

## LECTURES

### Fear and Loathing in the Turkish National Imagination\*

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#### Abstract

Blood, sexual honor, and “Muslim-ness” are related discourses that in Turkey produce national subjects in the service of the state. The national narrative brands a subject’s perception of self, attributes of the body, and everyday practices with highly resonant markers of belonging. The maintenance of a national identity requires continual vigilance against the threat of forgetting, losing the coherence of the narrative, and disappearing. I will examine the role of purity and boundaries in reproducing Turkish national identity, with particular focus on two key metaphors of threat: the missionary and the headscarf.

**Keywords:** *nationalism, Islam, Turkey, headscarf, identity, missionaries, women in Turkey*

Visiting Turkey over the past few years I noticed an ossification of the categories by which people perceive others—whether individuals, groups, or nations—along with rising antipathy and what one might call a homogenization of the rhetoric of fear. At core is a dispute over who and what is a Turk and, by extension, what is the Turkish nation and who is the “enemy” of the Turkish nation.<sup>1</sup>

Key metaphors that in popular discourse represent a perceived threat to Turkish society and nation are the missionary and the headscarf. There are other threats, such as armed attacks by the separatist Kurdish PKK, that elicit strong feelings of fear and hostility towards specific segments of the population, but here I focus on the missionary and the headscarf because I believe they allow special insight into broader issues of national identity. I will discuss the reasons for this perception of threat, and reactions to it in the form of boundary maintenance and an emphasis on purity, particularly purity of blood—the lineage or bloodline (*soy*) of the nation—as well as other markers of belonging. I will suggest that the process of producing a national subjectivity involves highly gendered practices and discourses that privilege a militaristic masculinity and that sideline women’s role in symbolically constituting the nation.

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<sup>1</sup>Ferhat Kentel et al., “*Millletin Bölünmez Bütünlüğü*” *Demokratikleşme Sürecinde Parçalayan Milliyetçilik(ler)* (İstanbul: TESEV, 2007).

This discussion is largely based on research carried out in Turkey in 2007 and 2008,<sup>2</sup> research that included participant observation and interviews with a variety of citizens of both sexes, young and old, pious and secular, educated and working class, in village and city, as well as people of different faiths. I make no attempt to be representative, but discuss here certain discursive patterns that emerged from these conversations. I define as “Muslim” those who responded to my questions about their identity (*kimlik*) by favoring Muslim over Turk, and secularists as those who made a point of placing a Muslim identity second to Turkishness, however they defined it. They were then asked to elaborate upon their relation to the nation and national culture. This displaces a wide variety of indigenous differentiations of national and nationalist identity, a subject to which I will return below, but has the benefit of allowing people to loosely position themselves along a continuum of self-defined values.

The fundamental question underlying this study of nationalism is: “What does it mean to be Turkish?” Turkish national culture, the sociologist Ferhat Kentel told me, is like a balloon with lots of bulges. When you inflate it, the bulges disappear.<sup>3</sup> This article is an attempt to look at the variable processes that allow the nation to be visualized as a shared identity, rather than warring ideological tribes. When I asked my informants about their identity (*kimlik*) and their relation to the nation, two patterns emerged that might best be described as secular nationalism and Muslim nationalism.

Muslim nationalists have an approach to national identity that differs from that of secularist nationalists, one that, I believe, in a paradoxical fashion makes them relatively immune from the perception of threat to national identity (although subject to other forms of threat by the state itself) and freer to act in a heterodox manner. Their challenge to the orthodox definition of “what is a Turk” in turn increases popular anxiety and fuels the perception of threat. Two factors that complicate definitions of national identity are the increasing separation of national subjectivities from the state, and contradictory impulses toward individualism and collectivist identities, which will be discussed below.

### **The missionary and the headscarf**

The missionary image is not specific to any particular Christian group or even Christians in particular, but rather evokes a cleavage between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens and between Turkey and the West. The Turkish army, government and press have been very vocal in their concern about missionaries. Until recently, official websites for the Army Chief of Staff and the Directorate of Religious Affairs listed missionary activity as the biggest threat facing Turkey. A 2004 report by the Turkish Armed Forces claimed that Protestant missionaries aimed to pass out a million bibles and to convert 10 percent of the Turkish population by 2020. The army believed that missionaries particularly targeted Kurds, who were in a spiritual vacuum due to terrorism and violence, youth unsettled by earthquakes and other natural disasters, Alevis,<sup>4</sup> and others made vulnerable by a lack of (Islamic) religious knowledge. The report warned that there were 5,000 recent converts to non-Islamic religions (including Bahá’ís and Jehovah’s Witnesses), with 185 persons converting to Christianity in

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<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank the Fulbright-Hays Program and the American Research Institute in Turkey for funding this research. The conclusions are entirely the author’s.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with the author, 17 December 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Alevi Muslims belong to a syncretistic sect containing elements of Shi’ism. They make up an estimated 20 percent of the population; many are Kurds.

the previous three years alone. The military urged cooperation with governors, mayors, and security and education personnel in order to counter this threat.<sup>5</sup>

In a 1999 article in its monthly magazine, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs warned that missionaries carried out their activities in private schools, hospitals, libraries, foreign language schools, shelters, orphanages, and pensions where, under the guise of helping people, they pursued their aims to convert Muslims. Doctors, nurses, teachers, Peace Corps volunteers, anyone who came running to help, all might turn out to be missionaries. They particularly sought out Muslim countries (by implication, Turkey) where residents were cut off from their cultural and religious values, knew little about Islam, and were distanced from spiritual values. The Kurdish areas of East and Southeast Turkey were considered to be particularly vulnerable to missionaries, who used “religion to support separatist interference.” Missionaries, the article states, distributed brochures and gave material support to “some of our citizens and those of our blood (*soydaş*)” in return for changing their religion, getting them to “sell their conscience (*vicdan*) for money.” To counter this, the article recommended revealing the missionaries’ hidden agenda through television programs, written media, schools, and conferences. While the Turkish constitution guarantees freedom of religion and conscience, and making Christian propaganda is not illegal, the author continued, this should not be construed as allowing the spread of Christianity or its propaganda in a country whose population is 99 percent Muslim.<sup>6</sup> In 2005, the magazine published a warning that, while missionaries wished their activities to appear as innocent religious work, in fact they intended to divide the country and undermine its unity, and to lure its citizens into becoming tools of their dark ambitions. “Necessary precautions” should be taken, the author concluded.<sup>7</sup>

On the surface, this seems an unlikely concern. No more than 100,000 Christians remain in Turkey in a population of 74 million, and missionary activity is severely constrained by law and custom. Conversion of 10 percent of the population would mean more than seven million converts, far more than the 5,000 mentioned in the army report. Yet, a 2008 Pew poll found that unfavorable opinions about Christians in Turkey rose from 52 percent in 2004 to 74 percent in 2008, across all ages and levels of education. Only 10 percent of Turks had favorable views of Christians, slightly higher than of Jews, which was 7 percent.

In 2006, the Italian Catholic priest Rev. Andrea Santoro was shot and killed in the Black Sea city of Trabzon because people whispered that he was a missionary and paying young Muslims to convert. The Catholic bishop of Anatolia responded that such a charge was groundless. For one thing, the struggling Christian community had no money.<sup>8</sup> In April 2007, one German and two Turkish Protestants in Malatya were tortured and killed by Turks who claimed that they had been told the men were missionaries. The victims worked in a bookstore that had Bibles in stock. Foreign media and European Union representatives expressed outrage and insisted that a Turkey destined to join the European Union first must show tolerance for different beliefs. During this period, prominent mention of the missionary threat disappeared from Turkish government websites.

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<sup>5</sup>“TSK: Misyonerler, Alevileri ve Kürtleri Hedef Aldı,” *Zaman*, 31 December 2004. The original report is no longer available on the Armed Forces website. All translations are by the author.

<sup>6</sup>Hasan Yıldırım, “Misyonerlik Dalgaları İslâm’ın Sağlam Duvarlarına Çarpıp Durmaktadır,” *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, October 1999.

<sup>7</sup>Ramazan Özalpdemir, “Misyonerlik,” *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, June 2005.

<sup>8</sup>Charles Vick, “In Turkey, a Deep Suspicion of Missionaries,” *The Washington Post*, April 9 2006.

In 2008, a number of videos circulating on YouTube captured these fears and their political context. Several had been commissioned by the secularist, nationalist newspaper *Cumhuriyet* and shown on television. Others were amateur responses in the distinctive style of these ads. One of the latter begins with these words on the screen: “Are you aware of the danger?” It is filmed as seen through the eyes of someone pushing his way through a home toward a man uneasily asleep in his bed. Through the intruder’s eyes, the viewer sees him lift a rolled-up copy of *Cumhuriyet* newspaper and beat the sleeping man with it. The man awakes, startled and defensive. The next screen warns: “Because *they’re* not sleeping.” A subtle soundtrack throughout the clip plays ominous Christian-themed music, repeating the words “Jesu Christie” over and over.<sup>9</sup> Another version of the same ad shows the viewer as an intruder looking in on a sleeping child first, with the implication that someone could harm the child because the parents are sleeping, before violently waking the father with the rolled-up newspaper.

That same year, Turkish villagers near the town of Midyat in Southeastern Anatolia petitioned the government to re-assign to their villages land that belonged to the 1,600-year-old Syriac Monastery of Mor Gabriel, complaining that the monks were missionaries. One of the petitions addressing the local officials rooted the village’s right to the monastery’s land in the 1453 Turkish conquest of Christian Byzantium: “You are the sons of Fatih the Conqueror, who once said ‘I’ll cut off the head of the one who cuts a branch from my forest.’ Don’t cut off the head of a bishop but you must prevent his occupation and plunder.”<sup>10</sup> The monks responded that they had been there for hundreds of years and had been paying taxes on this land to the Turkish state since 1938. The monastery won back some of the land in court, but lost a substantial part to the State Treasury.

Over the decades since the founding of the republic in 1923, non-Muslim citizens have suffered restrictions and occasional officially instigated pogroms. The two most egregious were the 1942 Wealth Tax that wiped out the livelihood of Turkey’s Jewish population and led to mass out-migration, and mob attacks on Greek-Orthodox shops and churches in 1955 on the basis of a fabricated rumor that Atatürk’s birth house in Salonica had been burned down. It later emerged that the rumor had been spread by nationalists to force Greeks to flee the country. Police and soldiers stood by or participated in the attacks.<sup>11</sup>

This history of active distrust between the secular Turkish state and its non-Muslim citizens is rooted in World War I, when European powers backed the territorial ambitions of Christian Greece against the Ottoman Turks, and even earlier in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Europeans supported revolts by the Ottoman Empire’s Christian minorities with the aim of acquiring control over these territories. Even the violent legacy of Christian Crusaders rampaging through the region between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries to “win back the Holy Land” from the Muslim infidel still resonates in the region today and is used as a trope for presumed foreign imperial ambitions. In the post-1923 era of the Turkish nation-state, the missionary came to stand for all of these predations and is emblematic of a continued perception of threat despite vastly changed international circumstances—Turkey is now a NATO member and a candidate for EU membership. The fear of conversion, however, taps a deeper and more intimate vein: the loss of the national self, rather than of territory. In the

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<sup>9</sup>*Cumhuriyet*, Commercial, 3, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfbvgWnBTqo>.

<sup>10</sup>*Hürriyet*, 2 September 2009.

<sup>11</sup>Umut Özkırımlı and Spyros A. Sofos, *Tormented by History: Nationalism in Greece and Turkey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

official national imaginary, the authentic Turkish self is Muslim.<sup>12</sup> In a 1998 national study of Turkish youth, respondents who chose to identify themselves as religious-traditional nearly always chose Turkish-national as the second point of reference, and vice versa.<sup>13</sup>

The official state policy toward religion is better translated as laicist, rather than secular. That is, the state does not promote the separation of mosque and state, but rather runs the mosques itself. Laicism, from the French term *laïcité* (Turkish *laiklik*), means state control of the public expression of religion. In the Turkish case, that religion is a particular Turkish brand of Sunni Islam, and the national person is conceived as being both Turkish and Muslim. The association of Turkish with Muslim in national discourse—for instance, as is narrated in school books<sup>14</sup>—means that non-Muslim Turkish citizens, including Turkey’s small population of Jews, are not perceived by their fellow citizens to be part of the Turkish nation, causing considerable distress to non-Muslims whose ancestors have lived in this region for hundreds of years and who identify with Turkey. In the dominant national scenario, non-Muslims are cast in the role of potentially traitorous agents for foreign powers.<sup>15</sup> The image of the missionary as threat to the nation and the national self unites nationalists of all stripes, since even secularists imagine Turkishness as Muslim, despite their rejection of Muslim practices, such as wearing the headscarf, that contradict the dominant national scenario of a Muslim-Turkish nation with a secular lifestyle.

The headscarf is another meta-category of threat that divides Turks, this time along lines of piety and secularity, but also over what it means to be Turkish (and by implication a Turkish Muslim and a Turkish woman). Several original *Cumhuriyet* video advertisements use veiling to demonstrate the threat of Islam to the republic. One shows a woman’s eyes leaning forward to look into a ballot box, as seen from within the box. The woman’s eyes remain framed by the slot, a visual reference to the face-veil. The voice-over says: “Do you see the danger in this ballot box? Consolidate your vote for a laicist and democratic Turkey. Take control of your republic.” “Republic” is also the name of the newspaper, and the term used for “take control” (*sahip çıkmak*) also means to “make your own,” thus deftly turning a political warning into an advertisement for the newspaper.<sup>16</sup> In another ad, a woman dressed in a blouse is slowly being enveloped in black until only her face shows. She says, “Of course, I make my own decisions.” Her voice, however, is that of a man.<sup>17</sup>

For most of the twentieth century, an urban, nominally Muslim class with a secular lifestyle controlled the national scenario of a model modern, secular lifestyle that Turkey projected to its own citizens and abroad. Two of its key symbols were drinking alcohol and the open display of women’s hair. Abstention and covering the head were markers of lower-class or village origin. Along with the rise of the Islamist movement in the 1980s, a new societal group of wealthy pious families developed, an Islamic bourgeoisie with enormous financial and political clout. They became the trend-setters for pious urban youth—many of them offspring of rural migrants—who wished to appear contemporary and modern. This

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<sup>12</sup>Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who Is a Turk?* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>13</sup>Konrad Adenauer Foundation, *Turkish Youth 98: The Silent Majority Highlighted* (İstanbul: İstanbul Mülkiyeliler Foundation Social Research Center [İMV-SAM], 1999).

<sup>14</sup>Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth of the Military Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave, 2004).

<sup>15</sup>Deniz Tarba Ceylan and Gral Irzık, *Human Rights Issues in Textbooks: The Turkish Case* (İstanbul: The History Foundation of Turkey, 2004).

<sup>16</sup>*Cumhuriyet*, Commercial, 2, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwTzascPpCQ&NR=>.

<sup>17</sup>*Cumhuriyet*, Commercial, 3, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfbgWnBTqo>.

generation began wearing *tesettür*, a continually evolving form of modest but fashion-conscious dress consisting of a long coat or tunic matched with a scarf tightly wound around the head and neck.<sup>18</sup> It designates a way to be modern and Turkish that directly contradicts the secularist national scenario in which only peasants and the elderly cover their heads and do so in styles distinctly different from *tesettür*.

Feelings about *tesettür* resonate with deeply held beliefs about what qualifies as modern and contemporary. Middle-class Muslim women say they cover their heads as a way to be modern, fashionable and urban, while expressing their faith. In contrast, many secularists perceive the headscarf, particularly in its *tesettür* form, to be a threat to the fundamentals of the Turkish nation and, as a symbol of political Islam, to its democratic state system. They disavow it as Turkish. As with missionary conversion, a widely held belief among secularists is that women are being paid by Islamists to cover their heads and wear *tesettür* as a means of turning Turkey into Malaysia or Iran—in other words, into another nation.

The Islamic bourgeoisie emerged after the 1980s, when the government of Turgut Özal opened Turkey's economy to the world market and loosened constraints on regional and mid-level businesses. These businesses produced a wealthy class that, reflecting their regional and class origins, tended to be more pious than the previous republican elite and sometimes did business explicitly on the basis of Islamic values. Their influence, along with other factors, led to their rise as a political class, culminating in the 2002 election of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) with roots in political Islam, which, as of this writing, still heads the government.

The AKP has distanced itself from the Islamic label, developed a platform promoting individual rights and freedom of speech, and pushed for EU membership in the belief that these would weaken the laicist state's grip and guarantee Islamic religious rights in Turkey. Foremost among these is the right for covered women to attend university, something that is presently banned. Pious men, whose identity is unmarked, are free to attend.

The headscarf issue has become the lightning rod for social and political tension at the highest levels, almost leading to the fall of the government in 2008, when the Constitutional Court accused the ruling AKP of threatening the nature of the laicist state by changing the constitution in such a way as to allow headscarves on university campuses. In another controversial case before the court, members of an ultra-nationalist group called Ergenekon have been accused of plotting to destabilize the nation in order to overthrow the AKP government in a coup because they considered the government to be a threat to the secularist nation and the laicist state. More than 200 persons have been arrested in the case, including military officers and members of civic organizations. Prosecutors are considering the possibility that the killings of Christians in Trabzon and Malatya, as well as the 2007 assassination of the Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink were part of an Ergenekon plot.<sup>19</sup> Dink was accused of insulting Turkish blood in one of his articles.

In other words, in what many might consider a counter-intuitive development, it appears to be the AKP with Muslim roots that is spearheading the drive to gain EU membership and to

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<sup>18</sup>Yael Navaro-Yashin, "The Market for Identities: Secularism, Islamism, Commodities," in *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey*, eds. Deniz Kandiyoti and Ayşe Saktanber (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002).

<sup>19</sup>Gareth H. Jenkins, "Between Fact and Fantasy: Turkey's Ergenekon Investigation," (Washington, DC: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2009).

secure individual rights. The AKP also supports integration into the global economy, while the secularist, laicist state and its supporters in the military, judiciary, and educational system, and the populace appear to be drifting toward isolationism and xenophobia, sometimes expressed as anti-Christian discourse. These internal divisions are at base different visions of Turkish national identity. As a result of a series of violent incidents, real and suspected coup attempts, and lapses of tolerance on all sides, polarization and the perception of the nation as being under threat have soared.

One could point to many internal and external reasons for this heightened tension and threat perception—a hot war with the separatist PKK; an extended period during which the United States refused to allow the Turkish army to pursue PKK terrorists across the border into Iraq; European Union reluctance regarding Turkey’s membership bid; the Iraq war that made Turks wonder whether they were the next domino in US imperialist expansion; and a power struggle between some of the old secular, urban state-linked elites and the newly emergent pious social and economic elites associated with the elected AKP government. But the 2000s also were a time of relative economic and social stability, hope for the future, a raised profile abroad, and better infrastructure at home. Business in the provinces was doing well, and there was pride in Turkey’s economic accomplishments and a sense of forward momentum in society, with EU membership a potential goal despite setbacks, supported by nearly half of the population.<sup>20</sup> Some pious and secular businesses and NGOs joined forces to pursue common political and economic goals.

Despite this, public discourse over these same years—reflected in personal conversations—became almost exclusively black and white, infused with ever more vitriol and rage and directed increasingly not only against other Turks, but also against the West. It was as if the entire nation had choked itself with a noose of terms that strangled any real discourse and narrowed vision down to an ideological pinprick. Like the many Inuit terms for snow, Turks have multiple words for being a Turk, each with minutely differentiated ideological characteristics, ancestral voices, genealogies, narratives of threat and redemption, and discursive scripts: *Kemalist* (broadly, follower of the principles of the nation’s founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, secularist, laicist), the related and equally potent *Atatürkçü* (Atatürk admirer, secularist), *İslamcı* (adherent of politicized Islam), *milliyetçi* (rightist nationalist), *ülküücü* (right-wing ultra-nationalist with Islamist or pan-Turkist tendencies), *ulusalcı* (left-wing or neo-nationalist, secularist, supporter of a strong state and military, anti-West), *liberal* (supporter of cosmopolitanism and freedom of speech), and *Türkiyeli*, a recent neologism that aims to circumvent the ethnic assumptions inherent in the term Turk, without bleaching it of communal identity altogether. The term “Turkish citizen” is used when referring to non-Muslim citizens who in the hegemonic national scenario cannot be Turks.<sup>21</sup>

Further complicating the study of Turkish national identity is Turkey’s claim to exceptionalism, the idea that Turkishness is unique and different from, and some claim prior to, any other national or cultural identity.<sup>22</sup> Several of my Turkish colleagues and graduate

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<sup>20</sup>German Marshall Fund, “Transatlantic Trends 2009 Partners,” (2009).

<sup>21</sup>A survey commissioned in 2007 by Boğaziçi University and the Open Society Institute examined some other categories of political identity that have recently gained currency. Forty-four percent of Turks identified as “new right” or modern rightist, defined as pro-democracy and pro-Western. Sixty-six percent of AKP supporters chose this category to describe themselves. A quarter of survey respondents said they were “traditional rightists,” defined as skeptical of democracy and the West. Forty-four percent of AKP supporters chose this label. Twenty-four percent of survey respondents said they were “traditional left,” also defined as skeptical of democracy and the West. This means that almost half the population is skeptical of democracy and the West.

<sup>22</sup>Ceylan and Irzik, *Human Rights Issues in Textbooks*.

students have related experiences in which their Turkish institutions or interlocutors have balked at supporting or participating in studies that would compare Turkey to other countries on the premise that Turkey is unique, with the sometimes openly stated implication that it would be unpatriotic to study any other place.

Michel Foucault has reminded us of the power of discourse to discipline and produce the individual, in no small part by defining and regulating the subject's "body"—giving meaning to such aspects of the body as blood, sex, gesture, and in Turkey everything from the color and visibility of a woman's hair to the shape of a man's beard.<sup>23</sup> In January of 2008, twenty school children in Kırşehir painted a Turkish flag with their own blood, which they framed and presented to General Büyükanıt, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to commemorate the deaths of soldiers killed by the PKK. The general praised the children and posed with them and their gift for the press. A nationalist newspaper distributed copies of the blood flag. Critics of this were savaged in the media as enemies of Turkey.<sup>24</sup> Sheathed in the power of the state, discourse demarcates what is normal and right from what is abnormal and wrong and shapes the subject's conception of an appropriate self. This self, Stuart Hall has suggested, is "narrativized" within a story about belonging that is built upon resources of history, language and culture.<sup>25</sup> In Turkey, a sip of whisky, like a drop of blood, is a highly charged cultural marker of social class, lifestyle and political values; it takes its power and meaning from the particular national narrative with which the individual identifies.

The sociologist Çağlar Keyder told me that he had asked his students at Boğaziçi University what they feared they would lose if Turkey joined the EU. They replied, nationalism. This surprised him, he told me, because he had always thought of nationalism as something outside the individual, something you subscribed to, that disciplined you. But it seems, he concluded, that nationalism has become part of people's personal identity.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the national narrative brands a subject's perception of self, attributes of the body and everyday practices with highly resonant markers of belonging. These guarantee the pleasurable and secure embrace of community, but they are also dangerous because they are subject to loss. In Turkey, the individual has become the nation, and the prospect of loss is immeasurably more fear-inspiring because it implies the loss of the "authentic" self.

Charles Lindholm has suggested that the search for authenticity is a consequence of a modern loss of faith and meaning.<sup>27</sup> Some seek authenticity through personal expression in art, musical performance, travel, or consumption, while others seek to anchor themselves in more collective forms (such as nationalism, religion, or minority identities), but also, on a smaller scale, in the construction of group identity around things like food and dance. In post-1980s Turkey, where the majority of the population is under the age of 25, urban young people with high school education appear hesitant to link their subjective identities and lifestyles to a single national project, leading to accusations of selfishness by previous generations whose subjectivities were shaped by and identities invested in the Kemalist republican project.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1975); Carol Delaney, "Untangling the Meanings of Hair in Turkish Society," *Anthropological Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (1994).

<sup>24</sup>Gökçe Gündüç, "Büyükanıt Spreads Militarism among Children," (2008), <http://bianet.org/english/education/104134-buyukanit-spreads-militarism-among-children>.

<sup>25</sup>Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996).

<sup>26</sup>Personal communication, 26 March 2008.

<sup>27</sup>Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

<sup>28</sup>Leyla Neyzi, "Object or Subject? The Paradox of 'Youth' in Turkey," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 3 (2001): 425.



Of Turks identified as “new right” Instead, young people are increasingly expressing themselves through new media, civic activism, and consumerism, but they do so in a society characterized by a collectivist culture that emphasizes values like obedience and conformity,<sup>29</sup> and collective identity remains central to their construction of subjectivity. The proliferation of collectivist subjectivities divorced from the state is exacerbated by the inability of youth to participate fully in public life. A lack of jobs keeps them economically dependent on an older generation, and youth are politically disenfranchised by what Neyzi has called a “political gerontocracy” that monopolizes the public sphere.<sup>30</sup> Kandiyoti also has observed that “the role of primary groups and particularistic allegiances in mediating citizens’ access to resources and services has remained critical.”<sup>31</sup> In place of individualizing as a response to the spread of new forms of communication and self-production through commodities, Turkish youth seem “to be fragmenting into identity-based enclaves.”<sup>32</sup>

In their search for an authentic identity, people are turning to the pre-republican past for discourses on which to model the self within the nation. “There is a growing interest in Turkey today in memories of the past, including life histories, autobiographies, and biographies, as identities are increasingly narrowed into the space of the self and body.”<sup>33</sup> The Ottoman era has been rehabilitated as a source of subjective as well as national identity.

In other words, while the individual has become the nation, the nation has become increasingly divorced from the state. Republicanism has become “a conservative, institutional identity associated with the status quo.”<sup>34</sup> As the ability of the Kemalist state to shape the national subject narrows, alternative definitions of the nation and the national subject have emerged. One of the most successful is that of a pious Muslim Turk whose subjectivity and vision for the future are shaped by an imperial Ottoman past overlaid onto a republican state framework, but divorced from the Kemalist state project.

Totalizing narratives of identity, such as Republican Kemalism, are fantasies of community that rely on difference to mark a frontier between us and them. Such fantasies require continual discursive work to maintain boundaries between categories of people that often are more symbolic than real. The maintenance of a national identity requires continual vigilance against the threat of forgetting, losing the coherence of the narrative, and disappearing. It requires continual monitoring of boundaries against the incursion of impure elements (in language, ideas, cultural practices, and blood). Following the Kocaeli earthquake in 1999, for instance, Turkey’s minister of health at the time banned foreign blood donations from Greece from entering the country, citing concerns about protecting the integrity of Turkish blood.

Non-orthodox elements already within Turkish boundaries must be assimilated, co-opted, or otherwise rendered harmless. The Islamic bourgeoisie represents just such a threat that has injected heterodoxy into all aspects of social and political life, including the perception of the nation and the definition of the national person. It is for this reason that the headscarf has moved from being simply a signifier of low social status to a meta-symbol of threat to the

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<sup>29</sup>Hasan Atak and Figen Çok, “The Turkish Version of Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (The Idea),” *International Journal of Human and Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2008).

<sup>30</sup>Neyzi, “Object or Subject? The Paradox of ‘Youth’ in Turkey,” 426.

<sup>31</sup>Deniz Kandiyoti, “Women, Islam, and the State: A Comparative Approach,” in *Comparing Muslim Societies: Knowledge and the State in a World Civilization*, ed. Juan Cole (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 256.

<sup>32</sup>Neyzi, “Object or Subject? The Paradox of ‘Youth’ in Turkey,” 425.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.: 427.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.: 425.

republic—the Islamic bourgeoisie has begun to rewrite the national scenario to include heterodox forms like *tesettür* veiling as modern and Turkish. This constitutes a rival authenticity powerfully rooted in religious and communal collectivity, but also in personal expression as the Islamic bourgeoisie and their imitators develop their own Turkish-Muslim enclaves within which distinction is gained through lifestyle, fashion, consumption, Ottoman-inspired musical performance, and distinctive media and publishing realms.

### **Losing Turkishness**

What lies behind an overriding fear of losing one's national identity, particularly in a nation like Turkey that has such an exceptionally pronounced national particularity? For instance, why would the nation's military worry that large numbers of Turks, whose strong national consciousness is often and loudly trumpeted, would be susceptible to conversion to Christianity, an act that would, in effect, make them "enemies" of Turkey and no longer "Turks"? Worse, why would anyone fear that Turks would take such a vastly negative action in exchange for a few hundred liras? The same can be asked about the widespread secularist claim that women cover their heads in exchange for money in a national climate hostile to that act.

One answer might be that individuals in Turkey can lose their national identity because national identity has been individualized and because the national subject is now a choosing subject. Proselytism by missionaries is about individual conversion, not collective conversion. After almost a century of laicism, of state-defined Islam and the suppression of non-state forms such as religious brotherhoods, has the Turkish-Muslim self become unmoored from religious authority, become heteronomous? If so, then the fear described above is not about twenty-first-century Crusaders invading Turkish territory, but about alienation from Turkishness by Turks themselves.

Islam was one of the few unifying elements in Early Republican Turkey. By the time the republic was established in 1923, most of Anatolia's non-Muslims had fled, been killed, or moved in population exchanges after World War I, leaving a primarily Muslim but ethnically mixed population. Islamic brotherhoods posed a challenge to the new state and constituted a powerful alternative identity that had to be contained, but Islam also was an important if problematic tool for unifying the nation. The public functions of Islam were absorbed by the laicist state, and state-defined and regulated Islam (or laicism) became a pillar of national identity. This commitment was revived most recently in the 1980s, when the elected government with the support of the army expanded Islamic education in order to encourage national unity as "Muslim Turks" and thereby counter the spread of communism and leftist ideologies. Being Muslim is an intrinsic part of the national narrative, even for secular Muslims, and conversion means losing Turkishness.

Fear of missionaries remains a widespread trope expressing this broader anxiety, one that goes beyond historic suspicion of Christians. The journalist Ayşe Önal<sup>35</sup> interviewed local Trabzon residents one month after the murder of Rev. Santori. The gunman's mother told Önal that her son killed Santori because he was a missionary, but when Önal asked what she meant by the term, the mother responded: "He was going to make him a Jew." In interviews in Malatya after the killings there, Önal encountered a similar displacement of meaning. People expressed fear that missionaries would make the country (*memleket*) "without

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<sup>35</sup>Personal communication, 12 November 2009.

religion” (*kafir* or *dinsiz*). Who were the missionaries? Answers included “the Jews” and “the Masons.” Some mentioned Alevis as a threat to the nation because they were believed to be easier to convert.

Another explanation for this exaggerated fear of losing national identity is that Turkishness is an identity that, despite the powerful discourse about blood, has weak ethnic roots. The citizens of the new republic were the remnants of an empire that at one point extended across Southern Europe and North Africa. If you ask a Turk about his or her grandparents, more often than not they have a far-flung heritage, for instance, a grandmother from Aleppo and a grandfather from Sofia or Salonika. Very few Turks can point to Central Asian roots, which are lost in the mists of time. The parents of the artist and film-maker Kerim Bora migrated to Turkey from Montenegro following World War II. In his primary school years, Bora said, “the teacher told us that we came from Central Asia. However, I knew that we were from Montenegro. I asked my father about it and he just laughed.”<sup>36</sup>

The republic also was founded on the basis of a shared language, Turkish, that was to some extent artificially constructed during a period of nationalist language reform.<sup>37</sup> Atatürk’s words “How happy is he who calls himself a Turk” is inscribed on plaques and pedestals across the country, referring explicitly to language as a source of national identity and unity. The inscription appears particularly often and in large format in the Kurdish-speaking East, the state’s not-so-subtle reminder that until recently speaking Kurdish was considered treason. If language is the national glue, then this explains the fear that speakers of a language besides Turkish, like Kurdish or Laz, might develop an alternate language-based identity that would undermine national unity.

The fear of losing national identity and unity is exacerbated by a weak sense of citizenship. Turks have tended to revere the state as a father figure (*devlet baba*), but until recently have expressed little evidence of a relationship to their elected government based on mutual obligation—that is, as citizens who should pay taxes and can expect services. School textbooks, for instance, define proper citizenship in terms of “dying for the homeland,” while devaluing civilian activities.<sup>38</sup>

The rhetoric of fear implies that the state and parts of the population no longer trust in the inviolability of national boundaries, whether geographical or personal, and have stepped up boundary maintenance, pressure to conform, and demonization of the heterodox “other.” In other words, individualization, or the emergence of the liberal individual as a marker of modernism, does not necessarily lead to more tolerance, but instead can be destabilizing, leaving the individual national subject with nothing but the bitter gruel of political jockeying, impotent ideological categories, and nostalgia for an unselfconscious collectivity and the embrace of community. The weakening of boundaries of Turkish identity has led not to a reveling in choice and creative self-definition, much less to increased tolerance, but rather to a defensive reinforcement of positions and heightened militarism.

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<sup>36</sup>Emine Özcan, ““İrkim Türk, Dinim İslam”dan Ötesi devinim.tv’de,”(2009), <http://bianet.org/bianet/diger/115038-irkim-turk-dinim-islamdan-otesi-devinim-tvde>.

<sup>37</sup>Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>38</sup>Ceylan and Irzik, *Human Rights Issues in Textbooks*, 78. The gendered aspect of this definition of citizenship should also be noted. “Dying for the homeland” refers to the male soldier and provides no obvious role for a female citizen.

Militarism is concerned with fears of weakness and boundary penetration.<sup>39</sup> These fears are kept at bay through purity rituals and taboos that focus intensely on objects that are “out of place” (for instance, the appearance of the headscarf in public or middle-class space), on the purification of space through the placement of images (for instance, busts of Atatürk or oversized Turkish flags),<sup>40</sup> on rehearsal of in-group/out-group membership in festivals and national holiday displays,<sup>41</sup> and on notions of purity of blood, custom, language, religious practice,<sup>42</sup> music, and even food. One might argue that it is the weakness of Turkish identity, particularly in its secular form, that leads to potentially destructive defensive behavior against enemies “within and without,” such as attempted coups and anti-minority violence. Identifying an enemy encourages the clarification of boundaries: “Violence can be understood as a way of ‘ensuring’ the certainty of the categorical identity of the ‘other,’ and therefore of the self.”<sup>43</sup>

By contrast, the Muslim version of the national scenario is based on a definition of the nation that appears to be less boundary- and less blood-driven than that held by Kemalist nationalists. Muslim nationalists consciously model their concept of the nation on the historical, flexibly bounded and multi-denominational Ottoman Empire, rather than solely on defending the present boundaries of the nation-state and a Central Asian bloodline. AKP has promoted rituals and monuments that celebrate the 1453 Conquest of Constantinople by the Turks over those celebrating the founding of the republic in 1923.<sup>44</sup>

This “openness of boundaries” and focus on an Ottoman, rather than republican, national narrative has given the AKP government license to develop relationships with countries in the Near East and Balkans, as well as with Iran, which are viewed as “special friends” based on this historical connection. A Turkish withdrawal from Cyprus, long seen by secular nationalists as a treasonable surrender of Turkish land, becomes a solvable problem of jurisdiction under the Ottoman scenario. Muslim nationalists also have been inspired by the Ottoman model of ordering relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, the *millet* system, which integrates non-Muslims as separate and unequal, but tolerated groups. This approach is mirrored in some advances in minority rights made under the AKP, such as allowing churches and synagogues to invest in repairing their buildings, something that had been banned throughout much of republican history.

## Community and rights

Muslim nationalism is a collectivist national identity rooted in a specifically Turkish form of Islam with Sufi roots. It does not contradict the laicist state’s Sunni Muslim definition of a Turk, but uncouples that identity from state structures such as the Directorate of Religious Affairs, which governs mosques and Islamic instruction. This allows religiosity to become personalized within non-state religious groups, such as the Nakşibendi Sufi order and

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<sup>39</sup>Joane Nagel, “Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 2 (2010): 256; Afsaneh Najmabadi, “The Erotic Vatan [Homeland] as Beloved and Mother: To Love, to Possess, and to Protect,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, no. 3 (1997): 445.

<sup>40</sup>Esra Özyürek, “Miniaturizing Atatürk: Privatization of State Imagery and Ideology in Turkey,” *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>41</sup>Alev Çınar, “National History as a Contested Site: The Conquest of Istanbul and Islamist Negotiations of the Nation,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 2 (2001).

<sup>42</sup>Kimberly Hart, “The Orthodoxization of Ritual Practice in Western Anatolia,” *American Ethnologist* 36, no. 4 (2009).

<sup>43</sup>Neyzi, “Object or Subject? The Paradox of ‘Youth’ in Turkey,” 421.

<sup>44</sup>Çınar, “National History as a Contested Site.”

Fethullah Gülen's religious movement, which operate through tight collective networks and provide powerful, if heterodox, Turkish identities not as susceptible to the fear of loss of the national self. The Muslim national scenario is based on a cultural Muslim-ness, rather than a racialized or language-based Turkishness, making it more open to negotiation with other identities, such as Turkey's non-Muslim minorities.

In contrast, secular nationalists increasingly have migrated toward Turkish exceptionalism and isolationism, anti-Westernism, and the missionary/threat script. A 2007 survey found that most respondents who identified as upper class and as secularist Republican People's Party (CHP) supporters said they opposed EU membership.<sup>45</sup> Open boundaries mean that the definition of Turkishness is no longer clear and the bloodline of the nation no longer guaranteed to be pure. Kemalist claims that Turkish citizens can be paid to convert and to veil—that is, abandon their national identity (as secular Muslim Turks) for money—speak to a broader anxiety about loss of community and the corrosive effect of commercialization and globalization on group loyalty, whether that group is the family, the community, or the nation. The Kemalist sense of siege has been exacerbated by the rise of a highly collectivist Muslim national movement that is threatening not only because of its heterodox notions of Turkish national identity, but also because it appears more stable and rooted than secular nationalism. Secularists perceive the Muslim nationalist discourse of individual human rights as duplicitous and as hiding its true collectivist nature. One fear commonly expressed by secularists is that “eventually community pressure will make us all wear veils and then we'll become Iran.” In some quarters, the response has been a heightening of essentialism, Turkey for the Turks, and an increased patrolling of boundaries for purity.

In fact, Islamists do code-switch between the language of collectivism and the language of individual choice.<sup>46</sup> For instance, in response to secularist charges that women are pressured to veil by their conservative communities, a Muslim counter-narrative emerged that emphasizes individual rights—that is, women's right to choose the veil. At another level, however, Muslim discourse unapologetically refers to the requirements of kinship, community, religion, and shared religious, ethical and cultural values. Depending on the circumstances, Muslim nationalist discourse strategically deploys either individual rights or its powerful communal solidarity.

It is important to point out, however, that Muslim communal solidarity is self-consciously Turkish. Muslim nationalists do not envision the nation as Iran or Indonesia, and certainly not as Arab. Muslim nationalists, like their secular counterparts, patrol the national Muslim subject for purity, in this case against perceived inroads made by non-Turkish culture. The Ottoman model places Turkish Islam and Turks at the pinnacle; it does not envision Turkish participation in a trans-national Islam that is not led and defined by Turks.

This dual discourse of individual rights and collectivism is readily apparent at the national level. In response to EU requirements and intensive lobbying by women's rights activists, for instance, the AKP government pushed through a number of legal changes that protect women as individuals, replacing laws that defined women's rights primarily on the basis of their status as family and community members.<sup>47</sup> Since then, there has been a notable lack of will in implementing these new laws. Why is AKP's ecumenical approach to foreign policy and

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<sup>45</sup>Commissioned by Boğaziçi University and the Open Society Institute.

<sup>46</sup>Jenny White, “The Islamist Movement in Turkey and Human Rights,” *Human Rights Review* 3, no. 1 (2001).

<sup>47</sup>European Stability Initiative (ESI), “Sex and Power in Turkey: Feminism, Islam and the Maturing of Turkish Democracy,” (2007), [http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi\\_document\\_id\\_90.pdf](http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_document_id_90.pdf).

minority rights not reflected in carrying through women's rights legislation? I would argue that the conservative view of women as embedded in society stands in the way of the implementation of liberal practices. This view of women's rights as deriving from their family and community status, rather than of women as individuals with rights, is widely shared in Turkey, and not only by right-wing nationalists or pious Muslims. Women in the Muslim world "have not emerged as full-fledged citizens but often remained members of religious/ethnic collectivities whose control is relinquished by the state to the patriarchal interests of their communities."<sup>48</sup> This understanding of women's rights as rooted in their community status, rather than in their humanity, is reinforced by state institutions such as the police and the judiciary and mirrored in the conceptual structure of nation and nationalism, which sets up "the nation" as a vulnerable female, with the nationalist as the protective male whose honor reflects that of the entire national family and ensures the continuity of the national lineage.<sup>49</sup>

Nationalism implies control—of the body, of national boundaries, and of boundaries of the body.<sup>50</sup> The discourse of nationalism uses the same language and imagery as that of sexual honor.<sup>51</sup> That is, the shame brought about by a penetration of sexual boundaries is parallel to the loss of honor due to a penetration of the nation's borders. At a military outpost in Aktütün on the border with Iraq, which was attacked in 2008 by the PKK, soldiers had used stones to outline a message on the ground: *Hudut namustur*, "The frontier/boundary is honor."<sup>52</sup> The term *namus* is also used to refer to women's sexual honor and chastity.<sup>53</sup> In the Religious Affairs Directorate article warning of the danger posed by missionaries, the author illustrated his point by referring to the "blood that flooded Kosovo" a few months earlier and similar "attacks against *ırz* [chastity, purity, honor], *namus* [good name, honor], *iffet* [chastity, innocence], *haysiyet* [personal dignity, honor], and *şeref* [honor, distinction]... We have a debt of loyalty and honor [*namus*] to those who put this motherland [*vatan*] under our protection [*emanet*, in our care]."<sup>54</sup>

This highly sexualized and gendered discourse, I suggest, positions men and women differently in the national imaginary and is reflected in men's and women's everyday understandings of their relation to the nation. Although women are displayed as part of the national ideal, they are not constructed—nor, as reflected in my discussions, do they view themselves—as active players. Women enter nationalist discourse as providers of sons for the military, and this is expressed in a worship of mothers, especially mothers of martyrs, as fallen soldiers are called.<sup>55</sup> The participation of professional women in public life that is the hallmark of Kemalism was mentioned only once by my interlocutors, by an educated professional woman, and only as an afterthought, pointing to a disconnect between Kemalist ideology and national subjectivity.

The Muslim national narrative also excludes women, who appear as passive figures on national display, not active in the work force or in politics, and as vulnerable, socially

<sup>48</sup>Kandiyoti, "Women, Islam, and the State," 256.

<sup>49</sup>Nagel, "Masculinity and Nationalism."

<sup>50</sup>Ayşe Parla, "The Honor of the State: Virginity Examinations in Turkey," *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001).

<sup>51</sup>Rubina Saigol, "Militarization, Nation and Gender: Women's Bodies as Arenas of Violent Conflict," in *Deconstructing Sexuality in the Middle East: Challenges and Discourses*, ed. P. İlkkaracan (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008); Najmabadi, "The Erotic Vatan," 445.

<sup>52</sup>*Milliyet*, 8 October 2008.

<sup>53</sup>Najmabadi, "The Erotic Vatan," 444.

<sup>54</sup>Yıldırım, "Misyonerlik Dalgaları."

<sup>55</sup>Najmabadi, "The Erotic Vatan," 446.

embedded beings whose physical integrity and honor must be protected through social control (rather than as free individuals). Secularist and Muslim nationalists are united in their fear of losing honor by allowing their defenses to be penetrated. For Muslim nationalists, this anxiety focuses on women, but geographic and to some extent ethnic and religious borders are unproblematic and potentially open. For Kemalists, the physical borders of the nation are the source of honor (*namus*), along with jealously guarded cultural and racial boundaries. Some favor slamming the door shut on the world entirely. A high-ranking officer told me that, as a nationalist, he believes Turkey should disconnect from the EU, the US, NATO, and the world market. “Turkishness is enough,” he insisted.

Contemporary Turkishness, I would argue, is defined in response to a fear of loss of the national self, either as an inward-looking defensiveness that characterizes secularist nationalism, or a selective opening within the framework of pre-republican historical models favored by Muslim nationalists. In both instances, the enemy within is the reviled Other, suspected of leading Turks astray from the Muslim heart of their national identity. For much of the population, the “enemy within” is symbolized by Turkey’s non-Muslims, who are presumed to be working indirectly to convert Muslim Turks from Turkishness, and directly as agents of “the enemy without,” the EU, the US, Israel, or the CIA, to undermine Turkish territorial and national integrity.<sup>56</sup> Secular nationalists have the added perception that national identity is threatened by the presence of the headscarf and religious symbols “out of place” in the public sphere, and by heterodox national rituals that commemorate pre-republican Ottoman events and downplay republican ones, thereby erasing orthodox Kemalist national identity in the public sphere.

Muslim nationalists must be understood as rooted in powerful collectivist norms and an expansive historical understanding of national boundaries that make them more resistant to the perception of threat to national boundaries and identity. Muslim nationalist discourse, however, is characterized by contradictory conceptions of rights as individual human rights and as deriving from membership in a collectivity. This allows pragmatic code-switching,<sup>57</sup> for instance, supporting liberal EU-mandated reforms while at the same time promoting in-group solidarity, obedience and conformity, and undermining tolerance for difference. Both Muslim and secular nationalists have a highly gendered understanding of the nation that limits women’s role in what is essentially a masculinist and militarist configuration of national identity.

Contemporary Turkishness, I would argue, is better imagined not as based on what is inside or outside Turkey’s borders, but as endlessly reflecting opposed mirrors, each reality a self-similar version of itself. It is this lack of real boundaries that generates a fear of loss of integrity, of penetration by outsiders (and loss of the nation’s bloodline). The lack of clear boundaries heightens the indispensability and intensity of belonging to a group, whether based on ideology or religion. Homi Bhabha has observed that “the ‘other’ is never outside or

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<sup>56</sup>Altınay, *The Myth of the Military Nation*; Ceylan and Irzik, *Human Rights Issues in Textbooks*.

<sup>57</sup>Islam recognizes no difference among Muslims other than in degree of piety. This egalitarian model of Islamic personhood is often used by pious Turkish Muslims to explain their individual rights discourse (White, “The Islamist Movement in Turkey and Human Rights.”) In other words, while code-switching may well be a pragmatic response to the national political context, it does not mean that individual rights discourse is wielded cynically. Contradictions between individualist and collectivist discourses about rights are often obscured by the Turkish public’s general lack of clarity about both humanistic philosophy and Muslim theology, allowing a practical and inexact approximation of meaning.

beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously ‘between ourselves.’”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 4.



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