

SECURITIZATION OF IDENTITY IN TURKEY DURING THE AKP ERA

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Abstract: This article analyses some of the key political discussions in Turkey, which are identity dichotomy, securitization and desecuritization cycle of religion under the rule of the Justice and Development Party particularly in the post-2007 period. The article argues that mostly from 2007 onwards, the ruling party started the de-securitization process of religion as a referent object. The article further points out that from 2014 onwards a shift in threat perception can be analyzed utilizing anti-Westernization. The West interchangeable meant and homogenized as the Christian world, is framed as Islamophobic and therefore the new threat to Islamic identity is not coming from the domestic secular identity but from the outside, the Western Christian identity/civilization. The conceptualization of the theoretical framework is built upon the Copenhagen School's societal securitization aspect. The first part focuses on the Copenhagen School of security in general and identity

securitization in particular. The latter sections evaluate the transformation of religious and secular identities through securitization and counter securitization by certain segments of the public. The transformation is analyzed through the ruling periods of the AKP. The data consists of the AKP party manifestos, official reports, election campaigns and speeches given by former Prime Minister and current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan between the periods of 2002-2019.

Keywords: Islamophobia, religious discussions, prejudices, Christianity

1. INTRODUCTION

National identities have consistently been on the agenda of international relations. Although national identity is an entrenched aspect of the domestic policy orientations regarding security, in some cases, the factors that define the overarching national identity are not always clearly

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defined and the dyad of identities may lead to a dichotomy and clashes, as in the case of Turkey. Deriving from this point, this article analyses some of the key political discussions in Turkey, which are identity dichotomy, securitization and desecuritization cycle of religion under the rule of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – hereafter AKP), particularly in the post-2007 period.

The article argues that mostly from 2007 onwards, the ruling party started the de-securitization process of religion as a referent object. The effects of the top-down desecuritization of religion, which was also ironically a counter securitization move against the dominant secular identity, enabled the secular audience who felt threatened by the Islamic identity to act as securitizing actors in a counter-securitization move.

The article further points out that from 2014 onwards a shift in threat perception can be analyzed utilizing anti-Westernization. The West interchangeable meant and homogenized as the Christian world, is framed as Islamophobic and therefore the new threat to Islamic identity is not coming from the domestic secular identity but from the outside, the Western Christian identity/civilization.

The study is particularly useful in explaining the securitization cycle of multiple identities in constructing threat perceptions. The research is also important in analyzing the structural transformation at the unit and subunit levels in Turkey. Thirdly, the article is important in elucidating the power relationship between the secular identity and the Islamic identity in Turkey.

The conceptualization of the theoretical framework is built upon the Copenhagen School's societal securitization aspect. The first part focuses on the Copenhagen School of security in general and identity securitization in particular. The latter sections evaluate the transformation of religious and secular identities through securitization and counter securitization by certain segments of the public. The transformation is analyzed through different time periods based upon the ruling periods of the AKP, namely 2002-2007, 2007-2011, 2011-2014 and finally 2014-2019. The data consists of the AKP party manifestos, official reports, election campaigns and speeches given by former Prime Minister and current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan between the periods of 2002-2019.

1.1. Copenhagen school of security

The Copenhagen School conceptualized securitization as the discursive and political process through which an inter-subjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something like an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998, 30). In that respect, the ‘Referent object’ is the object that is claimed to be threatened and holds a general claim on ‘having to survive.’ Additionally, there are ‘securitizing actors’ who make the claim through speech acts and audience. Speech acts point to an existential threat to this referent object and thereby legitimize extraordinary measures (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998, 32).

As significant representatives of the Copenhagen School of security, Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan argue that societal security is the defense of a community against a perceived threat to its essential character that is identity (Waever 2008, 581-593). Approached from this perspective, threats to identity symbolize external threats. This assumption is understandable if there is a

fixed single national identity. Thus, even when a securitizing actor’s securitization move is analyzed, the researchers usually presume that the actor’s identity is part of the already existing fixed overarching national identity. This ontological assumption cannot explain how two differing securitizing actors have an impact on the perception of national identity. It causes national identities to be treated as monolithic and unitary and prevents that the observation that identities are dependent on perceptions, receptions, and actions of the agents.

Deriving from these points, this article argues that the post-2007 desecuritization of Islamic identity through institutionalization and discursive practices led Islam to be a threat perception to the dominant secular identity. In return, it caused a counter securitization from the secular audience through securitizing secularism at the subunit and individual level.

1.2. The peculiarity of the Turkish case

In contemporary Turkey, the desecuritization of Islamic identity is not a result of the top-down military-bureaucracy desecuritization. The transformation is a result of the desecuritization of Islam through

transformation of the political and social structure, particularly from 2007 onwards. In early Republican Turkey, threat perception was built upon the pillars of the Ottoman era, such as Islam and the Eastern way of life. Once the republic was established, Westernization became an identity marker for the newly founded state. On the construction of its secular and Western identity, the 'other' was shaped by differences inherent to Turkey's historical and social reality as the Ottoman past. In other words, the other of the new identity was not directly from the outside, but from within the Ottoman history. This 'past as other' (Diez 2005, 613-636) was the main logic behind legitimizing or securitizing the religious and ethnic identities. As explained by Tanıl Bora (1996);

The 'other' image of the Turkish national identity is intrinsic to Turkey's historical-social reality. The other is the 'old Turkey'. That is Ottoman Empire; it is the old civilization framed by the religious world view. In this new 'old identity' the Ottoman is perceived as oppressing the Turk. Islam is also thought of primarily in terms of the potential of this ancient civilization and the balance of the Ottoman Empire (hence the 'danger of the reaction').

In that respect, the Takrir-i Sükun Law of 1925 is worth mentioning, since it was aimed specifically against the Islamic establishments. Until the late 1940s, the main threat perception of the state elite was religion, which meant that securitization measures implemented were aimed at protecting the secular identity of the state. In addition to the Takrir-i Sükun Law in 1925, with the introduction of another law, all orders, lodges, and other religious brotherhoods were officially banned, and sheikhdom and discipleship were prohibited. In the 1928 Constitution, the clause that defined the Turkish state's official religion as Islam was removed. Sharia and the Islamic lifestyle were replaced with the Western lifestyle and religious tutors were considered illegitimate in the aftermath.

Since the establishment of the multi-party period from the 1950s onwards, the securitization against Islamic identity has always been on the agenda of Turkish domestic politics (Aydındağ and Işıksal 2018, 301). The threat perception of Islam was mostly constructed by military and bureaucratic establishments. In this respect, significantly, the military intervened in domestic politics three times in twenty years on the grounds of a threat to secular

identity through the 1960, 1971, and 1980 military coups. The military also played an active role in removing Islamist Welfare Party leader and vice-prime minister Necmettin Erbakan from office in 1997, known as the February 28 incident.

The closure of the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi* - hereafter RP) was a rupture in Turkish political Islamism. In the 1995 elections, it had been the largest supported party. However, despite the widespread public support, the coalition government was short lived. In 1997, the Constitutional Court banned the party on the grounds of the RP's violation of secular identity related Articles 68 and 69 of the Constitution. The Constitutional Court used statements by the RP such as 'the headscarf must be free in the universities' and 'the right to choose your own legal system, including sharia', as examples of anti-secular activities (Yavuz 2003, 247).

The ban was followed by the limitation of public spaces available to Islamic actors. The headscarf was banned in all state as well as private universities. Within secularist discourse, the defense of headscarves was increasingly perceived as a direct threat to the state and the secular constitutional

system. As a successful definition of the situation, a columnist wrote that 'the headscarf battle is in fact a rebellion against Atatürk's reforms and the principles of the Republican state Atatürk established' (Çınar 2005, 79).

The military constructed the religious identity and its establishments as an existential threat to the secular identity, which legitimately was the only state identity. As a survival instinct under the dominant secular establishments the modernist wing of the National Outlook under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan formed the AKP. The Islamists realized that in order to diminish the suppression of the military and to sustain its own marginalized identity, supporting the European values and the European Union (EU) option had become the only option (Yavuz 2003, 250).

Transformation can be understood in part as an attempt to solve the identity-based societal sectoral insecurities of Islamists in Turkey (Jung and Raudvere 2008, 168). The RP's experience showed that Islamists could come to power through elections, although the Islamists were not able to survive in power under military tutelage (Cizre 2008, 20). This impacted on the transformation of new conservative

democratic identity that created the impetus to follow the West's instruments, such as a liberal economy, constitutional rights and liberties.

1.3. 2002- 2007: Desecuritization of Islam through Westernization

AKP became the ruling party of Turkey in 2002, one year after the party's establishment. With the break from Necmettin Erbakan's National Outlook movement, the AKP identified itself as a 'conservative democratic' party rather than an 'Islamist' party, which strongly emphasized good ties with the West, universal values of democracy, human rights and plurality. Erdoğan recognized that democratization, rather than seizing the power of the state, allowed pious people to live an Islamic life (Cizre 2008, 31).

The new identity owes a lot to the suppression under the 97 military intervention and its aftermath. It showed that not only the political representations of the Islamic identity but also the social and economic aspects could shrink when the dominant secular identity feels that its own identity is under existential threat. This does not change the fact that the political party representation came to power as a result of the people's choice

and with a majority of the votes. That demonstrates that political party establishment or gaining electoral legitimacy were not sufficient to sustain the Islamic identity, which was heavily marginalized.

Prior to the 2002 elections, the AKP highlighted three objectives. Firstly, because of the increased demand for better representation of ethnic and religious groups and better human rights standards, *consolidated democracy* was promoted. Secondly, because of the heavy burden of the 2001 economic crisis, which particularly impacted the middle class, strong emphasis was given to *economic welfare*. Thirdly, Turkey's membership of the EU was promoted.

Here, the membership of the EU served two objectives. Firstly, it differentiated the conservative democrat identity from the former Islamist National Outlook identity. Unlike the National Outlook perception of the EU as being a Christian Club, the AKP saw it as an impetus for liberalization and democratization and therefore a space for expansion of the Islamic identity. Secondly, one of the identity markers of secularism, Westernization is elucidated with the application for membership of the EU. Islamic political identity was traditionally built in opposition to the

West and the Western values. Therefore, through the values of the West, the AKP acquired legitimacy in their relationship with the secular establishment (Dağı 2005, 31). Through gaining legitimacy among the secular audience, the party also allowed the desecuritization of Islam for the dominant national identity, namely secularism.

Drawing upon the experience of the RP, the AKP radically revised its view of what political power can mean and accordingly stopped conceiving society as a passive object of unilateral transformation. Thus, it was believed that Islamic identity would not gain more space through state structures. Change is achieved by liberating societal dynamics and allowing them to be reflected in politics (Yıldız 2008, 44). One of the first AKP's manifestos called *Muhafazakar Demokrasi* (Conservative Democracy) made it clear that the party was not a continuation of the National Outlook and it did not have a Islamic political agenda. Erdoğan has argued that his conservatism does not equate to Islamism, rather it is the traditional practices, values, and beliefs of Muslim majority in Turkey.

As the AKP positioned itself as a center-right conservative party, Erdoğan supported the Anglo-American

definition of secularism, also called passive secularism, which keeps the state at an equal distance to all faiths and religions. His promotion of passive secularism is neutral towards citizens' religious identities. Traditionally, Turkey has an assertive secularist stance whose ultimate aim is to ban or limit its visibility in the public space. Secularism is rooted in the Kemalist revolution and is advocated by the military, judiciary, and the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party. Perhaps the best expression of assertive secularism can be found in certain decisions of the Constitutional Court. For instance, in its decision banning the RP, the Court stated that 'secularism is not the separation of religion and state, but the separation of religion and worldly affairs...It means separation of social life, education, family, economics, law, manners, dress codes; etc. from religion'. It is Turkey's philosophy of life that extends beyond just being a political regime (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 22).

Furthermore, while acknowledging the importance of religion as a personal belief, the AKP accommodated itself within the secular constitutional framework. Erdoğan's middle of the road approach to secularism and the state-religion

relationship can be seen in the AKP's party program as secularism is explained as: 'it allows people of all religions and beliefs to practice their religion in peace, to express their religious convictions and to live accordingly. Therefore, secularism is a principle of freedom and social peace' (AKP 2002).

It is also stated that the AKP 'acknowledges and respects all the birthrights of people, such as having different beliefs, ideas, races, languages, the right of expression, the right of association, and the right to live. It considers that diversity is not (a source of) differentiation, but our cultural richness that reinforces our solidarity' (AKP Bylaws 2002). One can deduce several key points from these bylaws and visions. Firstly, the party envisioned that Islamization could not be achieved through the state. The state should not impose its ideology on society. Change could be achieved by liberating societal dynamics and allowing them to be reflected in politics (Cizre 2008, 46).

Secondly, the specific mention of the respect for the concepts of nation, republic, borders and devotedness to democracy and good ties with the West reflects a re-evaluation that sees civilizational dialogue between the Islamic and Western worlds as essential.

Domestically, instead of indulging in the politics of 'othering', the new Islamism, by using non-religious political language, develops a culture of political compromise (Yıldız 2008, 46). John Esposito argues that the process of change represented by the AKP points to the fact that mainstream Islamic movements in Muslim countries are capable of adapting themselves to such issues as democratization, pluralism and women's rights (Esposito 2005). Thus, it is asserted that 'freedoms constitute the foundation of democracy' and that respect for individual rights and freedoms is the basic condition for the establishment of social peace and well-being, as well as for the acceptance of a democratic political regime by the people. It specifically mentions the freedom of thought and expression, the right to information, the right to seek justice and to a fair trial. What was *sui generis* in this case was the AKP's ability to command the respect of Muslim public opinion while simultaneously championing the cause of EU membership and establishing an enduring cooperative relationship with the West (Yıldız 2008, 47).

This worldview also functions as a move to curb any doubts of having an ulterior objective towards structural

change. Thus, the adoption of a discourse based upon the secular pillars and Western modernity naturalized itself against the legitimacy crisis between itself and the Kemalist/secularist establishment. In order to open up space for the Islamists, it was necessary to transform within the long run the secular identity in line with the domesticated suppressed identity (Çinar and Duran 2008, 19).

Here, desecuritization can be understood as a strategic practice that occurs within the psycho-cultural disposition of the securitizing actors and the audiences. In this respect, the construction of desecuritization as a speech act is too narrow to fully grasp the social contexts of the act (Williams 2003, 528). Erdoğan has framed AKP's pro-EU stance around two main arguments. The first is that Turkey's EU membership goal is part of Atatürk's project of reaching the level of contemporary civilizations. Secondly, Turkey's membership to the EU would prove to be an antidote to the 'clash of civilizations' perspective. The former argument can be identified as the party's rhetorical strategy against the secularist Kemalist elite. It was a departure from the Islamist arguments based on the difference with the West and the

National Outlook's framing of the EU as a Western tool for colonizing Turkey.

The second reflects both a departure from the Islamist party's understanding and the counter-argument to the 'clash of civilizations' perspective that was popularized after 9/11 (Dinc Belcher 2012, 10). The EU negotiation process triggered a change in identity and interests through which formerly securitized issues such as headscarf issue were desecuritized. The change in identity also transformed the secular discourse of nation-state. Formerly, the secular identity was protected via security of the regime discourse of state and the military establishments. Through consolidating the democracy, the transformation of state and the secular establishment occurred within the context of 'justice', 'freedom', and 'institutional flexibility' (Yeşiltaş 2014, 60).

One particular benefit of the EU was that the accession requirements would diminish the military's influence over politics, meaning that the AKP would have the ability to be more independent in domestic policy choices. Hence, the AKP promoted religious freedom, economic liberalization, and democratization, which was a shift that helped redefine Turkish political Islam

within the confines of the secular state (Dalay and Friedman 2013).

Consequently, the party took major steps towards democratization, equality and human rights in line with the EU candidacy. Between 2002 and 2004, eight harmonization packages including the rule of law, human rights, and the market economy were approved by parliament so as to satisfy the Copenhagen Criteria (Gül 2007). The closure of political parties became more difficult. In February 2003, the parliament passed another harmonization package that removed the top military officers who dominated the National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Konseyi* - hereafter NSC), personnel at the Radio and Television Supervision Board and its censor board.

One of the most important changes came with the August 2003 harmonization package. The harmonization package introduced significant reforms with respect to civilian-military relations. With the package, the jurisdiction of military courts over civilians was limited, the auditing of military expenditures and the property was enabled by the court of auditors, executive powers of the NSC's General secretary were repealed, the time period of NSC meetings was

increased from one month to two and finally and more importantly, a civilian Secretary General was appointed to the NSC. The military's weight in politics was significantly reduced if not eradicated by turning the NSC into an advisory body and the Secretary General into an administrative unit.

The EU harmonization packages provide a good example of a non-discursive desecuritization move towards Islamic identity. The military, media, and judiciary resources were material factors that were used to make it possible for the dominant secular identity to put pressure on the Islamic identity. By limiting their power through harmonization packages, Erdoğan indirectly managed to de-securitize religion at the domestic level. At this time, it is important to mention that Erdoğan did not make any speeches regarding secular identity as a threat or secular establishments as functional actors of this threat.

The main reason for this was Erdoğan's search for political legitimacy. Erdoğan needed to prove that the AKP as the Western-oriented, modern, and mainstream party was different from the National Outlook. Through Europeanization and internationalization of internal issues,

Erdoğan transformed the parameters of both Turkish politics and Islamist politics. In this sense, he regarded international support as a fundamental factor in attaining political legitimacy. Erdoğan learned the hard way from the February 28 process that electoral victory does not necessarily give legitimacy in the eyes of the state elite (Yavuz 2006, 282). This led Erdoğan to leave his rhetoric of searching for Islamic rule and to begin to use secular language. Thus, the AKP was successful in framing religious and local issues in terms of a broader European and universal language of human rights and political liberalism.

As evidenced by the EU progress reports and other legal documents, the Cyprus problem stands as one of the main obstacles for Turkey's EU membership. The EU authorities had widely and continuously criticized Turkey for not working and making significant moves towards the settlement of the Cyprus problem. Therefore, the Cyprus issue was a significant 'problem' that Turkey was obliged to solve or at least make efforts in that direction. In this connection, the AKP supported the UN proposed Annan Plan, which represented an historic opportunity for the re-unification of the Island. In order

to differentiate itself from the traditional secular discourse of 'no solution is the solution', Erdoğan opted for resolving and the eventual reunification of the island. By differentiating himself from the traditional security perception on the Cyprus issue, Erdoğan also marginalized himself from his Islamic National Outlook-oriented past.

To sum up, the first term in the office saw a truly conservative democratic identity of the AKP under Erdoğan's leadership and a departure from the Islamism of the National Outlook of Erbakan, which embraced an anti-Western stance in general and an anti-European one in particular from the 1970s to the 1990s. The AKP's focus on good relations with the Western countries, particularly with Greece, and its support for pragmatic moves such as the EU accession negotiations eliminated the identity dichotomy between Turkish secular and religious identities.

Secondly, the first term also saw instrumentalization of the EU against the secular and Kemalist threat perception of the AKP. Securing a path leading to membership has been regarded as essential, not only for democratizing and developing Turkey, but also for broadening the legitimacy of

the AKP within the secular establishment (Yavuz 2003, 101). The overlap of interests between the party and the Westernization process saw a significant reduction of power of the Kemalist establishment in Turkey.

1.4. 2007-2011: Re-securitizing Islamic identity from above

The second term of the AKP brought several different dynamics that eventually crystallized the re-securitization of Islamic identity. The first dynamic was the presidential elections. The President was Ahmet Necdet Sezer, a former judge, a hardline secularist and whose term in the office would end in 2007. As the president was elected with a majority vote of the Assembly, this meant that the ruling party would have the power to appoint a like-minded ‘conservative-democrat’ president.

The AKP’s presidential candidate was Abdullah Gül, who was also one of the founding members of the party. The effect of the possibility of having an AKP-based president, in addition to being the ruling party, on societal securitization was twofold. The first one could be defined as political-military sector interrelatedness. As

mentioned above, the military has always been a securitizing actor of secularism in the Turkish political arena, generally considering themselves as the guardians of the Republic and Atatürk’s reforms, most importantly secularism. On the eve of the presidential election, the then Chief of General Staff, Yaşar Büyükanıt published an ‘online memorandum’ that arguably was considered as an indirect military coup. He stated that ‘the problem that emerged in the presidential election process is focused on arguments over secularism. The Turkish Armed Forces are concerned about the recent situation...the Turkish Armed Forces are a party in those arguments, and absolute defender of secularism...’ (BBC News 2007).

In line with the online memorandum, President Ahmet Necdet Sezer also became involved in the process, warning that the country’s secular system faced its greatest threat since the founding of the Republic in 1923 (Rainsford 2007). Here, having the bureaucracy and the military acting as securitizing actors implied that having a pro-Islamist president created an existential threat to secular identity. The securitizing move that can be considered successful as one of the very first

audience response was the mass ‘Republic Protests’ led by several civil society organizations in Tandoğan Square in the capital city Ankara. The slogans included ‘Turkey is secular and secular it will remain’ (*Türkiye laiktir, laik kalacak*) (Evrensel.net 2007). The military’s involvement meant that in case of the possible Islamization of the government, the military would give a *de facto* legitimacy to the audience-based securitization of secularity.

The counter-securitization of Islam through the protests resulted in the Constitutional Court’s ruling that the first round of the presidential elections was void due to insufficient participation (Hürriyet 2007). Later, on May 6, 2007 Gül announced that he was withdrawing his candidacy after a second failed vote because the parliamentary session did not achieve the 367-member quorum (Hürriyet 2007).

In February 2008, the parliament voted to amend Turkey’s Constitution by eliminating the ban on headscarves being worn on university campuses. The headscarf issue, dormant during the first term of the AKP government, suddenly became the number one issue of desecuritization in early 2008. Erdoğan, in a speech act in Madrid, stated that the

ban should be lifted even if the headscarf is used as a political symbol. He added that there was no need to wait for the adoption of a new constitution and the problem could be solved by a simple ‘one sentence’ constitutional amendment. The then Prime Minister’s statement was strongly criticized by the main opposition Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi-CHP*). On 5 June 2008, the Constitutional Court annulled the amendments. The headscarf is a symbol that shapes how Islamists and seculars interpret the actions of the other. Within the Islamists social context, the headscarf represents the oppressed, whereas for the secular establishment, it represents the pre-Republican old rule which is a threat from the past.

This dichotomy caused a backlash from the secular public and secular elite establishments. They argued that it represents a threat against Turkey’s secular identity, because it might put pressure on women who choose not to wear a headscarf. The Islamists, on the other hand, argued that it is a human right to wear religious symbols in public spaces. This dichotomy resulted in a closure case for the AKP. The Chief Public Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals, took the

case to the Constitutional Court. The prosecutor asked Erdoğan among others to be banned from politics for five years and for the AKP to be closed. However, the Constitutional Court did not ban the party and Erdoğan was not banned from politics. In fact, AKP, under Erdoğan's leadership, was extremely careful to function within the limits of secular laws.

The 2008 Ergenekon and 2010 Sledgehammer cases changed the dynamics in the civil-military and Islamic-secular relationships. The Ergenekon trials involved high ranking military officials, judiciary, and journalists, all alleged to be members of the Ergenekon organization. Ergenekon was a supposedly secular clandestine organization plotting against the AKP. Operation 'Sledgehammer' was the name of an alleged Turkish secularist military coup plan dating back to 2003, in response to the AKP's victory.

The Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials and the subsequent legal reforms ended the Kemalist model of checks and balances between different pillars of authority within Turkey. In 2010, the Turkish Constitution revitalized the amendments backed by Erdoğan in order to bring the country in

line with the EU standards regarding democracy. It took measures on human rights and held the military accountable to civilian courts for crimes against the state or against the constitutional order. Although the West supported the reform packages, the secular establishment, mainly the secular opposition CHP, criticized the reforms. CHP argued that the reforms would put Erdoğan in control of both the military and judiciary, which are the secular pillars of the country with which Erdoğan had previously clashed (Hill 2010).

Restructuring of civil-military relations and reformation of the judiciary for the sake of Europeanization also affected the Turkish foreign policy implementation. Unlike the Erbakan case, during Erdoğan's premiership, the influence of the military and the traditional bureaucracy in foreign policy-making decreased (Talbot 2013). This worked well with the re-identification of Turkish identity in a more Islamic way by framing Islam as belonging to the oppressed and the AKP representing the oppressed. For instance, in his 2011 General Elections victory speech, Erdoğan said that 'believe me, Sarajevo won today as much as Istanbul, Beirut won as much as Izmir, Damascus won as much as Ankara, Ramallah,

Nablus, Jenin, the West Bank, Jerusalem won as much as Diyarbakir...the hopes of the victims and the oppressed have won' (BBC News 2011).

In effect, this discourse not only stated the AKP as a national political party but also as a regional actor representing the identity of oppressed Muslim masses. The speech had a stronger Islamic, Eastern undertone than a Western undertone symbolizing through domestic policy discourse reflected in foreign policy. This construction of a unified Islamic community portrayed Erdoğan as the savior of the oppressed and religious guardian of the masses, while not only otherizing West but also Western influenced identities within the state. The ongoing debate in Europe on the European identity of Turkey, and the blockage of key chapters during the accession negotiations process due to deep-seated differences between Turkey and the EU in relation to the Cyprus dispute, raised major question marks concerning the feasibility of Turkey's membership (Öniş 2010, 54). This further fueled the otherization of the West and Westernization of Turkey. In this discourse, Erdoğan constructed a host of objects to be referent objects that required protection, such as the Middle

East region, the Islamic masses, and the oppressed peoples in general. According to this logic of discourse, what is good for the Islamic dominant identity of Turkey would benefit the entire region; meanwhile, he continued to sustain the excluded and marginalized identity of Islam within the country.

1.5. 2011-2014: The clash and the securitization of Islamic and secular identities

The events that led to incidents from the securitization of secular identity peaked in Turkey during the 2013-14 anti-government protests, mostly due to Erdoğan's increasingly polarizing speeches and AKP policies.

A counter securitizing move came from the environmental-political sector through the Gezi Park protests of 2013. The protests, which started as a peaceful environmental demonstration against the confiscation of a historical park for the building of a shopping mall, were faced with denial of the right to peaceful assembly and un-proportional police attacks. The police use of force constructed a threat image to national identity caused by seculars. From the beginning, the Gezi protests were not solely a crisis in the environmental

sector. The crises were the spontaneous explosion of accumulated anxieties resulting from what was perceived as the government's increasing interference with the secular way of life and the arena of personal choice (Özbudun 2014, 157).

Faced by the largest mass protest in a decade, Erdoğan declared that the protestors were looters (The Guardian 2013). His speech act institutionalized the national security and intensified the juxtaposition of national identity and societal identity. Censorship on media and blockading the internet websites with an overnight bill that allowed the government to block internet trafficking further fueled the rage. Most infamous media censorship occurred when the mainstream media did not broadcast any news regarding the demonstrations for three days. The lack of media coverage was symbolized by CNN International covering the protests while CNN Turk broadcasted a documentary about penguins at the same time (Öktem, 2013). The Radio and Television Supreme Council (*Radyo-Televizyon Üst Kurulu* - hereafter RTÜK) controversially issued a fine to pro-opposition news channels such as Halk TV for their broadcasting of the protests, accusing them of morally,

physically and mentally de-stabilizing children (Özgenç 2013).

The protests were important in two ways; firstly, the public squares in Turkey are symbols of the secular Kemalist republic. They were part of the Republic's secularist struggle to eliminate the urban fabric during the Ottoman past. Taksim Square and Gezi Park, were symbols of secularism and progress. The AKP's attempt at building a mosque in the square and Erdoğan's persistence in demolishing the Atatürk Cultural Centre (*Atatürk Kültür Merkezi* - hereafter AKM), the secular symbol of Westernization through ballet and other performances, became concrete examples of the cultural transformation of Erdoğan from conservative democracy to Islamist identity. This caused tension within the secular segments of the society against the increasingly authoritarian policies, which became more palpable after 2011 when the AKP achieved its third consecutive electoral victory. The secular identity felt threatened that their non-religious lifestyle was in danger.

Secondly, the protest in itself was a dual securitization and counter securitization move from both the secular and religious establishments. As highlighted above, from the very

beginning, the Gezi protests were not solely a crisis in the environmental sector. Demonstrations were against the Erdoğan government's perceived religious conservatism. The Gezi protests created a rupture in AKP's legitimacy of responding to varying societal demands. Instead of answering to those demands, Erdoğan's marginalizing rhetoric and coercion led to the secular-pious separation in a cultural polarization reflected in the political sphere (Mis and Aslan 2018, 36).

1.6. 2014-2019: Securitization of Islam Through Anti-Westernization

Particularly from 2013 onwards, there was a shift in threat perception towards the Islamic identity. The change in security discourse this time was not against the domestic secular identity but the Christian West. The West started to be perceived as a threat to Turkish-Islamic identity. From that point on, the Turkish and Islamic identities stopped being distinct two identities but were framed as a homogenized unit.

The AKP's populist discourse, which focuses highly on anti-Westernism particularly concerning

Islamic identity, has been analyzed in recent articles by scholars. Many have analyzed anti-Westernization with a particular emphasis on de-Europeanization (Buket Ökten Sipahioğlu, 2017; Beken Saatçioğlu, 2016; Seçkin Barış Gülmez, 2013; Jacob Wodka, 2013; Senem Aydın Düzgüt, 2016; Münevver Cebeci, 2016), while others have focused on anti-Westernization based on the civilizational discrepancies between the East and West (Menderes Çınar, 2018; Katerina Dalacoura, 2017). There are also studies that have concentrated on anti-Westernism through a foreign policy perspective (Murat Yeşiltaş, 2013; Oguzhan Göksel, 2019), and anti-Westernism in domestic politics (İhsan Yılmaz, Galib Bashirov, 2018; Henri J. Barkey, 2019; Huriye Toker, 2014). None of these articles have focused on the transformation of security discourse from a pro-Western and European narrative to an anti-Western narrative.

The change in threat perception stemmed from a series of elections beginning with the local elections of March 2014, followed by the first presidential elections in August 2014, and then the June and November 2015 general elections. The July 15, 2016 coup attempt further increased the

perception of the West as a threat to identity. Similarly, the constitutional referendum of 16 April 2017 and the 2019 local elections created a heavily anti-Western perception. One of the major contexts of this anti-Western discourse is accusing the West of Islamophobia.

During this period, two significant points need to be underlined. Firstly, the main object of the securitization of Islam was the Muslims in general, instead of the Turkish population. Secondly, Turkey was presented as the protector of the Muslims oppressed around the world by implying and sometimes referring to the Ottoman Empire's grand past.

For instance, in Bursa on July 18, 2014 Erdoğan said;

“We are faced with a new Crusader alliance; this is a wrong direction. I am calling out to the West, this is not an honest approach ... Silence would not suit us. Osman Gazi established a state here, that state brought justice in Palestine, for centuries it maintained justice in all of the Middle East, North Africa, the Balkans” (Düzgit, “De-Europeanisation).

The reference to Osman Gazi, the leader and founder of the Ottoman Empire works as a reminder of this

historical grandeur. The reference to the Crusaders mimics and reminds that the age-old conflict between Islam and Christianity is still in progress and Turkey is the most important actor acting on behalf of Muslims around the world.

The factor that is worth emphasizing here is that the main driver that brought the AKP to power in the first term was the devotion to Western ideals of democracy and human rights. The AKP sponsored the civilization alliance, contrary to Huntington's popular thesis in the era when the clash of civilizations, particularly between Islamic and Christian civilizations, gained more popularity in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. As suggested by the ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis, “the ‘West’ and the ‘Muslim world’ are construed as monolithic and homogeneous and assume an unchanging character of duality between us and them” (Alper Kaliber, Senem Aydın Düzgit, 2018). Contrary to the earlier terms in office, the post-2013 era has followed a mutually exclusive understanding of Western identities and Eastern identities. The West is framed as Islamophobic and all the oppositional groups against the AKP are accused of being Islamophobic and Eurocentric.

In a speech given to AKP supporters in Sakarya in 2017, Erdogan again securitized the subject by referring to antagonism and opposition between the Islamic East and the Christian West. He said, "My dear brothers, a battle has started between the cross and the half-moon. There can be no other explanation" (Deutsche Welle, 2017). Similarly, in a speech on April 16, 2018 at the World Muslim Minorities' Summit in Istanbul, Erdoğan said "there are efforts to degrade and defame Islam, which is the only religion that offers genuine solutions to the modern world's problems. The West tries to put certain labels on Islam through certain 'project' terrorist groups. Racists and fascist groups target businesses, homes and places of worships belonging to Muslims, particularly in Germany, the Netherlands, France and Belgium" (Hurriyet Daily News, 2019).

Most recently at an election rally in Izmir on 2019, in the wake of the terrorist attacks at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, Erdoğan accused the international community of having double standards in categorizing terrorism by stating "all of the world leaders describe the terrorist attack in New Zealand as an attack on Islam and Muslims. They do not call the

perpetrator a 'Christian terrorist.' Why can't they say that?" (Daily Sabah, 2019).

When these speeches given by Erdogan are examined, which securitize Islam through an anti-Western discourse, one sees several patterns. Firstly, none of his speeches are directly targeted at the Western media, as in all of his speeches, the audience comprised the domestic public. Secondly, the speech acts were done for conservative electoral bases. Thirdly, in most cases, the anti-Western rhetoric blamed the West for domestic problems. According to Çınar, such anti-Western discourse may be expected to communicated better with the Arab Islamic World (Menderes Çınar, 2018). According to the AKP, the main reason for the Arab uprisings was that they were against the Western-backed authoritarian regimes, and they are symbolized by the rise of Islamist groups. Therefore, in order to build a bridge between these groups and Turkey, Erdogan focused on a civilizational discourse built upon anti-Western characteristics. However, more importantly, the securitization of Islam through anti-Western rhetoric works at gaining public support. It gains support because it "enables such a government to appeal to an imaginary —nationalist nostalgia (for the Ottoman Empire in Turkey) while simultaneously accusing

an external enemy of current socio-economic and/or political troubles” (Göksel, “Foreign Policy Making,” 18).

Aside from the securitization of Islamic identity, anti-Westernism also works to securitize the establishment of the Turkish Republic via effecting the deeply rooted fear of partitioning of the Republic by the Western powers, echoing the Sèvres treaty of 1920. The general belief in contemporary Turkey is that the Ottoman Empire did not gradually collapse by itself. Conversely, it was destroyed from within by Western powers and ethnic/religious minorities (Hakkı Taş, 2014). In contemporary Turkey, this fear and the securitization act find particularly acceptance from nationalists, the traditional Kemalists and most importantly, the traditional Islamists. By articulating the domestic threats with international ones, the AKP has naturalized its discourse in the election periods or during domestic problems. Particularly after the coup attempt on 15 July 2016, President Erdogan has appealed to this discourse. He has stated that:

In this critical time period in which this region is shaped, if we stop, the place we would find ourselves in would be Sèvres conditions...To be fair, Turkey is putting up the biggest fight

since the War of Independence. This is a fight for one nation, one flag, one homeland and one state...Our nation stood up courageously against the coup and broke the hands around its throat and wrecked the operation (Yeni Akit, 2019).

To summarize, the anti-Westernism should be understood as an extremely potent force for generating legitimacy and public support for the AKP administration, which has been isolated (Göksel, “Foreign Policy Making,” 13). Therefore, it is expected that the majority of Erdoğan’s anti-Western rhetoric takes place before the elections and referendums. What can be observed in those speeches is that the deep skepticism for the West and the West’s intentions toward Turkey was aimed at uniting Turkish religious conservatives and nationalists, who are the glue that bind the AKP’s electoral coalition together (Max Hoffman, Michael Werz, 2018).

2. CONCLUSION

Turkey has always been a special country in terms of the dichotomy of political identity. Since the foundation of the modern Republic in 1923, there has been a clash between the top-down imposed secular identity and mass rooted religious identity. In

contemporary times, especially in the post 97 period, due to heavy oppression by the dominant secular identity the Islamic identity has transformed and become more cooperant with the West. In this connection, in its first two terms, the AKP fully supported the EU process. The EU provides coherence with the main identity marker of secularism that is Westernization. Therefore, the dominant secular identity does not perceive the AKP identity policies as a threat to itself, unlike the National Outlook identity. One particular benefit of the EU was that the accession requirements diminished the military's influence over politics and this enabled the AKP to be more autonomous in domestic politics. The EU membership bid expanded the AKP's political space and led to the implementation of democratic control via preserving secularism and democratic rule.

The AKP's transformation from conservative democracy to Islamist identity became most visible in the post-2011 era. The legal reforms ended the secular Kemalist model of checks and balances between different pillars of authority within Turkey. Restructuring of the civil-military relations and reformation of the judiciary for the sake of Europeanization further utilized by

the AKP and the influence of the military and the traditional bureaucracy in foreign policy-making has also been decreased. Consequently, Turkish identity has been re-identified in a more Islamic way. This has resulted in the counter-securitization move by the secular identity camp that was activated in the Gezi Park protests. The protests and security forces' response led to the separation in a cultural polarization reflected in the political sphere. Finally, in the aftermath of 2014, in part due to multiple elections and referendums, the securitization of Islam through an anti-Western rhetoric gained a pace. The west as a threat to Turkish identity is profitable in the elections as it is linked to historical grievances stemming from the Sevres treaty. Although these events deteriorated the image of the AKP abroad and seriously hindered Turkey's EU membership bid, it also demonstrated that the AKP will continue its policies on cultural transformation from conservative democracy to Islamist identity.

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