

The Invention of Tradition and New Turkey: Creating a New National Identity

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Abstract: Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, there were many social engineering projects in Turkey to create a national identity. In the beginning, Turkish identity was based on secularism, democracy, shared culture, and language. However, with the election of the Justice and Development Party in 2002, a new social engineering project gained momentum, which aimed to erase the legacy of the old Turkish national identity. This new national identity is strictly based on a common religion, and it is not only open to the Turkish people but also open to the new immigrants from Muslim countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. Moreover, this new national identity is divisive as it discriminates against people who are not Muslim or who do not support the current government's religious and ethnic policies such as Alevis and other non-Sunni groups in Turkey. In this paper, I demonstrate that by changing the education system and educational institutions, transforming the meanings of Old Turkey's important days by implementing and opening megaprojects and creating new traditions such as the balcony speech after every election victory, Turkey's new national identity has been created. One principal aim of this national identity project is to eradicate the memory of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Republic of Turkey, and make Turkey a mere Islamic republic based on neo-Ottomanism.

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1. Introduction

All nation-states experience some level of social engineering when their initial foundational stages. Even though these experiences change in content, it generally includes reviving an old national hero, empire, or tradition to foster social cohesion among the members of the newly established state. Turkey was no different from other countries in this respect, and it faced not one but two nation-building processes in its short, nearly 100-year history as an independent democratic republic. In the first national identity project, the nation is based on blood and ethnic ties based on Kemalist principles secularism/laicism, nationalism, populism, statism, republicanism, and revolutionism/reformism (Kadioglu 1996: 187). In the second process, the laicist symbols entrenched in Turkish society was weakened by Islamist attacks, and a New Turkey was created. In New Turkey, Islam has an essential role in society, and even though it is not the official state religion, in the future, there is a possibility that Islam may be recognized as the state religion of Turkey.

In this article, I argue that the invention of tradition has been used by state officials to enforce a particular vision of Turkey. One tactic employed by the subsequent Justice and Development Party (AKP) governments has been decreasing the importance of previously celebrated holidays and changing the meaning of these national holidays by associating them with new projects and openings. Another tactic has been implementing a dramatically revamped education system and lowering the number of secular primary and secondary educational institutions by transforming them into preacher schools (Imam Hatip Liseleri), which aims to train Islamic clergy for mosques and Qur'an courses. The third tactic was to arrange large gatherings in front of the headquarters of AKP building in Sogutozu, Ankara, immediately after the electoral victories before the certification of the official results by the Supreme Electoral Board. Although these are not the only traditions and reforms created and implemented by the Justice and Development Party government, I argue that these laid the foundations of New Turkey by creating a new reality in which previously peripheral social groups, such as the pious people from small and mid-sized Anatolian cities, gained ground

against the White Turks, the Kemalist elite of Old Turkey.

My main research question is how and why the Justice and Development Party accelerated this new nation-building project, which had its foundations in the 1970s Islamist movements. Even though the initial 2002 government of the Justice and Development Party rejected the Islamist argument and placed itself in the Turkish political arena as a conservative democrat party (White 2013: 8; Turunc 2007: 81) like Christian Democrat Party's in Europe, its discourse and policies changed in the meantime which transformed the meaning of Islam. During the first identity-building project, Islam was not considered as faith, but it is viewed 'as a set of beliefs and mores that would socialize Muslims into the collective values of a culture that included a common education, morality, and aesthetics' (White 2013: 27). However, in the second process, which started after the Justice and Development Party's first term, we see that Islam is considered as a faith that is not only one of many parts of the Turkish culture but the dictating principle of the government policies and discourse. Most of the new traditions created by the Justice and Development Party affirms the place of Islam in New Turkey and erases the remnants of Old Turkey.

In the following section, I will present the literature on national identity construction and the malleability of national identities. Subsequently, I will explain the history of nation-building efforts in Turkey before the Justice and Development Party's ascendancy as the ruling party. This section will also explain the precursors of the Justice and Development Party, such as the National Salvation Party and Welfare Party. The fourth section will demonstrate the three significant reforms and traditions implemented by the Justice and Development Party. The fifth section concludes.

2. Changing National Identities

To understand how national identities transform, we first need to know what national identity is. Anderson (2006: 6) defines the nation as 'an imagined political community – and imagined

as both inherently limited and sovereign.’ Therefore, national identities are also imagined and modular as they can be modified over time according to the circumstances and aims of the leaders. The changing national identity in Turkey is also a piece of evidence for the modularity of national identities. In his book, *The Macedonian Conflict*, Danforth (1995: 228-231) states that the national identities ‘are not biologically given, they are socially constructed,’ and they are ‘a matter of self-ascription.’ Gellner (2009: 6) makes a cultural argument in which he states that ‘two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture, in turn, means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating.’ We can think of religion in Turkey in the first period as Gellner’s collective culture, which connects the people, but the understanding of religion changed dramatically when we have moved on to the second period. Mutual recognition keeps an essential part of Gellner’s nation as ‘two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation’ (2009: 7). This piece of the argument is relevant to the first period in Turkey as there were problems of mutual recognition between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923.

Anderson (2006: 15) also emphasizes the role of language in the nation-making process. The religious languages, which Anderson defines as Latin, Chinese, or Arabic, have had a profound effect on nations as most of the vernaculars derived from the original sacred languages. However, with the ‘fall of Latin (. . .), the sacred communities integrated by old sacred languages were gradually fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized’ (Anderson 2006: 19). Language debates consist of an essential part of Turkish politics as Turkey has an official state language, which is guaranteed by Article 2 of the Turkish Constitution (Earle 1925: 89). During the Ottoman era, the empire had multiple languages and no official language. Ottoman Turkish, which is an amalgamation of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, was used by the state elite while the ordinary people of Turkish origin spoke simple Turkish (Aydingun and Aydingun 2004: 418). In the modern era, the duality arose between the Turkish majority

and Kurdish minority as Kurdish people wanted an education in their primary language along with dedicated state television, which will broadcast in Kurdish. In the initial days of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established the Turkish Language Association, which purified Turkish from Arabic and Persian words to ‘create a more “authentic” Turkish vocabulary’ (White 2013: 28).

Aydingun and Aydingun (2004: 417) argue that except for secularism and language, history was also an essential part of the Turkish identity. Hobsbawm (1992: 1) maintains that the invented tradition constitutes a critical part of the national identity. Hobsbawm (1992: 1) defines the invented tradition as the ‘set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.’ For example, in the same book, Trevor-Roper (1992) explains how the Scottish kilt was created by an Englishman for capitalist purposes and then adopted as an integral part of the Scottish national identity. In the same way, Cohn (1992) demonstrates the creation of the Imperial Assemblage in India during the Victorian era. Zubrzycki (2016) discusses how the religious ritual of St. Jean de Baptiste day changed step-by-step each year in Quebec, Canada. In Turkey, the new traditions include the erasure of national holidays proclaimed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, renaming new megaprojects after the Ottoman sultans and not after real Turkic people, and giving balcony speeches after electoral victories to represent the superiority of the Justice and Development Party on the Kemalist establishment.

The divisive nature of religion also plays a critical role in Turkish national consciousness, even though a large number of people belong to Islam. Danforth (1995) shows that in Macedonia, the nation-building project included the creation of a homogenous Orthodox population, while Zubrzycki (2016) demonstrates how Catholicism divides Canada along language lines as French-speakers are Catholic and English-speakers are Protestant. Barreto (2001) explains in Puerto-Rico, religion divides Catholic Puerto-Ricans and Protestant Americans, and it is considered one of the most crucial parts of the national identity. In

Turkey, the first constitution of the Republic in 1924 designed Islam as the state religion to appeal to more people in the first years of sovereign Turkey (Earle 1925: 89, Article 2). However, this article was changed in 1928 and removed the religious reference from the constitution to assure that the constitution fits the secular principles. This modification did not solve the problems related to religion in Turkey as non-Turkish Muslims (Kurds and Balkan Muslims) were given priority (White 2013: 30) and accepted as Turkish citizens before the non-Muslim Ottoman subjects living in the same geographic area with Turkey. Moreover, historical enmities between the Alevi and Sunni Muslim groups, and the overlap between the Alevi and Kurdish minority caused further integration problems in the nation-building project in both periods. Van Bruinessen (1996: 7) defines the Alevi minority in Turkey as ‘a heterodox religious minority’ who are both ‘the Turkish and Kurdish speakers’ and ‘retained many more elements of pre-Islamic Turkish and Iranian religions than Sunni Muslims.’

The malleability of the national identity is not only based on different uses of religion, language, history, and tradition. Shelef (2010) argues that the modification of maps and other nationally important documents also creates a change in the national identity, and this change can be different under different political parties. In his book, Shelef demonstrates the alterations of the Israeli map changed who is Jewish and who is not. For instance, when the Religious Zionist Movement was looking for an answer to the question ‘Where is the homeland?’, the answers varied between ‘The River of Egypt to... the River Euphrates’ to the ‘Whole land of Israel,’ which only includes ‘West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights’ (Shelef 2010: 5).

National identities may evolve and become more inclusive or exclusive. In the Turkish case, which I will demonstrate in the next section, in different periods, the national identity was inclusive for different groups. In the first period, it was inclusive for people who accepted the modernization project and saw Islam only a part of the culture and did not live their lives according to the Islamic principles. In the second period, the new traditions opened the national identity for previously excluded, peripheral citizens who were more pious.

3. Turkish National Identity before the Justice and Development Party

Transitioning from a multilingual and multiethnic Ottoman Empire to the homogenous Turkish Republic was not an easy process. Yegen (2007:123) states that in the transition period from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey, Turks became the dominant/ruling nation (*millet-i hakime*) while in the Ottoman Empire, they were the main ethnic group (*unsur-i asli*). This change brought new laws, rules, and traditions to Turkey, which aimed to homogenize Turkey as much as possible. First of these modifications happened in the language area. Instead of Albanian, Kurdish, or Serbian, which were allowed in the Ottoman Empire, all Turks should be able to speak Turkish in the Republic of Turkey. Aydingun and Aydingun (2004: 418) argue that a national language will help to bring elites and masses together and foster a national consciousness which was much needed after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. To create a national identity, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established the Turkish Language Association, which targeted to purify the language and increase the literacy rate. Moreover, to complement the construction of Turkish identity, the Turkish Historical Society was founded, which wrote a critical report to examine the roots of the Turkishness (White 2013: 26). According to this report, Turks ‘were an ancient people that radiated out of Central Asia in successive waves of migration long before the eleventh century, crossing many areas of the world, populating and bringing civilization to native peoples of China, India, the Middle East, northern Africa, the Balkans, and parts of Europe’ (White 2013: 26). This report and its findings were incorporated into the national education curriculum and still taught in primary and secondary educational institutions.

Except for the language, religious identity was complicated in Turkey after the initial transition period. Waxman (1997) argues that with respect to Islam, Turkey always had an identity crisis. The break-up of the theocratic Ottoman Empire and subsequent secularization movement adopted by the Republican elite created a confusion of identity in

the masses. The elite of the late-Ottoman era, such as Ziya Gokalp, was also ambivalent about which identity to endorse as his writings ‘were wavering between the three trends of Islamism, Turkism, and Westernism, hence, reflecting the political climate of the context in which he was located’ (Kadioglu 1996: 183). Although the Ottoman Empire was based on Islamic traditions, the minorities had the right to religious freedom, but they were not equal with the Muslim citizens of the Ottoman Empire before the law. In the Ottoman Empire, religion was not a dividing factor between Kurds and Turks, but it was a dividing factor between non-Muslims and Muslims. For instance, in the Empire, non-Muslims were taxed extra for their religion, and this tax (*jizya*) was abolished in 1856 as a part of the Reformation Proclamation (*Islahat Fermani*) (Shadid 2005; Selcuk 2010).

Waxman (1997: 5) claims that one of the reasons that Islamic identity is still a problem in Turkey is that ‘Turkish modernization and nation-building has largely been top-down, state-led, and elitist’ so the religious masses did not have the opportunity to shape the state policy in the early years of Turkish Republic. White (2013: 28) states for the Kemalist elite ‘religion was a dangerous, divisive force in society that could not be eliminated and so had to be kept under the thumb of the state’ which is why Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established the Directorate of Religious Affairs to control religious education and train the Islamic clergy. Even though religion was seen as a dangerous force, the first definitions of Turkish citizenship took Islam as an essential building block of Turkishness, and the population exchanges between Greece and Turkey had happened to achieve religious homogeneity in Turkey (White 2013).

In addition to Islam and language, Turkish history has been used to create a national identity and devise several new traditions to nation-like feeling. The most substantial tradition created by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was the development of national holidays, which marks a massive break from the Ottoman Empire. The first crucial national day is October 29th, on which the Turkish society became a Republic by a public proclamation made in the Grand National Assembly of the Turkish Republic (TBMM) in 1923. The second national

day is April 23rd, which is also celebrated around the world as National Sovereignty and Children's Day (Ulusal Egemenlik ve Çocuk Bayramı). This national day was created by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk when the Grand National Assembly of the Turkish Republic was founded in 1920 and gifted to all children in the world. Lastly, May 19th was gifted to the youth and signifies the day when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk set foot to Samsun to start the Independence War in 1919. These new national days were accepted by the Turkish public as new traditions and filled the vacuum created by the downfall of the Ottoman Empire.

However, the problems related to religious identity remained, and the difference between the two groups, secular and religious, got more pronounced when Turkey moved into a multiparty election system in 1946. Many new traditions that will be created in the following period have their roots in the transition to multiparty systems and grievances faced in the transitory era from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. Turkey tried the multiparty system firstly in 1924 with the establishment of the Progressive Republican Party (Terrakiperver Cumhuriyet Firkası) by one of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's best friend, Kazım Karabekir Pasha. Ertem (2010) argues that even though this party was established with the permission of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, to counter the lethargy of the one-party system, it became the focus of anti-Republican activity in a short time. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk envisioned this first opposition party as a party that is different from the Republican People's Party¹ (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi) only in the economic program. Republican People's Party had a statist approach to the economy while this new party would have a liberal approach (Ertem 2010: 72). However, Sheikh Said Rebellion², which took place in February 1925 and

¹This party is the first political party of modern Turkey which is established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. For a long time, Republican People's Party was the only political party in Turkey and until 1946 elections, it got into elections as the only political party of Turkey. Since the election of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) in Turkey in 2002, Republican People's Party has been occupying the main opposition party position and generally polls around 25% in the elections.

²Sheikh Said Rebellion was planned against the new Turkish Republic by religious and mostly Kurdish groups on February 1925. Lahdili (2018: 13) states that the rebellion affected mostly Eastern and South-eastern regions of Turkey which have a significant percentage of Kurdish people. It is not certain what was the motive behind the Rebellion: nationalism or religious fundamentalism (Lahdili 2018: 13). Kucukcan (2003: 481) argues that the abolition of caliphate and Ottoman Empire may have triggered the Rebellion as the millet system in the Ottoman Empire encouraged 'ethnic and cultural diversities thrived by adopting a policy of recognition and toleration for other cultures.' The abolition of caliphate and the subsequent

following incidents in Turkey, altered the supporter base of this party and turned it into an Islamic fundamentalist party aiming to destroy the newly established Turkish Republic and restore the caliphate (Zurcher 2004: 43). After these developments, this party was closed down on June 1925. This incident shows that the cleavages and grievances in the society can create new traditions that may be decisive in the history of a newly established Republic.

The subsequent establishment of the Liberal Republican Party (Serbest Cumhuriyet Firkasi) in 1930 and the closure of this party in the same year did not give many opportunities to the masses opposing modernization and secularism in Turkey. In 1946, with the establishment of the Democrat Party (Demokrat Parti), Turkey became a fully-functioning two-party system, and after some time, Turkey turned into a fully-functioning multiparty system. To understand the Justice and Development Party's efforts to counter Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and reverse the reforms that Atatürk did, it is crucial to study Democrat Party as it became the first party to gain the majority in the parliament during the two-party era.

Democrat Party was established by Celal Bayar as an alternative to the Republican People's Party. In the beginning, they were representing the people in the periphery, such as the pious people, people from rural areas, small and medium-sized business owners. Leder (1979: 84) argues that the Democrat Party became the first party to recruit voters from the country-side and exploit the urban-rural and secular-religious divide in Turkish society. The Democrat Party's conspicuous patronization of 'mosques, religious ceremonies, and seminars' (Leder 1979: 85) as a new tradition was broadcasted everywhere in Turkey, and this behavior bridged the gap between the Democrat Party and the peripheral masses. However, these behaviors displayed by the Democrat Party was against the secularism principle. Moreover, some policies of the Democrat Party government, such as confiscating the properties and funds of the Republican People's Party, started the end for the Democrat Party politi-

homogenization and secularization projects may be another trigger. According to Kastoryano (2013: 145), the downfall of caliphate loosened 'the important religious ties between the Muslim communities of the Kurds and the Turks.' Barkey (2000: 91) emphasizes the nationalist identity of the Rebellion as 'Kurds, accustomed to the Ottoman Empire's construction of a society where Muslims, irrespective of their ethnic origin, were considered equal and first class citizens, felt betrayed by the increasingly Turkish character of the new Kemalist state.'

cians. On May 27, 1960, the military establishment, whose primary mission is to protect the Turkish state against religious attacks and conserve Ataturk's Turkey, committed a coup and restored democracy. Adnan Menderes, the prime minister of the Turkish Republic, was charged with high treason and abrogation of the constitution. Subsequently, he was executed along with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Finance, and the military went back to their barracks in 1961.

Before the elections in 1961, the most liberal constitution in Turkey was written by a group of law professors invited to Ankara by the military. The new liberal environment in Turkey allowed new parties to get into elections, and the first multiparty elections happened in 1961. The participant parties were the Republican People's Party, Justice Party (Adalet Partisi), Republican Villagers/Peasant's Nation Party (Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi) and New Turkey Party (Yeni Türkiye Partisi). The Republican People's Party won the election with a small margin, and the newly established Justice Party became the main opposition party. Justice Party replaced the Democrat Party in the elections as Democrat Party was closed by the 1960 coup.

The 1960s and 1970s created the main building blocks of the 'New Turkey' ideology, which rose to prominence during the 1990s. White (2013) argues that the rift between the left and right groups in those years gave momentum to the 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis' as both the military and mainstream parties tried to stop communist and socialist intrusion in Turkish politics. On the right, Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi) and National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi) became active players. Nationalist Action Party was envisioning a Turkey without Kurdish and Alevi people, based on ethnic and blood ties between Turkish people. White (2013: 34) states that the militia members of this party, Grey Wolves (Bozkurtlar), were responsible for the drive-by shootings of the leftists and massacre of hundreds of Alevis in several provinces including Kahramanmaraş, Çorum, and Malatya. Even though the Nationalist Action Party did not win an election as the majority party, they were a part of several coalition governments and had the opportunity

to put their agenda at work.

On the other hand, there was the National Salvation Party, which had a more Islamic outlook than the Nationalist Action Party. National Salvation Party's initial rise to power as a part of a coalition government brought 'national outlook' ideology to fore, which aimed to establish close relationships with the Arab-Muslim countries and abandon the Western countries and culture (Waxman 1997: 20). All of these right-wing parties became political platforms for the previously peripheral participants of Turkish politics, such as ultranationalist and religious factions. Bozkurt (2013: 380) argues that the voter base of the National Salvation Party created the future voters of the Justice and Development Party.

All of these developments in the inter-coup years created parts of the 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis,' which became the source of many traditions implemented in the Justice and Development Era. For example, Waxman (1997: 19) states that after the coup in 1980, before the military allowed the free and fair elections in Turkey, they made the religious education compulsory in all of the primary and secondary schools. Even though it was against the secularism principle, the military was afraid of communism and socialism more than Islamism, and they created this educational tradition, which became a source of conflict and exploitation in the Justice and Development Party years. Moreover, the military wanted students to learn the official Islam, which is different from the fundamentalist variety (Waxman 1997: 19). However, state-controlled Islamic education evolved into a system to transform Turkey into an Islamic state during the Justice and Development Party era. The changing composition of the Turkish elite and the dramatic increase in the number of Preacher Schools from 72 in 1970 to 374 in 1980 (Zubaida 1996: 13) helped to instill new traditions to the Turkish society and modify the Turkish identity.

The coup in 1980 banned all the popular politicians and political parties of the 1970s and 1980s from the political arena. New political parties were established in 1983, and most of them adopted the previously closed parties' logos and ideas even though they did not have any 'official, high-ranking' members from these parties. The Islamic traditions started to

gain momentum in the 1990s with the election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan as the mayor of Istanbul³ in 1994 from Welfare Party (Refah Partisi), which was an Islamic-oriented party popular among the political periphery. Oniř (1997: 743) reports that the Welfare Party increased its vote share to 21.4% in 1995 from 7.2% in 1997. When the Welfare Party won the most critical municipalities, they tried to create new local traditions and laws, such as banning the alcohol sale in the municipalities they won, attacking women who wore Western-style outfits and trying to impose an Islamic attire or removing the statues which had nudity from public spaces (White 2013: 40). The most critical recommendation aimed to erase Ataturk's memory by closing down the Ataturk Cultural Center⁴ in the historical Taksim Square and building a large mosque in the middle of the Square (White 2013: 40). The closure of the Welfare Party in 1998 due to anti-secular behavior also broke the party-base. In 2001, just before the 2002 elections, the Justice and Development Party was established by a group of ex-Welfare Party and Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi) politicians who named themselves 'reformists.' The other part of the Welfare and Virtue Party, the conservatives, followed Necmettin Erbakan, the head of Welfare, Virtue, National Order, and National Salvation Party, and established the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi). The Felicity Party was not successful in elections, and currently, it polls around 1% and stands against the Justice and Development Party.

³Erdogan proclaimed himself as the 'imam' (preacher) of the city when he got elected as the mayor (Heper and Toktař 2003: 164)

⁴White (2013: 40) argues that Ataturk Cultural Center was not closed but the other Ataturk-related symbols went through some transformation. For example, in Ankara, the capital, I. Melih Gokcek, the mayor of Ankara elected from the Welfare Party in 1994, tried to change the symbol of Ankara from Hittite sun (which was selected by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk) to minarets and mosques which was challenged in the courts (White 2013: 40). However, until 2007, courts did not reach a verdict and Ankara officially changed its symbol to minarets and mosques. This was not only symbol that Gokcek had changed. The Water Nymph statue, which was removed from the Tandogan Square (an important and historical place in the capital) during Murat Karayalcin's (Republican People's Party) reign in Ankara in 1992 due to metro construction in the area, was never returned its original place by his successor, I. Melih Gokcek, when the metro construction ended (Celik 2019). The statue was a gift from Italy to Turkey and was built in 1924. In 2010, the Minister of Culture in Turkey restored the statue and placed it in the corner of a museum's (CER Modern Museum) parking lot. The statue was depicting several Water Nymphs and half naked. Currently, its original place is occupied by a tea pot statue constructed during I. Melih Gokcek's time.

4. The Invention of Tradition during the Justice and Development Party

Justice and Development Party won the November 2002 elections with a landslide and received 34% of the vote while the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party, got 20% of the vote (Carkoglu 2002: 30). Due to the very high electoral threshold in Turkey (10%), none of the other parties got into the parliament. In this election, Erdogan became the prime minister, and with the first direct presidential elections in 2014, he became the president. Heper and Toktas (2003) argue that Erdogan's cult of personality affected his way of dealing with politics. For example, Erdogan went to a Preacher School (Heper and Toktas 2003: 160), which was different from the previous elite politicians. Erdogan's experience with the Preacher School and his belonging to the political periphery informed his policies on education, which aimed to create 'a conservative youth' via expanding public Preacher School education (Gall 2018).

His religious education and love of the Ottoman history and ideology show itself in his anti-Ataturk policies and traditions. For instance, the transformation of the meaning of the national holidays proclaimed by Ataturk and identification of these days with megaprojects or Islamic days reminds Sultan Abdulhamit of the Ottoman Empire, whom President Erdogan adores. For example, Deringil (1993) demonstrates that Sultan Abdulhamit created commemorative medallions, revived the caliphate, enforced some marginal groups (Yezidi Kurds, Nusayris) to accept Islam, and built an unnecessary railroad to Hijaz even though the Ottoman Empire was bankrupted. Deringil (1993: 25) states that the last megaproject was planned to be opened on Sultan's crowning day, which coincides with President Erdogan's behavior, who started megaprojects or opened them on nationally important days founded by Ataturk. In the following part, I will explain these traditions and inventions in detail.

a. The Invention of Tradition in Education: How to Create Conservative Youth?

The Turkish education system includes two sets of high schools: vocational and general skills schools. These schools can also be divided into two: vocational high schools and technical high schools and general high schools and Anatolian high schools (Yilmaz 2017). The Preacher Schools fall under the vocational high schools' category, and they aim to train religious personnel for the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Qur'an courses, and mosques. They were created under the First Republic by Atatürk's order to block the fundamentalist Islamic thought and took religion under the state's control. However, Waxman (1997: 15) argues that during the True Path Party (Dogru Yol Partisi) and under the successive governments, the Preacher School graduates started to go to different university departments not related to Islamic and religious thought. For example, in 1987, 40% of the Ankara University Public Administration freshmen class belonged to Preacher Schools, and in 1992, this figure rose to 60% (Waxman 1997: 15; Salt 1995: 19). Waxman (1997) states that the change in the composition of the freshmen class and the over-preference of the public administration and political science programs by the conservative students may create an Islamic political elite in Turkey in the future⁵

The Islamic elite that Waxman (1997) talks about also includes people like Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who dramatically increased the number of preacher schools during his time as prime minister and president. Not only the number of the schools but the number of students who attend the Preacher Schools also increased, but this did not happen entirely by choice. In

⁵Islamic elite creation project gained momentum after the postmodern coup in 2007, when the Justice and Development Party passed an education reform which allowed Preacher School (and other vocational school) graduates to choose any department they can get in the university entrance exam by abolishing point penalties (Dinçşahin 2012). Even though before this educational reform the vocational school graduates could go to any university they got in, it was harder for them to get in the departments which did not match with their high school education. For example, if a person finishes a Preacher School and got into a religious education department, he will not be penalized. However, if a person finishes a Preacher School and wants to go to engineering faculty, their central university examination points will be penalized. Although the change was positive for all vocational school graduates (as they will have the freedom to choose any department they want), Dinçşahin (2012: 621) argues that the aim 'was to clear the way for graduates of religious 'preacher schools' (...) to enter any university department.'

1997, there were a total of 492,809 students who were attending Preacher Middle Schools and High Schools (Waxman 1997:15, Yavuz 1998: 32). In 2018, 723,108 students were attending to Preacher Middle Schools, while 627,503 students were attending to the Preacher High Schools (Karakas 2019). You can see the change in the number of Preacher Schools in Turkey in Figure 1.

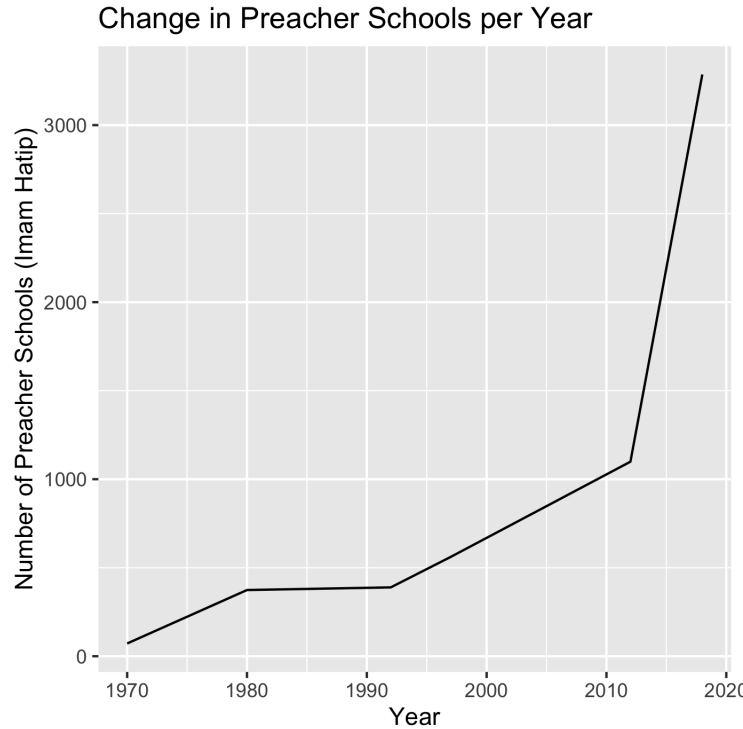


Figure 1: Change in Preacher Schools per Year (Data: Waxman (1997), Zubaida (1996), Yavuz (1998), Karakas (2019))

Above, I stated that the dramatic increase in the number of Preacher School attendees was not entirely by choice. To create the ‘conservative youth,’ Erdogan and his ministers started to convert regular middle and high schools into Preacher Schools. For example, in 2016, a middle school in Besiktas, Turkey, one of the most secular neighborhoods in Turkey, was divided into two, and half of the school was converted into a Preacher School (Karakas 2018). The parents of students opened a court case to convert the school back into the regular middle school. Even though the court sided with the parents and ordered to convert

the school back, the school did not recognize this decision and stated that the Ministry of Education should send them a note for conversion (Karakas 2018). To this date, the school still gives Preacher School education.

The basis for conversion to Preacher Schools was created by 4+4+4 education system implemented in 2012 when Erdogan was the prime minister and his friend, Abdullah Gul, was the president. This education system changed 8 years of compulsory education to 12 years and modified the cut-off points for primary, middle, and high school education. Before the 4+4+4 system, the primary school was eight years (5 years of primary school + 3 years of middle school), and the high school was 4 years. The 4+4+4 system converted the primary school to 4 years and added one year to middle school while not changing the duration of the high school education (Milli Egitim Bakanligi 2012: 10). Moreover, with the change in the law, ‘the option to attend religious junior high schools, which had been removed by the 1997 compulsory schooling law that required eight years of secular education, was reinstated’ (Erten and Keskin 2019: 189). In addition to this, new courses on Prophet Muhammed’s life and Qur’an would be offered as ‘elective’⁶ courses at the middle school and high school level (Milli Egitim Bakanligi 2012: 10).

The new education policy and increased prevalence of the religious education in Turkey signifies that the successive Justice and Development Party governments are trying to change the Turkish national identity by embellishing it with Islamic symbols. Moreover, after the passage of the educational reform, ‘Our Oath’ (Andimiz) was removed from the morning ceremonies of the schools. This Oath affirmed the Turkish character of people living in

⁶Even though these courses were offered as elective courses, in Turkey, due to the budgetary constraints, the real elective courses do not exist. For instance, if sociology, philosophy, and psychology are offered as elective courses, the students and parents do not have real freedom to choose because if a school does not have a sociology and philosophy teacher, the students in that school are forced to choose psychology due to the structural conditions. Moreover, it is a well-documented phenomenon that the Justice and Development Party government assigns religious teachers in higher numbers than other branch teachers (Birgun 2020). Hence, if a course is offered about Islam and the students want to choose another elective course about sociology, there is a higher likelihood that the students will take the course on Islam as there will be a small number of sociology professors. Birgun (2020) newspaper states that the highest number of quotas are given to the Religion and Morality teachers. For instance, in the last five years, 10% of the teaching positions in the public schools were filled with Religion and Morality teachers (Birgun 2020).

Turkey and had been read for 80 years. Atatürk implemented the Oath in 1933. The Oath has ended by saying, ‘How happy is the one who says I am a Turk.’ Erdogan argued that it was removed from the morning ceremonies because the author of the text, Resit Galip, was a supporter of the ‘Turkish prayer fiasco,’ which happened in the 1930s (Milliyet 2013). Since 2013, the students in the primary, middle, and high schools do not read the Oath.

b. The Invention of Tradition by Megaprojects: Neo-Ottomanism and anti-Atatürk Behavior

Deringil (1993) explains that during Sultan Abdulhamit’s reign, even though the Ottoman Empire was in bad shape, megaprojects were built, and these projects were either started or opened in the days corresponding the Sultan’s coronation and birth. We see the same trend in the Justice and Development Party governments as they try to open megaprojects on the same days with the national holidays proclaimed by Atatürk. Coupling this behavior with the revival of old Islamic days and abolishment of large festivities for national holidays, it becomes clear that the Justice and Development Party governments aim to erase the legacy of Atatürk and create a more Islamic Turkish identity. We see the reflection of neo-Ottomanism in these megaprojects, as well. Even though I will not analyze all the megaprojects precisely due to space concerns, it is essential to give examples of them for understanding the agenda of the Justice and Development Party governments.

The first neo-Ottomanist project which comes to mind is the Miniaturk project, which is opened as a non-profit cultural site in 2003. Tureli (2006) argues that this megaproject represents the connection between Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. People who were advertising this project, such as the ex-Istanbul mayor from the Welfare Party, Mufit Gurtuna (and new MP from the Justice and Development Party), states that this project represents the conquest of Istanbul by Ottoman Empire in 1453 (Tureli 2006: 57; Dila 2003). Even though this is one of the most significant projects implemented in the Justice and Development Party era, before the Justice and Development Party, Istanbul was generally identified

with the conquest in the Islamic Welfare Party circles. Cinar (2001: 383) states that in 1994, the year when the Welfare Party won both Istanbul and Ankara municipalities, the mayor's office, in collaboration with an Islamic foundation, celebrated the Conquest of Istanbul in the same scale of celebration with the national holidays proclaimed by Ataturk (Tureli 2006: 58). The invention of tradition as the celebration of the Conquest of Istanbul in 1453 started when the Welfare Party increased its vote share to significant levels and then continued into the Justice and Development Party era. White (2013: 28) argues that when the new Turkish Republic established from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, 'every aspect of the new Turkish nation constituted a definitive break from its Ottoman imperial past.' The revival of the Ottoman figures, the pairing of a national historic site with an Ottoman Conquest and events show that the Justice and Development Party and previous versions of this party try to make neo-Ottomanism a part of the Turkish identity.

The second project which connects the new Turkish identity to Ottoman Empire is the construction and naming of the third bridge over Bosphorus. Istanbul was established on two sides of Bosphorus, which divides the Asian (Anatolian) and European sides. Before the inauguration of this bridge in August 2016, Istanbul had two bridges, various ferry and motorboat roads, and a metro system that connects two sides of it. In 2013, prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul declared that a third bridge should be built in the north of Istanbul to ease the rush hour traffic on two bridges and other transportation methods. This bridge named Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge after the Ottoman Sultan, who had unified the Holy Islamic Lands under the Ottoman banner and started to use the caliphate title. The first two bridges were named after Mustafa Kemal Ataturk⁷

⁷This bridge was finished in 1973 and opened for service the same year. It is named after the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. However, its name has been changed in 2016, following the unsuccessful coup attempt in Turkey. The name was taken after the date of the coup attempt and it is currently called 15 July Martyrs Bridge. This can also be shown as an example that how the Justice and Development Party tries to create national holidays to counter national holidays put in place by Ataturk. It is worth to note that when this bridge was built and named in the beginning, the Republican People's Party government was ruling the Istanbul. It can be one of the reasons why it was named after Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and not after an Ottoman sultan. Another reason can be that the president of the time, Fahri Koruturk, had come from a military tradition and preferred naming it after the founder of modern Turkey and not after the Ottoman Empire.

(which is currently called the first bridge /Bosphorus bridge colloquially) and Fatih Sultan Mehmet⁸ (which is currently called the second bridge/FSM bridge colloquially), an Ottoman Sultan who conquered Istanbul in 1453. Even though Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge⁹ is not the first bridge that is named after an Ottoman Emperor, selection of Yavuz Sultan Selim, among many Ottoman Sultans created a controversy between the Sunni Muslim majority and Alevi minority.

According to the historical accounts, when Yavuz Sultan Selim went to conquer the East and engaged with several wars against the Safavid Empire (Shi'a Muslim), he also persecuted and killed a sizeable number of the Alevi subjects of the Ottoman Empire (Akturk 2018: Footnote 37). Vardar (2013) states that Selim the Grim (another name for Selim I, Yavuz Sultan Selim) became the symbol of annihilation for Alevis as his 'assimilation and annihilation politics on Alevi Turkmens and Kurds was not a result of the opposition between Ottomans and Safavis [*sic.*], but a result of this domination dynamics' (interview with Erdogan Aydin). In the same interview, Aydin also argues that 'naming the bridge as Selim shows the fact that the incumbent government was unable to accept no peace at home, nor outside. For instance, it became clear that Turkey's foreign policy on Syria reflected the neo-Ottoman mentality towards Selim's path' (Vardar 2013). Agreeing with the neo-Ottomanist tone in the foreign policy that Aydin speaks about, Saracoglu and Demirkol (2015) and White (2013) argue that the foreign policy in the Justice and Development Party era is established on affirming the special ties with the previously occupied Ottoman territories.

⁸This bridge was finished in 1988 and opened for service the same year. It is named after the Ottoman Sultan who conquered Istanbul and demolished the Byzantium Empire. When this bridge was built, the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis ideology was gaining ground in Turkey and Turkey had its first visibly Islamic president, Turgut Ozal. This may be one of the factors why it is named after an Ottoman Sultan and not after an important Turkish person.

⁹This bridge has opened to service in August 26, 2016 which is just four days away from a very important national holiday proclaimed by Ataturk. Ataturk proclaimed the Victory Day on August 30 as the Turkish troops won the national independence war that day. Selection of August 26 as the inauguration date signals that the Justice and Development Party government is trying to associate August 30 with another event.

c. The Invention of Tradition in the Election Night: Balcony Speeches in the Cold Capital

In the Turkish electoral tradition, when a party wins an election, that party's leader gives a small interview to journalists in the party headquarters. Since the election of Erdogan as a deputy from the Justice and Development Party to the government in 2003, these interviews turned into big meetings televised live by all mainstream media organizations. Usually, the interviews are given after the Supreme Board of Elections (Yuksek Secim Kurulu-YSK) announces that most of the votes are counted but before the official electoral results. Even though Erdogan complied with this tradition until the referendum of 2017, on that day, he did his balcony speech before the announcement of the Supreme Board of Elections (Sozcu 2017). From the national identity creation perspective, the timing of the speech is not very important, but from the electoral perspective, the timing is essential as there are serious doubts about the fairness and freedom of elections in 2017 and 2019.

The content of the speeches is more important than the timing of the speeches, as most of these speeches included references to Islam, the Ottoman Empire, and ummah. For example, in 2011, during his third balcony speech, he referred the God (Allah) six times and stated, 'I embrace all 74 million together and together, I entrust you all to God¹⁰ (T24 2011, translated by the author). Moreover, in this speech, instead of Turkish words, he preferred using several Arabic words. In another balcony speech, in 2014,¹¹ Erdogan stated: 'you [the Justice and Development Party] protected the independence struggle of *New Turkey*' (Sozcu 2017, emphasis added by the author) in which he equated the Independence War against the foreign imperial powers with the war against the Gulen Movement. Moreover, the emphasis

¹⁰'74 milyonu bir ve beraber olarak kucakliyor, hepinizi Allaha emanet ediyorum' (T24 2011).

¹¹Before these elections, in December 2013, a huge bribery fiasco shocked the Justice and Development Party ranks. The recorded audiotapes of Prime Minister Erdogan and his son Bilal Erdogan's conversation and several other ministers' tapes showed the extent of bribery and fraud in the Justice and Development Party. Erdogan argued that the audiotapes were fake, and they were released by the Gulenist Cult which Erdogan initially supported. In this balcony speech, Erdogan maintained that Turkish citizens should be unified and protect the Turkish state from the Gulenist Terror Organization. His independence struggle metaphor tries to capture this struggle against the Gulenist Organization.

on New Turkey became more prevalent after this talk. In another balcony speech in the same year, he stated, ‘let’s leave the Old Turkey, and old arguments behind’ (Sozcu 2017), which tries to instill the idea that Ataturk’s Turkey is the old Turkey and Erdogan’s Turkey is the new Turkey.

In this process, Erdogan skipped several balcony speeches. For example, in June 2015, when the Justice and Development Party lost the supermajority but stayed as the party with the highest vote share, Erdogan refrained from speaking in front of the crowd in Ankara. In this election, the Justice and Development Party’s 13 years as the single-party government came to an end (Kemahlioglu 2015). Even though the Justice and Development Party won the elections with a supermajority again in November 2015, this election result sent shock waves to Erdogan. After the *second* local elections in 2019, in which Ekrem Imamoglu and Mansur Yavas won the mayorships of Istanbul and Ankara respectively, Erdogan refrained from giving a talk, as well (Yenicag 2019; Cumhuriyet 2019). In his last balcony speech, on March 31, 2019, Erdogan stated, ‘We bow only to God and while we are praying to God. We never bow any other time to anyone else’ (Haber 7 2019).

5. Conclusion

In this article, I explained how the Justice and Development Party governments have been inventing new traditions since their election to the Turkish Grand National Assembly. I analyzed the new religious tradition created in the education system, naming and changing the meanings of the national holidays proclaimed by Ataturk, and the electoral tradition of giving balcony speeches to enforce the idea of New Turkey. The religious tradition and gradual transformation of the secular schools to religious schools created the conservative youth that President Erdogan was longing since he was elected as the Prime Minister of Turkey. The megaprojects which were named after the Ottoman Sultans, the association of these megaprojects with the national holidays and creation of the new national holidays, such as

the 15th July Martyrs Day alters the secular and non-Ottoman outlook of the Turkish identity. The Justice and Development Party's insistence on the Ottoman roots and President Erdogan's ambition to act as his role model, Sultan Abdulhamit, creates a neo-Ottoman national identity that is shadowing the Turkish identity. Lastly, the references to Old and New Turkey, along with using religious language in the balcony speeches, complements the new neo-Ottoman, conservative national identity.

As I demonstrated, Ataturk's Turkey, which is secular and far away from the Ottoman Empire, creates a striking contrast with Erdogan's Turkey and its religious and neo-Ottoman characteristics. As Anderson (2006), Shelef (2010), and Danforth (1995) suggest, the national identity construction projects have no end as the definition of a nation is fluid. In the Turkish case, I expect the Justice and Development Party to continue their conservative nation-building efforts as long as they in the elections in the future.

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