Erşen, 2016). In other words, the application of principles such as pragmatism, balancing, focusing on areas of cooperation, and avoiding confrontation as much as possible have proven effective in the context of bilateral relations.

Similar to the period of the USSR, this period was characterised by the establishment of a leader-to-leader relationship, as evidenced by the numerous high-level visits exchanged between the two countries. Following Putin’s visit to Ankara in 2004, Prime Minister Erdoğan’s visit to Moscow identified potential areas of cooperation. As a manifestation of the “Zero Problem Policy”, the High-Level Cooperation Council was established between the two countries in 2010 (MFA, 2013). The year 2010 was a significant one for the relationship between Russia and Turkey. It saw the mutual abolition of visas in accordance with the “zero problem policy” towards neighbouring countries (Özbyay, 2011).

The energy cooperation relationship that originated under the USSR and persisted into the 1990s continued during this period. However, in contrast to its predecessors, nuclear energy, rather than coal or natural gas, was incorporated into the Moscow-Ankara agenda as a novel topic. In a renewed effort to advance their energy cooperation, Turkey and Russia agreed to construct a nuclear power plant in Akkuyu, Mersin. This initiative had been previously discussed in 1979 but ultimately did not materialise. This agreement will result in Turkey becoming dependent on Russia for nuclear energy, in addition to the Blue Stream pipeline and the Western pipeline. Furthermore, following the cancellation of the tender for the construction of the plant by the Council of State, the contract was awarded to Russia directly through an inter-state agreement, circumventing the tender process (Celikpala, 2013). This not only signals the advent of a new phase in the relationship but also suggests the emergence of a privileged and dependency-enhancing dynamic, where bilateral relations serve as a conduit for breaking and building new rules, rather than adhering to established norms.

In contrast to the USSR period, the institutionalisation of relations between Turkey and Russia was not a priority during this period, with relations instead being conducted at the leader-to-leader level (Tannisever, 2021). Despite the establishment of councils, decisions were ultimately reached through dialogues and meetings between Erdoğan and Medvedev or Putin (Ozidal et al., 2021). Between 2000 and 2015, Turkey–Russia

cooperation did not go beyond the traditional areas such as energy and economy, and the mutual lifting of visas in 2010 can be marked as a new development (IKV, 2011).

Despite the fact that the two countries have reached a certain degree of concord, two developments warrant mention in terms of the parameters and boundaries of their relations. Firstly, upon establishing relations with Russia, Turkey has refrained from adopting a pro-Russian stance within NATO, instead aligning its actions with the alliance's established policies. For example, Turkey did not adopt a negative stance towards the signal given at the Bucharest Summit in 2008 for Ukraine and Georgia to join the organisation. Furthermore, it also consented to the installation of NATO missiles in Kürecik, Malatya (Egeli & Güvenç, 2012).

Following the NATO Summit in 2008, Russia initiated hostilities against Georgia and subsequently recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In response, Ankara defended Georgia's territorial integrity but declined to provide assistance, as requested by Georgia (Yesilot, 2021). It is evident that Turkey's preference was to refrain from direct confrontation with Russia and to avoid involvement in a dispute that did not directly concern its interests. Another illustration of Turkey's inclination to avoid direct confrontation with Russia is the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Akturk, 2017). Despite Turkey's consistent affirmation of support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, it has not aligned itself with the EU and US sanctions against Russia and has continued to maintain diplomatic relations with Russia.

The Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 represented a significant turning point in the trajectory of bilateral relations. Turkey, with the backing of the United States, viewed its potential role as a model for the nascent governments in these countries as an extension of its broader policy of becoming a global power. In this context, Turkey, in collaboration with the United States, provided support to opposition forces seeking to challenge the Assad regime in Syria. In contrast, Russia prioritised stability over democracy, characterising the series of regime changes as a new imperial initiative by the United States (Babaev, 2021).

This divergence, which has become increasingly evident in Syria, has provided the impetus for the emergence of a novel concept in Russia-Turkey relations. The term "compartmentalisation" is used to describe a process by which issues of differing interests are set aside, or compartmentalised, when such differences do not present a threat to vital

interests. The concept of compartmentalisation refers to a policy of maintaining cooperation by setting aside divergent interests, provided that they do not impinge upon vital interests. While this policy became more visible between Russia and Turkey after 2011, it reached its conclusion in November 2015 when Turkey shot down a Russian jet, thereby precipitating the advent of a chaotic process (Akturk, 2017).

2015–2023: FROM RUPTURE TO NORMALISATION

In the wake of the downing of the Su-M24 Russian jet by Turkey, Russia enacted a series of sanctions targeting various sectors, including the lifting of visas for Turkish nationals, the suspension of energy negotiations, and the imposition of trade restrictions. These sanctions, which were particularly harsh, demonstrated the fragile and delicate nature of the relations between the two countries. Furthermore, they illustrated that energy, and economic relations have a limited impact on the development of security cooperation (Ozdal et al., 2021). Furthermore, the downing of the Russian aircraft serves to illustrate the failure of both the compartmentalisation policy and the Zero Problem Policy in the context of relations with Russia (Balta, 2019).

The crisis between the two countries was resolved only after President Erdoğan issued an apology in June 2016. Conversely, the July 15 coup attempt and Russia's support for Erdoğan despite the West's silence led to a strengthening of ties between Turkey and Russia (Bardakci, 2021). Moreover, the decision of NATO, the United States, and the EU to refrain from immediate action during the coup attempt was perceived as a lack of support by Turkey, leading to a greater visibility of Russian support (Bechev, 2018). Ultimately, in August 2016, Erdoğan and Putin convened in Russia, marking the commencement of a swift and comprehensive process of diplomatic normalisation. In the aftermath of the crisis, Russia pursued a pragmatic strategy to foster closer ties between Turkey and Russia in the Middle East, facilitating Turkey's participation in the Astana Process alongside Iran (Yulia, 2021). As a result, the parties were able to engage in direct dialogue on the subject of Syria. However, one of the most significant motivations for Russia's incorporation of a NATO member into this structure was its perception of the rift between Turkey and the United States, which it attributed to the latter's relationship with the YPG. Russia sought to utilise Turkey as a counterbalance to the

United States in this context (Kortunov & Ersen, 2018, Ozdal et al., 2021).

While the stances adopted by Turkey and Russia in Syria exhibited a contentious dynamic between 2011 and 2016, after 2016, with the Astana Process, the parties began to concur on certain matters. Despite Turkey's repeated criticism of the YPG's presence in northern Syria and the implicit US support for this, the United States' continued stance on the issue has resulted in a divergence between the two countries (Bardakci, 2021). Conversely, the improvement in relations between Turkey and Russia prompted Russia to reassess its stance on the future influence of Assad, leading Turkey to approve the Euphrates Shield and Peace Spring operations. These actions on the part of Russia and its distancing from the YPG provided the foundation for the two countries to act in coordination (Celikpala, 2019).

In the energy sector, relations have resumed. In October 2016, Turkey and Russia signed an agreement on Gazprom's Turkish Stream, which will carry gas to Europe and Turkey respectively.

In addition to the Astana Process, Turkey's decision to purchase the S-400 system from Russia resulted in significant tensions within NATO. Negotiations between Turkey and the United States regarding Patriot missiles commenced in 2013, yet ultimately proved unsuccessful. Ankara declined an offer from China in anticipation of a response from Washington and ultimately procured the S-400 defence system from Russia in 2018. The S-400 missiles have resulted in the imposition of significant sanctions against Turkey by the United States. The S-400 purchase exemplifies Russia's emergence as a competitive alternative supplier, reminiscent of the arms acquisitions of the 1990s. For Russia, beyond the financial benefits, Turkey's acquisition of these missiles guaranteed that Turkey would confront challenges, and that NATO would be preoccupied with internal affairs rather than focusing its attention on Russia.

A further significant factor influencing the relationship between Russia and Turkey during this period was Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Similarly, as was the case with Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Turkey promptly expressed its support for Ukraine's territorial integrity. Additionally, Turkey pursued a policy of non-disengagement from NATO. In response to Ukraine's request, it promptly fulfilled the requirements of the Montreux Convention and closed the Straits to Russian warships (BBC, 2022).

Conversely, Turkey has elected not to participate in the sanctions imposed on Russia while pursuing a foreign policy aligned with the West, despite expectations that it would adopt a more Atlanticist approach. Furthermore, it augmented its existing trade with Russia, which had previously exhibited less volatility. Ultimately, as a consequence of the Ukraine War, Russia became Turkey's primary supplier of both natural gas and oil (EMRA, 2022). Furthermore, Turkey facilitated a diplomatic encounter in Istanbul as part of its efforts to mediate between Ukraine and Russia. Ultimately, Turkey served as a mediator between the two parties in response to the escalating food prices caused by Ukraine's inability to fulfil its grain export obligations due to the ongoing conflict. This led to the conclusion of the Grain Agreement.

The parameters of Turkey's alliance with the West, while maintaining relations with Russia and participating in sanctions, were delineated by the alliance itself. Despite its absence from numerous sanctions, Turkey persisted in using Russia's own system, MIR, following the removal of Russian banks from the SWIFT system. However, Turkey promptly withdrew from the MIR system upon receiving notification that the United States might impose sanctions on Turkish financial institutions. Turkey's prompt withdrawal in the face of the United States' pressure illustrates the constraints on Turkey's relationship with Russia (Euronews, 2022; Abay, 2019).

CONCLUSION

A review of the evolution of bilateral relations between the USSR and Russia reveals several defining characteristics that emerged in the latter years of the twentieth century. These dynamics are likely to shape the nature of relations between the two countries in the coming years. Firstly, the relationship between Turkey and its northern neighbour has, for the most part, been characterised by pragmatism and a mutual recognition of mutual benefit. Secondly, in contrast to the West, both parties hold a conviction in the importance of a strong state and perceive criticism from this perspective as an infringement upon their internal affairs. In this context, bilateral relations are structured in a manner that incorporates this factor. The economy and trade have consistently been significant areas of discussion between Turkey and both the USSR and Russia. This relatively stable area is facing several geopolitical risks and the possibility of conflict. In this context, the crises of 1945 and 2015 demonstrate

the fragility of economic relations between Turkey and Russia and the potentially adverse consequences of the dependence created.

It is evident that Russia is not a country with which Turkey wishes to align itself, nor does it represent a viable future direction for the country. Since its foundation, Turkey has pursued a policy of catching up with the West. However, in the context of confrontations with the West, Russia has served as a balancing actor for Turkey, facilitating the preservation of its relative autonomy. In light of these considerations, the question of whether Russia can serve as an alternative to Turkey's relations with the West or NATO can be answered in the affirmative, as it has been for a century.

Despite the inherent limitations and interdependence in the relationship between Turkey and Russia, particularly in the energy sector, the nature of their bilateral ties is shaped by the prevailing global, regional, and national circumstances. Furthermore, in contrast to the situation in Western countries, there is a paucity of institutional and social ties. At times, the relationship between the two countries can be described as a bilateral one between two leaders. Furthermore, Russia plays a pivotal role in a geopolitical landscape where Turkey's strategic options are constrained, particularly when the potential for a geopolitical confrontation is taken into account. The lack of an alternative mechanism to protect Turkey other than NATO further constrains Turkey's strategic manoeuvrability. Consequently, although Turkey's relations with Russia are characterised by dangerous dependencies, they do not represent an alternative to its relationship with the West or NATO. Furthermore, while the relationship between the two actors can be characterised as a partnership, it is not an alliance and is sufficiently fragile to be seriously damaged by the risk of conflict.

The dynamics that have characterised Turkish–Russian relations for a century allow us to identify some opportunities and threats for the future, in the 101st year and beyond. First, Russia will once again be an alternative or a stabiliser for Turkey in cases of disagreement or tensions with the West. In this respect, Russia will remain a facilitator for Turkey to achieve its goals in negotiations with the West. However, it is an exaggeration to expect that Turkey will abandon the EU and NATO, with which it is already integrated at the institutional level, and to continue its path with Russia instead.

Second, in the post-Cold War era, Russia is part of several organisations and platforms that encompass the geography of the former Soviet

Union and extend beyond it. In light of the pragmatism that guides their relations, Turkey will likely seek to strengthen cooperation with Russia at the regional and bilateral levels to maximise its interests and influence in the region. Cooperation on the Zangezur Corridor, which will connect Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, is an example of this.

Third, the two countries have a relationship in trade, tourism, and energy that goes back decades and will continue under ongoing and new energy and trade agreements. This could open up new opportunities in these areas, particularly in the energy sector. Turkey's exchange of energy with Russia has increased, rather than decreased, since the war in Ukraine. With Ukraine out of the picture for transporting Russian gas to the EU, Russia has been trying to establish a hub in Turkey to transport gas to Europe. Russia's choice of Turkey as a destination is not only because of its ties with the West but also because of the trust between Ankara and Moscow. In other words, trust and years of experience between the parties open the door to new opportunities.

Ultimately, historical relations will facilitate the identification of both threats and potential opportunities. Despite the considerable economic and energy relations between the two countries, relations in other areas remain suspended or frozen. Nevertheless, Ankara and Moscow will likely endeavour to engage with each other in a way that avoids direct confrontation in the 101st year and beyond, in line with the approach that has been taken for the past 100 years.

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IN LIEU OF AN AFTERWORD



*Buraya, bir inanç
bir inat koydum
Tut ki unuttun,
tekrar bak,
o inat neyse sen osun
Birhan Keskin, Kargo*

*[Here I've put conviction and tenacity
Say you forget,
just take another look,
for you are whatever that tenacity is.]¹*

¹ Translation by Neil P. Doherty.