# Muslim Nationalism and Public Attitudes toward Syrian Refugees in Turkey

By

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# ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the official discourse on and public sentiment toward Syrian refugees in Turkey within the context of a populist and civilizationist "Muslim nation" project championed by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan—a project that elevates Islam as the core element of Turkish national identity and promotes a neo-imperial vision of Turkey as the natural leader and guardian of Muslims, particularly in former Ottoman territories.

Using both primary and secondary sources, the first empirical chapter documents how Erdoğan's Muslim nationalism differs from Kemalist nationalism, the founding ideology of Turkey, in its portrayals of the Turkish nation's symbolic boundaries, collective past, and rightful place and mission in the world. The chapter also sheds light on the populist and civilizationist underpinnings of Muslim nationalism, highlighting how Erdoğan has engaged in a multifaceted politics of victimhood to consolidate his conservative supporters. It argues that the Muslim nationalism of Erdoğan and his ruling Justice and Development Party should be seen as a particular manifestation of the global rise of "civilizationist populism" in the 21st century.

Combining thematic analysis with dictionary-based automated coding on a corpus of 554 public speeches, the second empirical chapter examines the ways in which Erdoğan has employed Muslim nationalist narratives to prevent a popular backlash against Syrian refugees. While populism research tends to rely on a simplistic dichotomy between civic-inclusionary and ethnocultural-exclusionary national boundaries, here I show that right-wing populism and the ethnocultural forms of "people-making" associated with it do not necessarily lead to an outright exclusion of refugees. Depending on how they interpret the nation's collective past and its rightful place and mission in the world, right-wing populist leaders may in fact adopt a relatively

welcoming stance toward migrants whom they see as culturally similar to "us." More broadly, I posit that inclusion and exclusion are matters of degree and that populist leaders may alter their position on migrants in response to the signals from their mass audiences.

Drawing data from nine focus group discussions conducted in Istanbul in November 2019, an original survey of Istanbul residents conducted in July-August 2020, and a nationally representative public opinion poll conducted in February 2016, the third empirical chapter investigates how religious conservatives respond to the Muslim nationalist discourse on Syrian refugees. A thematic analysis of the focus group data reveals that while conservative Sunni Muslims generally acknowledge their religious "duty" to help Syrians, they are also deeply concerned about the material impact of the refugee crisis on themselves and their communities. Using an original survey as well as a public opinion poll, I provide further evidence for this tension between Islamic fraternity and material concerns in religious conservatives' attitudes toward Syrian refugees. In contrast to the Eurocentric literature, which discusses religion mainly in terms of its negative effects on refugee/host society relations, I find that religious motives have a bias-reducing impact on conservatives' attitudes toward Syrian refugees. However, I also demonstrate that the pro-refugee effects of religious conservatism diminish as individual economic concerns increase. I thus argue that instead of viewing cultural and economic explanations as competing perspectives, scholars should pay attention to how symbolic and material factors may interact in shaping native-born citizens' migration preferences.

The concluding chapter summarizes the dissertation's contributions and argues that populist nationalism is best viewed as a dynamic and relational process of "people-making," a process that involves ongoing negotiations between political leaders and their mass audiences in the context of changing political, economic, and social circumstances.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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and conclusions expressed in this dissertation are solely mine and should not be construed as representing those of any governmental or non-governmental agency.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| AFAD | Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency |
| AKP | Justice and Development Party |
| BJP | Indian People's Party |
| CDS | critical discourse studies |
| CHP | Republican People's Party |
| Diyanet | Directorate of Religious Affairs |
| DP | Democratic Party |
| DYP | True Path Party |
| EU | European Union |
| FIDESZ | Alliance of Young Democrats (Hungary) |
| HDP | People's Democratic Party |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| IYIP | Good Party |
| Kızılay | Turkish Red Crescent |
| LGBTQ | lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer |
| LMC | labor market competition |
| MHP | Nationalist Action Party |
| MSP | National Salvation Party |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NGO | non-governmental organization |
| NWE | Northern and Western Europe |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development |

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|---|---|
| OLS | ordinary least squares |
| PKK | Kurdistan Workers Party |
| RP | Welfare Party |
| SYRIZA | Coalition of the Radical Left (Greece) |
| TİKA | Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency |
| TOTTTH | Turkish Hearths Committee for the Study of Turkish History |
| TP | temporary protection |
| TRY | Turkish Lira |
| TÜGİK | Young Businessmen Confederation of Turkey |
| TÜİK | The Statistical Institute of Turkey |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees |
| YPG | People's Defense Units (Syria) |
| YSK | Supreme Election Council |

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# CHAPTER I

# Introduction

## 1.1 Research on Populist Nationalism and Public Attitudes toward International Migrants

Nearly seven million people have fled Syria since the Syrian civil war began in 2011 (UNHCR 2021:7) with an estimated one million applying for asylum in Europe (Connor 2018). Coupled with the growing number of asylum-seekers from other protracted conflict zones such as Afghanistan and Iraq, this mass movement sparked a Europe-wide crisis in 2015, adding fuel to the fire of the populist right's nativist and anti-Muslim propaganda. Indeed, recent evidence from Austria (Steinmayr 2017), Denmark (Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Damm 2019), Greece (Dinas et al. 2019; Hangartner et al. 2019), and Germany (Mader and Schoen 2019; Marx and Naumann 2018) all indicate that the so-called "refugee crisis" has had a lasting political impact in Europe, as it has activated xenophobic dispositions and amplified the appeal of right-wing populist parties among voters.

These developments have led to a renewed scholarly interest in the determinants of public attitudes toward refugees[1] in general (Adida, Lo, and Platas 2019; Bansak, Hainmueller,

[1] I define the term "refugee" broadly as someone who has fled their country of origin to escape persecution, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have gravely upset public order and safety. For the purposes of this dissertation, the term includes not only those who have been formally granted refugee status or a comparable form of legal protection but also those who are technically asylum-seekers, i.e., individuals whose claims for legal protection have yet to be

and Hangartner 2016; De Coninck 2020; Czymara and Schmidt-Catran 2017; Hager and Veit 2019; Hercowitz-Amir and Raijman 2020; Meidert and Rapp 2019) and Muslim refugees and immigrants in particular (Bruneau, Kteily, and Laustsen 2018; Erisen and Kentmen-Cin 2017; Helbling and Traunmüller 2018; Schlueter, Masso, and Davidov 2020; Simonsen and Bonikowski 2020). At the same time, a more qualitatively-oriented literature has emerged analyzing the relationship between populism and nationalism (Anastasiou 2019; Betz 2017; Bonikowski et al. 2019; Brubaker 2020; De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017; Jenne 2018; Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2017; Stavrakakis et al. 2017; Venizelos 2021), including a discussion on how the populist right in Europe and North America utilize religious symbols to exclude Muslims from their conceptions of the "true people" (van den Broeke and Kunter 2021; Brubaker 2017a; Cremer 2021; DeHanas and Shterin 2018; Haynes 2020; Marzouki and McDonnell 2016; Roy 2016; Schwörer and Romero-Vidal 2020).

Both of these literatures—the former focusing on the "demand side" of politics (i.e., mass attitudes) and the latter on the "supply side" (i.e., elite projects)— emphasize the relationship between national identity content and the social inclusion or exclusion of migrants.[2] To start with

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processed. "Immigrants," on the other hand, are persons who have left their country of origin for economic, educational, or family reunification purposes. I use "international migrants" or simply "migrants" as a comprehensive term to include both refugees and immigrants.

[2] Existing research indicates that native-born citizens in developed countries tend to be more welcoming toward "involuntary" migrants fleeing conflict and persecution (i.e., refugees) than they are toward "voluntary" migrants seeking better economic opportunities (i.e., immigrants) (De Coninck 2020; Czymara and Schmidt-Catran 2017; Hager and Veit 2019). However,

the demand side, existing research suggests that the meanings attached to the nation play a central role in structuring native-born citizens' attitudes toward migrants. Indeed, prior studies have shown that dominant group members who define the nation in civic terms are more likely to be accepting of immigrants and refugees than their compatriots who define it in ethnic or ethnocultural terms (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Hjerm 1998; Kunovich 2009; Pehrson and Green 2010; Reijerse et al. 2013).[3] In addition, scholars have revealed that a chauvinistic belief in the superiority of one's own nation over others (Ceobanu and Escandell 2008; de Figueiredo and Elkins 2003) and agreement with national victimhood or exceptionalism narratives (Feinstein and Bonikowski 2021) predict anti-migrant attitudes.

Studies on public attitudes toward migrants have also addressed the effects of ethnoracial and religious considerations, considerations that are likely to influence individuals' national self-understandings. Focusing on the United States, the former line of research has demonstrated that

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scholars generally employ the same theoretical frameworks to explain majority members' attitudes toward refugees and immigrants. Moreover, recent evidence from survey experiments suggests that views about these two categories of migrants are shaped by similar factors (Adida et al. 2019; Bansak et al. 2016; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Valentino et al. 2019).

[3] As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter III, civic forms of nationalism imagine nation as a voluntary political community, where membership is based on elective criteria, such as subjective identification with the nation and commitment to a set of political principles and institutions. Ethnocultural forms of nationalism, by contrast, imagine the nation as an organic community, where membership is based on ascriptive or quasi-ascriptive traits, such as common ancestry, skin color, native birth, and allegiance to the majority religion (Brubaker 1999).

general ethnocentrism (Kinder and Kam 2010) as well as group-specific prejudices (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Burns and Gimpel 2000; Citrin et al. 1997; Pérez 2010; Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013) predict support for restrictionist immigration policies among White Americans. On the other hand, scholars have shown that religious ideologies can shape native-born citizens' migration preferences via their impact on popular conceptions of the nation. Several studies, for example, have found that endorsement of Christian nationalist views fuels anti-migrant sentiment in both Europe (McAndrew 2020; Storm 2011) and the United States (McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle 2011; Sherkat and Lehman 2018). Relatedly, recent survey experiments have revealed that majority members in Western countries tend to prefer non-Muslim migrants over Muslims (Adida et al. 2019; Bansak et al. 2016; Hager and Veit 2019; Valentino et al. 2019).

In keeping with these results, previous studies have also found that native-born citizens who are more educated, religiously unaffiliated, or have left/liberal political leanings tend to be more accepting of refugees and immigrants in comparison to those who are less educated, religiously affiliated, or have right/conservative political leanings (Anderson and Ferguson 2018; Ceobanu and Escandell 2010; Cowling, Anderson, and Ferguson 2019; Deslandes and Anderson 2019).

Turning to the supply side, different conceptions of the nation also occupy a central place in recent works on the relationship between populism and nationalism. This small but growing literature has been led by a group of scholars who draw on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's (1985) poststructuralist discourse theory in order to challenge the tendency to conflate populism and nativism, which is especially common in the European context. The group's position has been articulated most fully in a series of articles by Benjamin De Cleen and Yannis Stavrakakis

(De Cleen 2017; De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017, 2020; Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2017; Stavrakakis et al. 2017). According to the authors, populism and nationalism represent two analytically distinct ways of discursively constructing and claiming to represent "the people." Populism is structured around a vertical (down/up or low/high) axis whereby "the people" is constructed as a downtrodden majority through opposition to an illegitimate "elite" or "the establishment." Nationalism, on the other hand, is structured around a horizontal (in/out or member/non-member) axis whereby "the people" is constructed as a bounded and sovereign national community through a constitutive reference to other nations. In other words, while populist discourse is primarily about unequal distribution of power, status, and resources within an individual polity, nationalist discourse has a global frame of reference, delineating a positively valued national ingroup within "a world of distinct nations" (Brubaker 2020:51).[4]

On this view, articulations between populism and nationalism create a multilayered discourse in which populist subject positions such as "the people" and "the elite" gain their meaning through an interplay of vertical and horizontal antagonisms. The resultant structure of meaning, De Cleen and Stavrakakis (De Cleen 2017; De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017) contend, depends crucially on the kind of nationalist demands with which populism is articulated. One set of nationalist demands commonly articulated with populism focuses on excluding ethnocultural minorities from the national community and its decision-making structures—demands that are typical in right-wing populist movements. Another set of nationalist demands frequently

[4] Brubaker (2020) agrees with De Cleen and Stavrakakis that the conflation of populism and nationalism is problematic. However, he holds that the vertical and horizontal registers are tightly interwoven in populist discourse and thus cannot be neatly separated.

expressed in populist terms focuses on protecting national sovereignty from the encroachments of supranational political and economic forces—demands that might be voiced by both left- and right-wing populist actors.

From this perspective, populism is not necessarily an exclusionary phenomenon, although most populist projects construct "the people" at the national level and express nationalist demands of some sort (Anastasiou 2019; De Cleen 2017). Rather, it is when populism is articulated with ethnic or ethnocultural forms of nationalism that it becomes exclusionary. In such articulations, the horizontal in/out axis overdetermines the vertical down/up axis, thereby filling populist signifiers with nativist content. Indeed, when the right-wing populists invoke "the people," they usually refer to not all ordinary and hardworking citizens but an ethnocultural majority whose identity and interests are imperiled by dangerous "outsiders" and their "elite" allies. However, populist discourse can also be fused with civic forms of nationalism, which distinguishes left-wing, progressive, and inclusionary varieties of populism from right-wing, reactionary, and exclusionary varieties. In short, De Cleen and Stavrakakis (De Cleen 2017; De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017, 2020) argue that whether a given populist politics is inclusionary or exclusionary is determined by whether the type of nationalism it is articulated with is civic (inclusionary) or ethnocultural (exclusionary).

Insightful as they are, these two bodies of scholarship leave important gaps in our understanding of populist nationalism and how it relates to public attitudes toward refugees and immigrants. To begin with, both literatures are characterized by uneven geographical coverage. For its part, the emerging literature on the relationship between populism and nationalism reproduces the "Atlantic bias" (Moffitt 2015) of the larger populism research, concentrating mainly on Europe, the United States, and Latin America. It is thus unclear whether the categories

and theoretical generalizations derived from these regions extend to populist nationalisms elsewhere in the world. Similarly, the literature on public attitudes toward migrants focuses disproportionately on high-income societies in Europe, North America, and Australia, thus paying insufficient attention to major migrant-receiving countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (Alrababa'h et al. 2021; Cowling et al. 2019). This is particularly problematic in the study of public attitudes toward refugees, because the overwhelming majority (about 86 percent) of the people displaced across borders live in developing countries, with only one of the world's top 10 host countries (i.e., Germany) being in a developed region (UNHCR 2021:18). As Alrababa'h and colleagues (2021) argue, the scarcity of studies dealing with migration attitudes in developing countries raises questions about whether the ostensibly universal theoretical claims made in the literature apply to host communities outside of the global North—communities that typically command fewer economic resources to absorb international migration flows but tend to have greater cultural affinity with migrants, many of whom come from neighboring countries.[5]

Second, both literatures employ a dichotomous framework that juxtaposes civic, liberal, and inclusionary conceptions of the nation with ethnocultural, illiberal, and exclusionary conceptions. As discussed above, scholars who analyze the populism-nationalism nexus tend to rely on a fundamental opposition between civic and ethnocultural nationalisms, an opposition they use in order to distinguish between inclusionary and exclusionary populisms. Likewise, the literature on migration attitudes assumes that native-born citizens would be more accepting of

[5] According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2020:22), in any given year over the past decade, at least three quarters of all refugees were hosted by countries neighboring the areas of conflict that had caused forced displacement.

immigrants and refugees as their national self-understanding moves away from the ethnocultural model and toward the civic one. However, the dichotomy between civic-inclusionary and ethnocultural-exclusionary forms of nationalism presents an overly simplistic and therefore distorted representation of how elite actors and ordinary citizens draw symbolic boundaries around the nation as an "imagined community" (Anderson 2006).

There are multiple problems with this dichotomy. First of all, as scholars of nationalism have shown, all nationalist projects blend civic-voluntarist and ethnocultural-organicist visions of the national community in varying proportions, thus making it problematic to classify individual cases as either one or the other (Brubaker 1999; Kuzio 2002; Nieguth 1999). Moreover, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter III, the assumption that civic boundaries necessarily imply inclusionary attitudes toward migrants, whereas ethnocultural boundaries necessarily imply exclusionary attitudes is flawed. For one, ostensibly elective criteria such as commitment to a nation's political creed may be conceived of in essentialist terms (Zimmer 2003), thus barring some groups from admission to the national community. For another, under certain circumstances, ethnic and cultural criteria for national belonging may serve inclusionary ends, with the former encouraging positive attitudes toward ethnically similar migrants and the latter toward culturally similar ones (Shulman 2002). What this also means is that populist-nationalist projects can simultaneously adopt an inclusionary stance regarding some social groups and an exclusionary one regarding others. Finally, it should be recognized that inclusion and exclusion are matters of degree and that the extent to which a group is included in or excluded from "the people" may change over time depending on political, economic, and social circumstances.

## 1.2. The Turkish Case

This dissertation seeks to address these limitations by examining the official discourse on and public attitudes toward Syrian refugees in Turkey. There are three main reasons that make the Turkish case useful for this purpose. First, located at the intersection of Europe and Asia, Turkey is currently sheltering the largest number of refugees in the world, including roughly 3.6 million displaced Syrians under "temporary protection" and over 300 thousand asylum-seekers mainly from Afghanistan and Iraq.[6] Counting only those who have been officially granted international protection, by the end of 2020, Turkey hosted the fifth largest refugee community in the world relative to its national population: 43 refugees per 1,000 nationals (UNHCR 2021:19–20). By comparison, high-income countries hosted an average of about 2.8 refugees per 1,000 nationals.[7]

Second, like many other migrant destination countries in the developing world, the Turkish context offers a mix of economic challenges and cultural opportunities for successful migrant integration when compared with affluent Western countries. On the one hand, as an

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[6] These figures are for the year 2020 and were extracted using the UNHCR's "Refugee Data Finder" tool: https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?url=l1vHE8 (accessed 6 November 2021). It should be noted that these numbers do not include undocumented migrants as well as over 100 thousand Syrians who have been granted citizenship by the Turkish government (Erdoğan, E. 2020:24).

[7] Calculated using World Bank data on refugee population by country or territory of asylum: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.REFG (accessed 6 November 2021).

upper-middle-income country with a fairly young population, Turkey has relatively high levels of unemployment, inflation, and income inequality, all of which provide a fertile ground for the proliferation of anti-migrant attitudes. On the other hand, despite their ethnolinguistic differences, Turkish majority members and Syrian refugees also share religious and historical ties that may reduce the perceived cultural gap between the two groups. First and foremost, the overwhelming majority of Turkish citizens, like that of Syrian refugees, identify as Sunni Muslim.[8] In addition, Turkey and Syria share not only a 566-mile border but also a long imperial past, as the lands that today constitute the Syrian Arab Republic remained under Ottoman rule for nearly 400 years from the early 16th century to the end of World War I. These religious and historical ties open up a discursive space for framing Syrian refugees as (partial) insiders and therefore not much of a threat to the national community, hence potentially making their social acceptance easier in Turkey than in Europe and North America.

[8] The Statistical Institute of Turkey (*Türkiye İstatistik Enstitüsü*, TÜİK) does not collect data on the religious affiliation of Turkish citizens; therefore, it is not easy to tell exactly what proportion of the population identify as Sunni Muslim. We do know, however, that Sunni Muslims are by far the largest faith group in Turkey. For instance, in a national survey (n = 5,222) conducted in 2015 by a reputable public opinion company, over 89 percent of the respondents self-identified as Sunni Muslim, while 4.4 percent self-identified as Alevi Muslim, and 2.1 percent as "Other Muslim." Only 1.1 percent of the respondents reported no religious affiliation, and those self-identifying with a religion other than Islam were less than 1 percent. 2.4 percent declined to answer the question (KONDA 2015).

This brings us to the third, and the most important, reason why the Turkish case is theoretically interesting: the government's response to the refugee flows from Syria and the broader political context within which that response has developed. To start with the latter, the movement of displaced Syrians into Turkey after 2011 has coincided with the restructuring of Turkish politics and society along the lines of a populist (Arat-Koç 2018; Gürsoy 2021; Yabanci and Taleski 2018) and civilizationist (Kaya, Robert, and Tecmen 2019; Yanaşmayan, Üstübici, and Kaşlı 2019; Yilmaz, Demir, and Morieson 2021) "Muslim nation" project. Carried out by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his ruling Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP), this project has elevated Sunni Islam as the defining characteristic of Turkish national identity and promoted a neo-imperial vision of Turkey as the natural leader of Muslims, particularly in former Ottoman territories (Saraçoğlu and Demirkol 2015; White 2014). As I will elaborate in Chapter II, AKP's Muslim nationalism combines populist (the pious people vs. the secular elite), nationalist (the Turkish nation vs. its internal and external enemies), and civilizationist (Ottoman-Islamic civilization vs. the Judeo-Christian West) antagonisms. As such, it presents an interesting counterpart to what Rogers Brubaker (2017a) highlights as the growing civilizationism of the populist right in Northern and Western Europe.

It is within this context that the Turkish government has formulated its policy response to the Syrian refugee crisis. As is well-known, the civil uprising in Syria began in March 2011 and rapidly escalated into an armed insurgency following the Assad regime's use of violence to quell the protests. By the end of the summer of that year, the Turkish government had thrown its full weight behind the opposition and instituted an "open door" policy for Syrians fleeing the conflict. Later, in October 2011, the government declared it would implement a temporary protection (TP) regime for Syrians crossing into Turkey, stressing its commitment to the

principle of non-refoulement (no forced returns) and pledging to provide basic humanitarian services to those living in government-run refugee camps (Kirişci 2014:4; Özden 2013:5).

Since then, Ankara has extended universal healthcare to all TP beneficiaries, granted Syrian children the right to access free public education, and determined that Syrian families are eligible for various public assistance programs (Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel 2017; Yılmaz 2019). The TP status, however, does not entail an automatic right to work. Instead, the current regulations make the employment of Syrian refugees conditional on a work permit to be obtained by the prospective employer and require that the number of TP beneficiaries employed in a workplace does not exceed 10 percent of the employees who are Turkish citizens. The practical difficulty of obtaining work permits condemns refugees to the informal sector, where they are heavily exploited (İçduygu et al. 2017; Siviş 2021). This, in turn, pits them against native-born workers at the lowest rungs of the workforce, thereby contributing to intercommunal tensions (Tumen 2016).

The Turkish government has been rightly criticized for leaving Syrians in a precarious legal and socioeconomic situation by denying them formal refugee status (which would have included the right to work) or a well-defined path to citizenship (Baban et al. 2017). Still, the open door policy toward Syrian refugees, which by and large remained in effect until 2016 (Makovsky 2019) was unprecedented in its fairly permissive approach to the admission of a large non-coethnic population into Turkey (Danış 2016). By the end of 2015, when the Turkish government finally decided to seal its Syrian border and admit only those with valid travel documents or in need of emergency medical services, there were already over 2.5 million Syrians registered under the TP regime, with the vast majority living in cities across the country as urban refugees. Although there has been a substantial decline in new refugee arrivals since 2016, the

number of Syrian TP beneficiaries has recently exceeded 3.7 million, in part due to the high fertility rate among Syrian refugees (see Figure 1.1).[9]

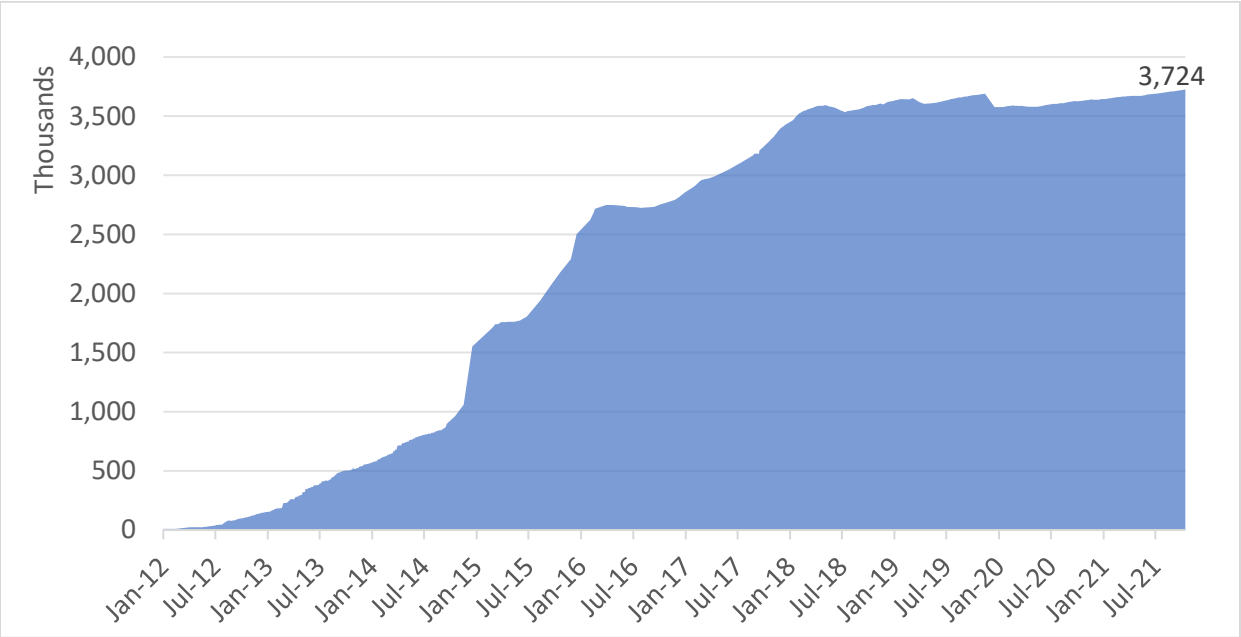


***Figure 1.1*** *Registered Syrian Refugees in Turkey, 2012-2021*. Source: UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response. Data available at: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/113.

[9] An analysis by the Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies (2019) found that the total fertility rate for Syrian women aged 15-49 in Turkey in 2018 was 5.3. By comparison, the corresponding number for Turkish women of the same age group in 2019 was 1.9. See TÜİK's fertility statistics: https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Dogum-Istatistikleri-2019-33706 (accessed 6 November 2021). It is estimated that, by the end of 2019, over 500 thousand Syrian children had been born in Turkey (Erdoğan, E. 2020:30–31). Ankara does not give Turkish citizenship to these children, instead recognizing them as TP beneficiaries.

In addition to this relatively welcoming admission policy toward Syrian refugees, prominent members of the Turkish government have also employed Islamist and neo-Ottomanist narratives to both justify Turkey's involvement in the Syrian conflict and prevent a popular backlash against the growing refugee population (Devran and Özcan 2016; Kloos 2016; Polat 2018). In so doing, they have highlighted the religious and historical bonds between Syrians and Turkish citizens, constructing in effect a shared identity between the two communities. The salience of this shared identity has been further amplified on the ground by faith-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to assist the refugees (Danış and Nazlı 2019) and thousands of preachers affiliated with Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, Diyanet) (Jacoby, Mac Ginty, and Şenay 2019). Furthermore, despite President Erdoğan's recurrent threats over the past few years to "flood Europe with refugees" (Hume and Potter 2020; Trew 2019), key AKP leaders have made a habit of contrasting what they see as Turkey's unparalleled generosity toward refugees with Europe's xenophobic response to the 21st century's biggest humanitarian crisis (Balkılıç and Teke Lloyd 2021; Polat 2018; Yanaşmayan et al. 2019).

The AKP government's refugee-friendly discourse and policies make it a "deviant" or "negative case" (Emigh 1997) in relation to the right-wing populist parties in Europe and North America, which have taken a resolutely anti-refugee stance, especially since the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis. Through a close examination of this rather atypical (but not unique) case, I seek to refine the conceptual categories and interpretive frameworks adopted in Western-centric scholarship on populist nationalism and public attitudes toward migrants.

## 1.3 Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation examines the official discourse on and public sentiment toward Syrian refugees in Turkey within the context of a conservative populist nation-building project promoted by President Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party.

The dissertation has three empirical chapters. Using both primary and secondary sources, the first one (Chapter II) documents how Erdoğan's "Muslim nationalism" (White 2014) has challenged Kemalist nationalism, the founding ideology of Turkey, in its portrayals of the Turkish nation's symbolic boundaries, collective past, and rightful place and mission in the world. This challenge can be summarized in three points. First, while Kemalist founding elites envisioned the ideal citizen as an ethnolinguistically Turkish or Turkified Muslim with a secular and pro-Western outlook (Cagaptay 2006), AKP's new nation-building project has imagined the emblematic citizen as a pious Sunni Muslim who proudly embraces Turkey's Ottoman-Islamic heritage (White 2014:9). Second, whereas Kemalist historiography relegated the Ottomans to the margins of Turkish history in an attempt to achieve a clean break with the imperial era, Muslim nationalism has located modern Turkey firmly within its Ottoman past, interpellating Turkish citizens as the heirs to a glorious empire that stretched across three continents. And third, whereas Kemalist nationalism displayed a fairly defensive and inward-looking ethos in its future projections, AKP's Muslim nationalist project has promised to "make Turkey great again" (Cagaptay 2019)by reviving the country's Ottoman-Islamic legacy and mobilizing it as a source of power in international relations.

Chapter II also sheds light on the populist and civilizationist dimensions of AKP's Muslim nationalism. The populist dimension of Muslim nationalism manifests itself through a

Manichean framing of Turkish politics as a relentless struggle between a despotic secular elite and a historically marginalized devout majority. The civilizationist dimension, on the other hand, manifests itself through a binary opposition that pits a benevolent and peaceful Ottoman-Islamic civilization against a devious and cruel Western one. Moreover, these two dimensions of Muslim nationalism are mutually implicated. For one, Muslim nationalist discourse accuses the secular elite of not only mistreating pious citizens but also undermining Turkey's power and status in the international arena by betraying the country's civilizational heritage. For another, the AKP leadership portrays itself as not only the authentic voice of the Turkish people but also a true champion of oppressed Muslims around the world. Through these populist and civilizationist appeals, AKP calls on its supporters, in particular its religious conservative base, to join a high-stakes battle against the nation's internal and external enemies—a battle that AKP leads in order to restore Turkey's former glory and alleviate the suffering and misery of fellow Muslims in the Middle East and beyond.

Chapter II concludes by arguing that AKP's Muslim nationalism represents a particular manifestation of the global rise of "civilizationist populism" (Brubaker 2017b) in the 21st century. Similar to the right-wing populist parties in Northern and Western Europe (NWE) (Brubaker 2017a), AKP blends populist, nationalist, and civilizationist appeals into an emotionally charged political discourse. There are, however, two significant differences between the civilizationist populism of Erdoğan's AKP and that of Europe's right-wing populist parties. First, while NWE populists invoke Christianity merely as a secularized cultural identity (Brubaker 2017a; Roy 2016), AKP engages with Islam not simply as a nominal identity marker but as a specific faith with its own theology, rituals, and values. Hence, prominent AKP members incorporate religious symbols and themes into their political performances much more

directly and unapologetically than do NWE populists. Second, whereas NWE populists' civilizationist references to Europe's Christian identity play a predominantly defensive role against the perceived threat from Islam (DeHanas and Shterin 2018; Roy 2016), AKP's civilizationist references to the Muslim ummah have neo-imperial implications, as they seek to expand Turkey's influence both regionally and globally.

The second empirical chapter (Chapter III) investigates the ways in which President Erdoğan's public speeches on Syrian refugees have echoed his Muslim nationalist ideology and its populist and civilizationist underpinnings. More specifically, it asks (1) how Syrian refugees have figured in Erdoğan's Muslim nationalist reconstruction of the Turkish nation's past (*who we were*), present (*who we are*), and future (*who we should be*); (2) what kind of "us" versus "them" boundaries Erdoğan has drawn via his refugee discourse and to what extent he has included Syrian refugees in his imagined community of "us"; and (3) how Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees has evolved over time.

The data for this chapter come from a corpus of 554 public speeches Erdoğan has given between 3 January 2012 and 28 December 2020. I analyzed the data through a mixed methods design. In the initial stage, I employed a quantitative "down-sampling" procedure (KhosraviNik 2010) to produce a manageable set of texts for in-depth qualitative analysis. This procedure relied on *semiotic richness* (selected texts should involve a thorough discussion on Syrian refugees) and *temporal distribution* (selected texts should be evenly distributed across time) as the two main selection criteria and yielded a total of 54 texts equally distributed across 18 six-month periods from January 2012 to December 2020. In the second stage, the selected texts were subjected to a thematic analysis that had both deductive and inductive aspects (Deterding and Waters 2021). In the third and final stage, I created separate dictionaries representing some of the

core themes identified through qualitative analysis and used them to perform an automated coding of the full corpus. These dictionary-based analyses served three main purposes. First, they helped me present an overview of the full corpus, providing information about how common the qualitatively identified themes were in the entire data set. Second, they helped me find additional instances of these themes, including their first appearance in the corpus. Finally, and most importantly, they helped me corroborate my provisional qualitative findings about the shifts and continuities in Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees over time.

The findings show that Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees has both reflected and reproduced his Muslim nationalist reconstruction of the Turkish nation's past, present, and future. To begin with, Erdoğan's refugee discourse has been closely linked with his Muslim nationalist portrayal of Turkish history. Indeed, since the beginning of the civil war in Syria, Erdoğan has regularly employed Ottomanist historical themes to justify both Turkey's active involvement in the Syrian conflict and his government's relatively welcoming policies toward Syrian refugees. Two such themes have been prominent. First, Erdoğan has depicted Ottoman-Islamic civilization as a "civilization of mercy and compassion," arguing that Turkey has historically been a safe haven for oppressed people regardless of their ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. Second, he has repeatedly emphasized the cultural bonds between the peoples of Turkey and Syria, bonds that were forged during the centuries-long Ottoman rule in the Middle East. In doing so, he has not only connected modern Turkey tightly to its Ottoman past but also represented his government's refugee policies as fulfilling Turkey's historical obligations toward peoples living in former Ottoman territories.

Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees has drawn on Muslim nationalism also in its emphasis on Islam as the defining characteristic of "who we are" as a nation. Erdoğan has made

heavy use of Islamic tropes to promote pro-refugee attitudes since May 2013, when a terrorist attack in the border town of Reyhanlı killed 53 people and led to protests against the presence of Syrians in the region. Chief among these tropes have been the *ansar-muhajirun* analogy, which likens the relationship between Syrian refugees and their Turkish hosts to the one between the first Muslims who fled Mecca with Prophet Muhammad because of persecution (the *muhajirun*) and the early converts to Islam in Medina who sheltered them (the *ansar*). Highlighting the eminence of the *ansar* in the Islamic tradition, this analogy has allowed Erdoğan to frame the hosting of Syrian refugees as a religious responsibility for Turkish citizens. At the same time, calling on the Turkish people to act in accordance with Islamic principles, the analogy has been instrumental in reaffirming Turkey as a Muslim nation.

Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees has reflected how he views the Turkish nation's rightful place and mission in the world as well. Most notably, he has underscored AKP government's "open door" policy toward Syrian and Iraqi refugees, as well as its growing humanitarian and development assistance to poor countries, to argue that under his leadership Turkey is reemerging as a major actor in the international system. Moreover, he has claimed that the "new Turkey" constitutes a virtuous power, one that is both willing and able to protect oppressed peoples around the world, particularly Muslims.

Chapter III further shows that Erdoğan has utilized the Syrian conflict and the ensuing refugee crisis to bolster the populist and civilizationist antagonisms that lie at the heart of Muslim nationalism. Regarding the former antagonism, Erdoğan has asserted that the political opposition to his government's Syria and refugee policies reflects the secular elite's alienation from the Turkish people's historical and religious traditions. Accusing the secularist opposition of having a pro-coup mindset, he has also established a chain of equivalence between his

Kemalist detractors and the Ba'athists in Syria on the basis of their alleged despotism and cultural disdain for ordinary people. Erdoğan has combined this populist language with a civilizationist one, juxtaposing the alleged benevolence of Turkey's Ottoman-Islamic heritage with Europe's deep-rooted racism and xenophobia toward refugees. This has enabled him to not only glorify "our ancestors" but also deflect the European Union's (EU) criticisms regarding the worsening of democracy, rule of law, and human rights in Turkey.

Finally, Chapter III draws attention to the fact that Erdoğan's discourse has not been fully inclusive of Syrian refugees. First, despite his repeated references to the religious and historical brotherhood among Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees, Erdoğan has established a clear hierarchy between the two communities, a hierarchy whereby the latter depends on the charity and protection provided by the former. Second, every now and then Erdoğan represented the refugees as a heavy social and economic burden, especially when he threatened European countries that he might send the refugees to their way. And third, while he has actively supported full citizenship for a minority of highly skilled refugees, Erdoğan's proposed solution for the vast majority of displaced Syrians has been their resettlement in a "safe zone" within Syria. In fact, Erdoğan's emphasis on the eventual return of Syrians to their country has grown stronger since 2018, as the Turkish economy has faltered and public hostility toward refugees has surged. As a result, Erdoğan's refugee discourse has become increasingly ambiguous and less inclusionary.

Overall, this chapter makes two main theoretical contributions to the literature on right-wing populist parties and movements. First, it highlights the narrative dimension of populist nationalist identity-work, showing how populist leaders tell citizens not only who they *are* but also who they *were* and who they *should be.* Hence, to better understand the implications of a populist nationalist project for minoritized communities, we need to examine in detail how it

constructs the nation's past, present, and future. Second, and relatedly, the chapter challenges the tendency in populism research to rely on a simplistic dichotomy between civic-inclusionary and ethnocultural-exclusionary national boundaries. To start with, it argues that depending on how they construe the nation's collective history and its rightful place and mission in the world, right-wing populist leaders may in fact adopt a relatively welcoming attitude toward migrants whom they see as ethnically or culturally similar to "us." The chapter also maintains that a populist nationalist party or movement may be simultaneously inclusionary toward some social groups and exclusionary toward others. More broadly, it posits that inclusion and exclusion are matters of degree and that populist leaders may alter their position on migrants in response to the signals from their mass audiences.

Having thus examined the official discourse on Syrian refugees in Turkey, the dissertation turns our attention to mass attitudes. The final empirical chapter (Chapter IV) probes how religious conservative citizens make sense of and respond to appeals that ask them to treat Syrian refugees as their Muslim brothers and sisters. To address this question, the chapter employs a sequential (QUAL → QUAN) mixed methods design, whereby nine focus group discussions (n = 59) conducted with religious conservatives in Istanbul in November 2019 were complemented by an original survey of Istanbul residents (n = 2,284) fielded in July-August 2020. Moreover, in order to ensure that the findings do not simply reflect the unique circumstances of Istanbul, the chapter replicates its quantitative analyses with data from a nationally representative survey (n = 2,649) carried out in February 2016 by KONDA, a reputable public opinion company in Turkey.

Of the nine focus groups discussions, eight were conducted with ethnic Turks and one with ethnic Kurds. The discussions with Turkish participants were stratified by sex

(male/female) and socioeconomic status (lower-income/higher-income), whereas the discussion with Kurdish participants included only men with modest incomes, who are among those most likely to compete with Syrian refugees in the labor market (International Crisis Group 2018). To let focus group participants share their genuine opinions without being influenced by the study questions, a collage activity was implemented in the first half of the discussions. In this activity, the participants were asked to express their thoughts and feelings about "living together with Syrian refugees" through images they could cut from magazines of varying content. The focus groups, however, did not rely only on an unstructured discussion format. In the second half, a semi-structured discussion guide was used to initiate conversation around key study questions.

A small minority of the focus group participants unequivocally endorsed AKP's Muslim nationalist discourse on Syrian refugees, fully subscribing to the idea of religious solidarity with newcomers and taking pride in Turkey's alleged leadership among Muslim nations. The majority, however, had ambivalent attitudes. While these participants acknowledged their religious duty to help Syrians, they were also deeply concerned about the material impact of the refugee crisis on themselves and their communities. Blaming the refugees for their economic woes and stressing the conditional limits of Islamic solidarity, these respondents minimized their responsibilities toward newcomers. In fact, some respondents even denied that they had any religious obligations toward Syrian refugees by claiming that the latter were not good Muslims. Both of these discursive strategies allowed the participants to without support from Syrian refugees while at the same time maintaining their self-identity as devout Muslims.

Using data from an original survey of Turkish citizens residing in Istanbul, Chapter IV provides additional evidence on this tension between Islamic fraternity (identity) and material concerns (interests) in religious conservatives' attitudes toward Syrian refugees. The findings

show that religious conservatives on average hold warmer feelings toward Syrian refugees and are more supportive of integration policies compared with other members of the Sunni Muslim majority, even after controlling for partisanship, multiculturalism, and various demographic variables. However, the findings also reveal that the relationship between religious conservatism and attitudes toward Syrian refugees is moderated by individuals' assessment of their personal economic circumstances. At lower levels of perceived economic insecurity, religious conservatism has a large and statistically significant association with pro-refugee attitudes. But when economic insecurity is at maximum, religious conservatives become statistically indistinguishable from other citizens in terms of their attitudes toward Syrian refugees. The chapter replicates these findings with data from a nationally representative public opinion poll conducted in February 2016, when the AKP government's religiously-legitimated pro-refugee discourse was at its strongest and the Turkish economy had not yet plunged into a crisis.

Taken together, these results suggest that religious motives have a bias-reducing effect on conservative Sunni Muslims' attitudes toward Syrian refugees in Turkey; nevertheless, such motives are not powerful enough to override material concerns—concerns that are increasingly prevalent due to the worsening economic conditions in the country.

Chapter IV makes three main contributions to the literature. First, it underscores the fact that religious considerations may play a positive role in shaping citizens' migration attitudes depending on the sociopolitical context. In affluent countries of the global North, especially in Europe, where many migrants come from distant lands and practice different religions, politicians have used religious symbols primarily to represent newcomers as culturally alien and thus threatening to host societies. Given this background, it is not surprising that scholars have found a link between religious concerns and anti-migrant attitudes. By contrast, the ruling

conservative party in Turkey has employed religious symbols and tropes to promote acceptance of Syrian refugees, who not only come from a neighboring country but also practice the same majority religion with Turkish citizens. This sociopolitical environment has made it possible for religion to have a bias-reducing impact on citizens' attitudes toward migrants.

Second, Chapter IV shows that political orientation and educational attainment do not have the same effects in Turkey and Western countries. Whereas research conducted on Western samples consistently shows that left-leaning individuals tend to be more accepting of migrants, my analyses reveal that supporters of the religious conservative AKP have on average the most refugee-friendly attitudes. Likewise, while the existing literature points to educational attainment as one of the strongest predictors of pro-migrant attitudes, I find that it has at best a negligible relationship with Turkish citizens' attitudes toward Syrian refugees. I thus urge scholars to pay greater attention to the scope conditions of the prevailing theories and predictive schemes in research on migration attitudes.

Finally, instead of pitting identities against interests, Chapter IV illustrates how they may interact in shaping native-born citizens' views about migrants and migration policies. The existing literature tends to view cultural and economic explanations as competing perspectives, debating whether collective identities ("symbolic threats") or material interests ("realistic threats") play a more important role in the formation of individuals' migration preferences. My findings in Chapter IV suggest that a more useful pathway for future research would be to investigate the complex interplay between cultural and economic factors, both at the individual and aggregate levels.

In the concluding chapter of the dissertation (Chapter V), I use the empirical findings presented above to argue that populist nationalism is best viewed as a dynamic and relational

process of "people-making" (Smith 2003), a process that involves ongoing negotiations between political leaders and their mass audiences in the context of changing political, economic, and social circumstances. I also draw parallels between Erdoğan's Muslim nationalism and some other prominent instances of populist nationalism in the world, thus highlighting the cross-national transferability of the dissertation's arguments. I contend that while the case of Erdoğan is atypical in some respects, it exemplifies the potential for culturally selective forms of transnationalism intrinsic to civilizationist populism. I wrap up the dissertation by offering future research directions.

# CHAPTER II

## Muslim Nationalism and Its Populist and Civilizationist Underpinnings

My fellow countrymen,

We have accomplished many and great things in a short period of time. The greatest of these is the Turkish Republic, the basis of which is Turkish heroism and the great Turkish culture. We owe this success to the resolute forward march of the Turkish nation together with its admirable army. However, we can never consider what we have achieved to be sufficient, because we must, and are determined to, accomplish even more and greater things. We shall raise our country to the level of the most prosperous and civilized nations of the world. We shall endow our nation with the broadest means and sources of welfare. We shall raise our national culture above the contemporary level of civilization. Therefore, we should judge the measure of time not according to the lax mentality of past centuries but in terms of the concepts of speed and movement of our century. Compared to the past, we shall work harder. We shall accomplish greater things in a shorter period of time. I have no doubt that we shall succeed in this. Because the Turkish nation is of excellent character, the Turkish nation is hardworking, the Turkish nation is intelligent! Because the Turkish nation has been successful in overcoming difficulties through national unity and togetherness. And because the Turkish nation holds the torch of positive science in its march on the path of progress and civilization. …

How happy is the one who says, “I am a Turk!” (Atatürk 1933).

## 2.1 Turkey: A Deeply Divided Nation

Cross-national measures of mass political polarization—whether based on ideological differentiation, negative partisanship, or perceived dissimilarity between contending parties—show that Turkey is one of the most polarized countries in the world today (Erdoğan and Uyan-Semerci 2018:37–38, 41–42; Lauka, McCoy, and Firat 2018). Correspondingly, studies on political polarization in Turkey indicate that partisans tend to view rival parties as a major threat to their economic and political well-being (Laebens and Öztürk 2021), which results in very low electoral volatility and defection rates (Çakır 2020; Yılmaz 2017). This literature also reveals disturbingly high levels of affective and social distance between the supporters of different political parties (Erdoğan, E. 2016; Erdoğan and Uyan-Semerci 2018). In a 2017 survey, for example, 79 percent of the respondents said they would not want their daughter to marry someone voting for the party they feel most distant to, and 68 percent said they would not want their children to befriend the children of someone supporting that party (Erdoğan and Uyan-Semerci 2018:64). Though less dramatic, recent studies have reported significant levels of social intolerance as well, especially along religious, sectarian, and ethnic lines (KONDA 2019; Sarigil 2018; Sarigil and Karakoc 2017).

In her ethnographic work on contemporary Turkey, social anthropologist Jenny White (2014) associates this polarization with political disputes over the role of religion and ethnicity in defining Turkish national identity. It might of course be argued that such disputes are not new, that they are as old as the Republic of Turkey itself. While that is a valid point, it is also true that questions about national identity have gained greater political salience since the early 1990s, polarizing the public along deep-seated societal cleavages. Indeed, using the well-known Dalton

(2008) index, Emre Erdoğan and Pınar Uyan-Semerci (2018:37–39) show that party system polarization grew fourfold in Turkey between 1991 and 2015 (from a score of 1.55 to 6.21), with a sharp increase after 2007.

What brought questions about national identity to the forefront of Turkish politics in the 1990s was the resurgence of two oppositional movements: Islamism and Kurdish nationalism. And what brought disputes over national identity to a boiling point in the 2000s was the meteoric rise of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP). Erdoğan's political rise set two different national projects at odds with each other: the secular nationalism of Kemalist and neo-Kemalist (*ulusalcı*) elites on the one hand and the "Muslim" (White 2014) or "Islamic" (Çınar 2011) nationalism of new conservative elites on the other. Ultimately, Erdoğan has defeated his political opponents, and Muslim nationalism has become the new state ideology.

This chapter provides an overview of AKP's Muslim nationalism and how it challenges Kemalist nationalism in its portrayals of the Turkish nation's symbolic boundaries, collective past, and rightful place and mission in the world. In so doing, the chapter also highlights the populist and civilizationist underpinnings of Muslim nationalism. It concludes by arguing that AKP's Muslim nationalism should be seen as a particular manifestation of the global rise of "civilizationist populism" (Brubaker 2017b) in the 21st century—one that is substantively religious and has a neo-imperialist posture as opposed to the European variety which is only nominally religious and has a defensive posture.

Below we will first take a closer look at Turkey's Kemalist legacy, for it is in relation to Kemalism, its constitutive Other, that Muslim nationalism acquires meaning.

## 2.2 The Kemalist Legacy of Turkey

Kemalism refers to a set of ideological principles formulated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), the founder and first president of Turkey, and his Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) in the 1920s and '30s.[10] In essence, Kemalism was a modernist nation-building project with two main pillars: (i) an "assertive secularism" that sought to push religion to the margins of political and social life (Kuru 2009:202–26), and (ii) an assimilationist nationalism that sought to create a culturally homogeneous nation out of the ethnic and religious diversity inherited from the Ottoman Empire (Cagaptay 2006).

The first pillar of this project, secularism, was not simply a matter of separating religion from the state so as to make the latter a neutral institution guaranteeing freedom of conscience for all citizens. On the contrary, Kemalists had a civilizing mission aimed at purifying both the state and society from what they considered to be the corrosive effects of a stagnant Islamic culture. Atatürk believed, as is evident in his remarks on the 10th anniversary of the Republic, that the Turkish nation had to break free from its Ottoman-Islamic past ("the lax mentality of past centuries") and embrace modernity ("the torch of positive science") in order to catch up with Western civilization ("raise our country to the level of the most prosperous and civilized nations of the world").

[10] The honorific "Atatürk" was given to Mustafa Kemal in 1934 by the Turkish parliament as part of a new law mandating all citizens to pick a fixed family name. It means "Father/Ancestor of the Turks."

Kemalist elites enacted a series of reforms to secularize the fledgling republic and its legal and educational institutions. In a sense, these reforms were a continuation of the efforts to modernize Ottoman public administration which had begun in the 19th century. Kemalists, however, were much more radical in their approach, as they were determined to dismantle all forms of officially recognized religious authority that could challenge their power. A major step in this direction was taken when the Grand National Assembly terminated, to the dismay of pious Muslims within and beyond Turkey, the centuries-old Ottoman Caliphate on 3 March 1924 (Hassan 2016). On the same day, the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam (*Şeyhülislam*), the head of the Islamic legal and scholarly establishment, was abolished as well, and Islamic schools and colleges (*medreses*) were shut down (Lewis 1968:265). The efforts to eradicate the power of the ulama (Islamic scholars and lawyers) continued with the closure of the Sharia (*Şer'iyye*) courts in April 1924 (Zürcher 2017:188). The secularization of the legal regime was completed in the following years through the adoption of various European laws, most notably the Swiss civil code in 1926 (Lewis 1968:271–74). The new civil code banned polygamy and made men and women equal under marriage, divorce, and inheritance laws (Nadolski 1977). Crowning all these reforms, the principle of secularism (*laiklik*) was incorporated into the constitution on 5 February 1937 (Ahmad 1993:63).

Kemalist reforms also aimed to establish a tight control over popular manifestations of Islam. To this end, a Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, Diyanet) was established in 1924 under the authority of the Prime Minister's Office. Representing official Islam, Diyanet's tasks included supervising all mosques in the country, appointing their imams, and producing and disseminating knowledge in matters of Islamic faith and worship (Çınar 2005:17). For the same reason, the dervish convents (*tekkes*) and lodges (*zaviyes*), where

followers of Sufi orders (*tarikats*) practiced religious rituals and received training, were outlawed in 1925 (Kuru 2009:221). Furthermore, establishing religious associations was made illegal in 1926 with a penal code adopted from Italy (Zürcher 2017:188).

These attempts to tame popular forms of Islam were coupled with reforms designed for transforming social and cultural life along Western lines. The Hat Law of 1925, for example, prohibited men from wearing the traditional fez, while public officials were required to put on Western-style hats (Lewis 1968:269–70). Although no dress codes were issued for women, the Kemalist state actively promoted unveiling, particularly through the increased visibility of "modern" women in the public sphere (Çınar 2005:59–74). Other Westernization reforms of the Atatürk era included the adoption of the Gregorian calendar in 1926, the Latin alphabet in 1928, European weights and measures in 1931, and Sunday as holiday in 1935 (Zürcher 2017:189–90). Even the Islamic call to prayer (*ezan*), a fixture of everyday life in Muslim societies, could not escape Kemalist modernization attempts: a Turkish version replaced the Arabic original in 1932 (Kuru 2009:223).

Kemalist political elites did not only seek to create a more secular and Westernized society; they also sought to create a culturally unified nation. This was no easy task, for they had inherited an ethnically, and to a degree religiously, heterogenous populace from the Ottoman Empire. It is true that the violent uprooting of Anatolian Armenians and Greeks during World War I, the mass flight of Western Anatolian Greeks after the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922), and the compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923 had drastically diminished Turkey's Christian populations (Zürcher 2017:164–65). Still, the newly formed Turkish Republic had non-negligible numbers of Greek, Jewish, and Armenian citizens, who were geographically concentrated in specific localities. In addition, there were a multiplicity of

ethnically non-Turkish Muslim groups in the country. Some of these groups were native to Anatolia, with Kurds being by far the largest one. Others were immigrant-origin Muslims who had been driven out of Crimea, the Caucasus, and the Balkans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Karpat 1985:60–77). As Soner Çağaptay, an eminent historian of Turkish nationalism, reports (2006:16), in 1927, even after the population exchange with Greece, 2.64 percent of Turkey's population was non-Muslim and 13.58 percent spoke a language other than Turkish. Of these non-Turkish speakers, the majority were speakers of Kurdish, who made up approximately 8.7 percent of the total population.[11]

Initially the Kemalist regime seemed to be embracing the country's ethnic and religious diversity through a civic-territorial definition of Turkishness. For instance, Article 88 of the 1924 Constitution stated, "The People of Turkey, regardless of religion and race, are Turks as regards citizenship" (Peaslee 1956:412). In a similar fashion, Atatürk proclaimed, "The people of Turkey, who have established the Turkish state, are called the Turkish nation" (Cagaptay 2006:11). In reality, however, this ostensibly civic-territorial discourse of nationhood masked a subtle distinction between those who were Turkish only on account of their citizenship and those who were more authentic members of the national community (Yeğen 2004). As it became clear throughout the 1920s and '30s, the latter, more authentic form of Turkishness was based on shared religious affiliation and ethno-cultural traits, hence excluding non-Muslim citizens and

[11] Cagaptay (2004:86) estimates that in 1912, before the Balkan Wars began, Christians constituted roughly 20 percent of the population living within the territories of modern Turkey. In 1927, they constituted barely over 2 percent.

Muslims who resisted cultural assimilation. In other words, saying "I am a Turk" was not as simple as Atatürk made it sound (Yıldız 2001).

Given their staunchly secularist worldview, it might come as a surprise that Kemalists relied on Muslim affiliation in their attempts to forge a culturally unified nation. This was a choice grounded in the sociopolitical conditions of the time. First of all, after eleven years of continuous warfare against the Christian populations of the Ottoman Empire, the new leaders of Turkey were deeply distrustful of, if not openly hostile toward, religious minorities. Moreover, the violent ethno-religious conflicts that marked the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had turned Muslimhood into a highly salient social identity unifying the native Muslims of Anatolia with those exiled from the lost territories (Canefe 2002; Goalwin 2018)**.** Thus, when the remaining lands of the Ottoman Empire were occupied by European, Greek, and Armenian forces following World War I, the national movement led by Atatürk had rallied people using a combination of religious and nationalist appeals (Uzer 2016:94–95). For these reasons, although appeals to religious sentiments gradually disappeared from the public sphere after the foundation of the Republic, a secularized Muslim identity remained key to delineating the boundaries of Turkishness (Cagaptay 2006:11–15, 156–61).[12]

[12] Compared to Christians, the Kemalist state had a more ambivalent attitude toward its Jewish citizens. On the one hand, Jews were not automatically excluded from the nation. In fact, similar to non-Turkish Muslims, the state demanded their cultural assimilation into Turkishness (Cagaptay 2006: 24-7). In addition, between 1933 and 1945 Ankara admitted hundreds of Jewish intellectuals fleeing Nazi persecution as temporary asylees and let thousands of European Jews to use Turkey as a transit country to Palestine (Kirişci 2000:10). On the other hand, however,

However, it should be emphasized that this nominal Muslim identity, though significant, was not at the center of the Kemalist vision of nationhood. At its core, Kemalist nationalism was ethno-linguistic. Indeed, not only did Kemalists create an elaborate, if not fantastical, ethnic mythology around Turkishness and its Central Asian roots (Ersanlı 2003) but they also demanded complete linguistic and cultural assimilation from ethnic minorities (Yıldız 2001). This assimilationist approach to creating a homogenous nation was evident in various state initiatives, such as the infamous "Citizen, Speak Turkish!" campaigns, which pressured minority communities to stop using non-Turkish languages in public (Aslan 2007). It was also evident in the Kemalist regime's immigration and citizenship policies, which were exclusionary toward both non-Muslim groups and Muslims who were deemed inassimilable, such as Kurds and Arabs (Cagaptay 2006:65–101; Kirişci 2000).

Predictably, the Kemalist regime's secularizing reforms and assimilationist nation-building practices generated significant discontent among the public. The regime was largely successful in bringing the relatively small non-Turkish Muslim groups into the fold of Turkishness. Turkifying the Kurds, however, proved very difficult. As a matter of fact, the efforts to create a centralized nation-state based on a homogenous Turkish identity resulted in a series of Kurdish rebellions between 1924 and 1938, which were violently suppressed by the military (Orhan 2012). The secularizing reforms fared even worse. Although Kemalist political elites managed to build a strong support base for secularism in urban centers, the regime's

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Jewish citizens were harassed for resisting Turkification, discriminated against in employment, and treated as a potential threat to national security. As a result, thousands of them left Turkey in the 1920s and '30s (Guttstadt 2013).

popular appeal was fairly limited in rural areas, where the overwhelming majority of the population lived.[13] Given the large-scale discontent with their policies, Kemalist elites had to rely on top-down social engineering to achieve their objectives. Hence, for all intents and purposes, Turkey remained an authoritarian single-party regime until the end of World War II.

The emergence of a bipolar world order after the war brought about significant changes in Turkish politics. In order to ensure membership in the Western alliance and secure protection against the Soviet Union, Turkey's eastern neighbor, the Kemalist regime approved the transition to a multiparty system in 1946 (VanderLippe 2005).[14] The first free and fair elections were held on 14 May 1950, and the ruling CHP was heavily defeated by the Democratic Party (DP), a center-right party that challenged CHP's assertive secularism and statist economic policies via a populist language that promised to give the power back to "the people" (Sunar 1990). This defeat marked the end of Kemalism as a radical social engineering project; however, a more generic commitment to the notion of Turkey as a secular, Westernized, and culturally unified nation

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[13] The first national census conducted in 1927 found that only 24.2 percent of Turkey's population lived in urban areas (Başvekalet İstatistik Genel Direktörlüğü 1935:14).

[14] In 1945, Stalin demanded that Ankara lease the Soviet Union a military base on the strategically critical Turkish Straits and concede two eastern provinces, Kars and Ardahan, which Lenin had ceded to Atatürk in 1922. Realizing its mistake, Moscow renounced these demands in 1946; however, this did not change Ankara's willingness to become part of the Western alliance. The newly elected DP government sent three brigades to Korea to fight alongside the American forces, and Turkey became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952 (Ahmad 2003:104–7).

remained at the foundation of Turkish politics throughout the Cold War (Yeğen 2009:63–65). At the same time, the Turkish military and the high judiciary emerged as the self-designated guardians of these principles, periodically intervening in the democratic process to suppress the "Islamic reactionary," "Kurdish separatist," or "communist" threats to the Republic (Kuru 2012).

This was, then, Turkey's Kemalist legacy: first, a deep cultural rift between secular social segments clustered in urban centers and a conservative majority concentrated in the countryside; second, a sizable Kurdish minority whose identity and collective rights were denied; and finally, a military-judicial establishment exercising tutelary power over elected officials in order to uphold Turkey as a secular, Western-oriented, and culturally homogenous nation.

## 2.3 AKP and the Dismantling of the Kemalist Tutelary Regime

AKP was founded in 2001 by a group of young and pragmatic leaders—chief among them Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül—who broke with Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist-oriented National Outlook (*Milli Görüş*) movement. The party came to power in November 2002, after a decade of political and economic instability had eradicated voters' trust in the traditional political class (Somer 2019:48). Running on a platform that combined cultural conservatism with political and economic liberalism (Hale and Özbudun 2010:20–29), the party received over 34 percent of the valid votes (YSK 2002a) and about two-thirds of the parliamentary seats (YSK 2002b)—a discrepancy caused by the 10 percent threshold for electing members of the parliament, which was cleared by only two parties in the 2002 election.

AKP's strong economic performance during its first term in government and the progress it achieved in Turkey's long-standing bid for European Union (EU) membership boosted the

party's popular support and international legitimacy, setting the stage for its landslide victories in the two general elections and two constitutional referendums that took place between 2007 and 2011. The party won 46.58 percent of the votes in 2007 (YSK 2007b) and 49.83 percent in 2011 (YSK 2011), becoming the first incumbent party in the history of Turkish democracy to have increased its vote share in three consecutive parliamentary elections (Tezcür 2012:117–18). In addition, a resounding majority of the voters approved the constitutional amendments proposed by AKP in the 2007 (YSK 2007a) and 2010 (YSK 2010) referendums (68.95 and 57.88 percent, respectively). These victories allowed the party to capture key state institutions, including the presidency, and break the power of its secular nationalist opponents in the military and the judiciary. By 2011, AKP had dismantled the Kemalist tutelary regime (Esen and Gumuscu 2016; Taş 2015) and established its hegemony in Turkish politics (Tezcür 2012).

The termination of the tutelary regime, however, did not lead to democratic consolidation in Turkey. Instead, over the past decade, Erdoğan's Turkey has taken an increasingly authoritarian (Castaldo 2018; White and Herzog 2016; Yilmaz and Bashirov 2018) and Islamist (Karakaya-Stump 2018; Kaya 2015; Lüküslü 2016; Yilmaz 2018) turn, both facilitated by a populist-nativist politics of polarization (Castaldo 2018; Rogenhofer 2018; Somer 2019). Turkey's authoritarian drift, which culminated in the creation of an all-powerful executive presidency with the constitutional referendum of 16 April 2017 (Esen and Gumuscu 2018), is well-documented and need not be repeated here. Suffice it to say, political rights and civil liberties have deteriorated so badly in Turkey that the Freedom House now classifies the country as "not free" (see Figure 2.1).

In the sections below, I will elaborate on AKP's new conservative nation-building project and its populist and civilizationist underpinnings, for they relate closely to this dissertation's research questions.

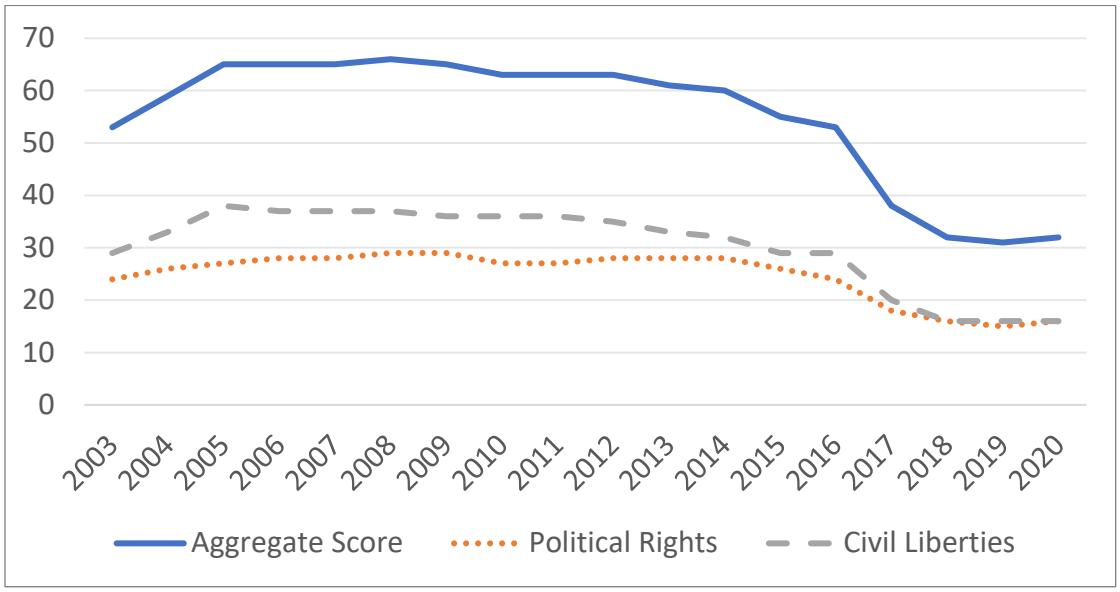


***Figure 2.2*** *Political Rights and Civil Liberties in Turkey, 2003-2020.* Source: Freedom House, Aggregate Category and Subcategory Scores. Note: The aggregate score ranges from 0 to 100, where higher scores represent greater freedom. Data ("Aggregate Category and Subcategory Scores, 2003-2021") available for download at: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world.

## 2.4 The Rise of Muslim Nationalism

AKP does not subscribe to a fundamentalist version of Islamism that seeks to replace the modern nation-state with a theocratic regime or build a social order governed by sharia. Nevertheless, following its third consecutive general election victory in 2011, the party has

become bolder in its use of religious discourse, relying increasingly on Islamic symbolism to vilify the opposition and consolidate its conservative base (Rogenhofer 2018; Yabanci and Taleski 2018). Moreover, since 2012, the party has embarked on an ambitious program to refashion Turkish society in line with Erdoğan's desire to "raise a pious generation" (Lüküslü 2016). To this end, successive AKP governments have expanded both the budget and the institutional prerogatives of the Diyanet, turning it into a powerful indoctrination tool for creating conservative citizens loyal to Erdoğan (Mutluer 2018)**.** In addition, the educational system has been overhauled to promote Islamic education, including the conversion of thousands of public middle and high schools into *imam-hatip* schools, where students receive extensive religious instruction based on Sunni Islam (Bilefsky 2017; Butler 2018; Gall 2018; Yilmaz 2018). Last but not least, AKP's Islamist-sectarian tendencies have become evident in its post-Arab Spring foreign policy, with Ankara sponsoring various Islamist groups in the Middle East and North Africa to once again position Turkey as the leader of the (Sunni) Muslim world (Başkan 2018; Çınar 2018; Özpek and Tanriverdi Yaşar 2018).

AKP's growing references to Islam as a source of political legitimacy and its Islamist domestic and foreign policies reflect a new nation-building project, marketed by the party leadership as creating a "New Turkey" that will be more in tune with its civilizational heritage and therefore more democratic and powerful than the "Old Turkey." This "Muslim nationalist" project—as I will call it, following White (2014)—has challenged Kemalist nationalism(s) on three main fronts: (i) the nation's symbolic boundaries, (ii) its collective past, and (iii) its rightful place and mission in the world.

A crucial way in which Muslim nationalism differs from its Kemalist alternative(s) is how it conceptualizes the Turkish nation and its symbolic boundaries. As discussed above, for

the early Republican political elites, the ideal citizen was an ethno-linguistically Turkish or Turkified Muslim (Cagaptay 2006) who nonetheless had a secular lifestyle and fully supported Atatürk's Western-oriented modernization program (White 2014: 9). In response to the rise of political Islam and the Kurdish national movement in the 1990s, Kemalist nationalism has taken on a more militantly secularist, ethnocentric, and anti-imperialist form, in which Islamists, Kurdish nationalists, and major Western powers feature as existential threats to the Turkish nation (Bora 2003; Çinar and Taş 2017; Özkırımlı 2013). By contrast, AKP's new nation-building project imagines the emblematic citizen as a pious Sunni Muslim who proudly embraces the legacy of the Ottoman-Islamic civilization (White 2014: 9). That is to say, Muslim nationalism places Islam—not only as an identity marker but also as a substantive faith—at the center of its conception of the nation. As Saraçoğlu and Demirkol (2015:307, italics in original) put it, "[i]n AKP's nationalism, Sunni-Muslim values are no longer conceived solely as *one* of the common cultural features of 'Turkishness' … but have become the *core* element defining what the 'nation' is."

The centrality of Islam in AKP's definition of the nation can be observed clearly in the speeches Erdoğan has given over the past 10 years. The following quotation from his remarks at the 2019 Mawlid al-Nabi (the birth of the Prophet) celebration provides a good example:

> Ever since it was honored with Islam, this nation has been molded with the love of our Prophet. The calls to the prayer [*ezân-ı Muhammedî*], which have been adorning our firmament [*gök kubbe*] for centuries, are the emblem of our independence as a nation. The calls to the prayer, which fill the Sultanahmet Square in Istanbul, are recited with the same spirit, the same enthusiasm in

> Diyarbakır's Grand Mosque. The prayers made in Edirne Selimiye [Mosque] embrace those made in the Şanlıurfa Halil-ül Rahman Mosque before reaching the highest heaven [*arş-ı âlâ*]. As we face the Kaaba five times a day, as we raise our hands to the sky [to pray], as we greet each other, as we shake hands [*musafaha yaparken*], we comprehend the meaning of being a nation, being an ummah [*ümmet*] (Erdoğan, R. T. 2019a).

Similarly, in a speech delivered on 27 July 2020, three days after the reopening of the Hagia Sofia [*Ayasofya*] to Muslim worship, Erdoğan depicted Islam as both the foundation of "our nation" and the source of its future vitality:

> Neither enemy attacks, nor political and economic crises, nor those who impose their rotten mentality upon society can ruin this homeland. As long as the sources that nourish our nation's faith remain alive, we will—God willing—overcome all of these [problems]. … The greater the role of our mosques, with their religious and social influences, in our lives, the greater the confidence with which we can view our future. The more our mosques stand out in the skyline of this country, the closer we are to our goals. On the other hand, the emptier our mosques are, the more barren our beloved land becomes. … That's why the reopening of Ayasofya to worship, its reunion with *secde*s [prostrating oneself in prayer] does not simply mean the coming into service of just another mosque. With this step, we are in fact witnessing the rebirth of a nation (Erdoğan, R. T. 2020a).

Muslim and Kemalist nationalisms also differ in how they construe the nation's collective past. When Kemalist elites turned to history writing in the late 1920s and the 1930s, they pointed to the creation of the Republic as the "founding moment" of the Turkish nation, i.e., the moment when the nation "acquired agency to become a sovereign entity capable of determining its fate" (Çinar and Taş 2017:662). These narratives depicted a Turkish nation that had reclaimed, under Atatürk's leadership, its sovereignty from not only foreign invaders but also a degenerate *ancien régime* (Morin and Lee 2010:495–98). At the same time, Kemalist anthropologists and historians created new historical myths about the great empires and civilizations they claimed had been established by pre-Islamic Turkic populations all over the world, thereby pushing the Ottoman Empire further to the margins of Turkish history (Cagaptay 2006:48–53; Ersanlı 2003). The following passage from *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* (*The Outlines of Turkish History*), a 1930 book presenting the Kemalist regime's official view of Turkish history, illustrates the negative portrayal of the Ottomans in Kemalist nationalism:

> The sons of Osman had already lost their competence and ability to govern the Turkish nation. In the general armistice, the Turkish nation was faced with a great disaster that it had not seen in its history, which is as old as the entire history of the world. No one was thinking of the possibility of removing the victorious enemy armies that had occupied every part of the country and establishing an independent Turkish nation-state. *Mustafa Kemal*, who was aware of the needs and troubles of the Turkish nation as much as he knew its heroism in the battlefields, took on the leadership of the nation and started the fight in Anatolia with this determination (1919). The Turkish nation did not hesitate to gather

> under the banner of *Mustafa Kemal* and embark on the struggle for independence. … Saving the Turks from the sons of Osman and the useless Caliphate, *Mustafa Kemal* also established the Republic (29 October 1923). The *Gazi* [Mustafa Kemal], who was elected the President of the Republic, led the Turkish nation on the path of real progress and development with many reforms (TOTTTH 1930:605–6).

If Kemalist narratives of the nation marginalize Turkey's Ottoman past, Muslim nationalist narratives sacralize it. In AKP's public discourse, the Ottoman Empire does not simply represent one state among the many founded by the Turkish nation in its long and venerable history. Instead, as a glorious civilization, it represents the golden age of the nation, the age when powerful Ottoman-Turkish sultans held the office of the Caliphate and ruled over a vast empire stretching across three continents. Thus, Muslim nationalism locates modern Turkey firmly within its Ottoman past, interpellating Turkish citizens as the heirs to a centuries-old Ottoman-Islamic civilization (Çınar 2001). Erdoğan put this idea as follows on 10 February 2018, the 100th anniversary of the death of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1842–1918), who has long been a "cultural icon" among Turkey's Islamists (Akyol 2016):

> Some people insistently begin the history of this country from 1923. Some people stubbornly try to tear us away from our roots, our ancient values. A circle, including the head of the main opposition party, still regards hatred toward our ancestors as a criterion of loyalty to the Republic. According to them, the Republic of Turkey is a rootless state, a state with no history. … They argue that the Republic did not inherit anything from either the Seljuks or the Ottomans,

> who ruled the world for six centuries. Moreover, in their eyes, the Ottoman sultans were extravagant, imprudent personalities who lived in luxury, waste, and debauchery. This is how our country has suffered for years in the grip of a mentality that sees the completely false or even hostile statements of some western and western-minded people as our own history (Erdoğan, R. T. 2018a).

Of course, public speeches are merely one way of (re)writing national histories. The success of national narratives in creating desired national subjects depends crucially on their institutionalization in commemorative rituals and everyday practices. Today, Turkey's Ottoman legacy is continually reinvented and kept alive in public memory through not only massive commemorations organized by the state (Karakaya 2020) but also transformations of the built-in environment (Aykaç 2019; Batuman 2018), museum practices (Barlas Bozkuş 2014; Posocco 2019), movies and tv series (Çevik 2019; Özçetin 2019; Yang Erdem 2017), and numerous commodities that cater to the new popular nostalgia for Ottoman grandeur. In fact, the political and social life in contemporary Turkey has become so infused with Ottoman symbols that some scholars have invoked the idea of "banal Ottomanism," suggesting that this newfound fascination with the Ottoman past has achieved a hegemonic status (Ongur 2015:417, 425–28).

The central role given to Islam and the shared Ottoman past in Muslim nationalist discourse leads to a decentering of Turkish ethnicity in the definition of the nation. From this perspective, the Turks are just one of the Muslim ethnic groups within the boundaries of Turkey that collectively constitute a larger national community. Thus, unlike the rigidly assimilationist character of Kemalist nationalism, Muslim nationalism allows for recognizing ethnic minorities as authentic members of the nation without asking them to give up their cultural differences, provided that they embrace Islam and Turkey's Ottoman heritage as the primary basis for

national identification (Saraçoğlu 2011)**.** Erdoğan regularly makes this point in his speeches, especially through his now-famous *Rabia* slogan: "One nation, one flag, one homeland, one state!"[15] As he emphasizes, the "one nation" in this formulation encompasses all Muslim ethnic groups in Turkey:

> We are a single nation of 79 million, together with the Turks, the Kurds, the Laz, the Circassians, the Georgians, the Abkhazians. Turk, Kurd, Laz, Circassian, we will march together as one nation. Let the Kurd take pride in his Kurdishness. Let the Turk take pride in his Turkishness. But the Kurd has no superiority over the Turk, and the Turk over the Kurd. As I just said, [superiority is based on] god-consciousness [*takva*]; we will focus on that. And we will love each other for the sake of Allah (Erdoğan, R. T. 2016a).

It was this emphasis on shared religion and Ottoman heritage that enabled the AKP government to initiate a "Kurdish opening" (*Kürt açılımı*) in 2009, which included several important steps toward the restoration of Kurdish language rights (White 2014: 13). The same perspective also underlined the so-called "peace process" (*barış süreci*) between 2013 and 2015, which was an unsuccessful attempt to end the three-decade-old armed conflict between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK). The following remarks

[15] The Rabia slogan is named after the Rabaa al-Adawiya Square in Cairo, where a Muslim Brotherhood sit-in protesting the coup against President Muhammad Morsi was violently dispersed by the Egyptian army on 14 August 2013, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of demonstrators.

made by Erdoğan in Diyarbakır, the largest majority-Kurdish city in Turkey, on 16 November 2013 exemplifies this approach:

> We are members of the same geography, the same lands, the same civilization. … The Kurds, the Turks, the Laz, the Albanians, the Romans, the Bosnians, they are all my brothers. We said we shall love the created for the sake of the creator. … My brother from Diyarbakır, my Kurdish brother, my Turkish brother, my Zaza brother. This republic is your republic. This republic is your republic as much as it is the republic of those from Izmir, Istanbul, and Ankara. This flag is your flag. Like everyone else, like 76 million [people], you are a genuine citizen of this country; you are the owner of this country, this flag, and this state. … No culture, no sub-identity can be denied anymore. There will be no discrimination in the new Turkey (Erdoğan, R. T. 2013a).

Two caveats are in order at this point. First, the decentering of Turkishness in the Muslim nationalist discourse is only partial. For one, Erdoğan and other AKP officials frequently refer to the overarching national community as the "Turkish nation," thus reaffirming the centrality of Turkish ethnicity in the social and cultural make-up of Turkey. For another, while they barely mention pre-Islamic Turkish history in their speeches, the historical allusions of prominent AKP members typically involve major Turkish figures and symbols from the Seljuk and Ottoman periods. It could thus be argued that, although AKP's vision of nationhood downplays Turkish ethnicity, it is still centered on Turkish-Islamic cultural symbols and traditions. This allows the AKP leadership to speak to both religious conservative and nationalist sensibilities, providing the

party with the flexibility to adjust its ideological discourse according to the shifting contours of the sociopolitical landscape.

Second, and relatedly, neither the Islamist nor the Ottomanist emphases in Muslim nationalist discourse reflect a truly transnational ideological orientation. There is no question that AKP's civilizationist language constructs a superordinate collective identity—the Muslim ummah—that transcends the boundaries of Turkey, calling on citizens to extend solidarity to their religious brethren, particularly those living in former Ottoman domains. And yet this imagined community of Muslims does not supersede national belonging. Muslim nationalism primarily addresses the people of Turkey, not the entire ummah. As Saraçoğlu and Demirkol (2015: 310) argue, the "'Islamic world' typically becomes a part of AKP's political rhetoric when highlighting the 'historic mission' of the nation, that is, acting as the leader of former Ottoman territories as a 'central country.'" This brings us to the final way in which Muslim nationalism differs from Kemalism.

National narratives describe not only who the nation's true members are and how its history has unfolded but also the promising future that awaits the nation if it stays true to its identity and founding ideals. For Kemalist nationalism, this was a future where Turkey as a secular and prosperous nation would be a respected member of the modern Western world (Morin and Lee 2010: 500-1). Thus, in its future projections, Kemalist nationalism was relatively modest and even defensive, rejecting irredentist ideologies such as pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism and instead calling on future generations to be always vigilant in protecting the Turkish Republic and its independence (Morin and Lee 2010: 493-4, 499-502). Atatürk expressed this defensive attitude as follows in his famous "Address to the Turkish Youth" ("Türk Gençliğine Hitabe") in 1927:

> O Turkish youth!
>
> Your first duty is to forever protect and defend the Turkish Independence and the Turkish Republic. This is the sole basis of your existence and future. This basis is your most valuable treasure. In the future, as well, you will have internal and external adversaries who will want to deprive you of this treasure. If one day you are compelled to defend your independence and the Republic, you shall not think about the conditions and possibilities of your situation before taking up your duty. These conditions and possibilities may be very unfavorable. … By force or ruse, all the citadels and arsenals of our dear homeland may have been taken, all of its armies may have been dispersed, and all corners of the country may have been occupied. More painful and troubling than all these, those who are in power within the country may have fallen into gross error, heresy, and even treason. … O the future sons and daughters of Turkey! Even under such circumstances, your duty is to save the Turkish independence and Republic! The strength you shall need exists in the noble blood flowing through your veins (Atatürk 1927).

In contrast to the defensive and inward-looking ethos of Kemalist nationalism, AKP's new nation-building project represents the current boundaries of Turkey "as a cultural and political 'centre' [sic] from which the political influence of the Turkish state, as the heir of the Ottoman Empire, could be extended into the Balkans, Caucasus, and Middle East" (Saraçoğlu and Demirkol 2015: 312). In other words, AKP's nationalism promises to "make Turkey great again" (Cagaptay 2019) by revitalizing its political, economic, and cultural ties with former Ottoman territories. This neo-Ottomanist/neo-imperial foreign policy vision was articulated most systematically by Ahmet Davutoğlu (2001), a professor of international relations who served as

the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2009 to 2014 and as the Prime Minister from 2014 to 2016. It has also been a key component of Erdoğan's public discourse, who likes to remind his audience that at the height of their power the Ottomans ruled over 20 million square kilometers, a figure that dwarfs Turkey's current size, 780 thousand square kilometers:

> There are those who say to us, "Why are you in Syria?" Like Mr. Kemal [Kılıçdaroğlu, the CHP leader]. There are those who say to us, "Why are you interested in Iraq?" Like Mr. Kemal. There are those who say to us, "Why are you so sensitive about Jerusalem?" Like Mr. Kemal. There are those who say to us, "What does Libya have to do with you?" Like Mr. Kemal. There are those who say to us, "What do the Caucasus, the Balkans, the Black Sea basin, the north of the Mediterranean basin, and further down Africa, South Asia have to do with you?" Like Mr. Kemal. If they are not ashamed, they will say, "Why are you so interested in Central Asia and Turkistan?" In fact, there are even those who say this. However, we are intertwined with these regions through our history, our culture, our civilization, and our hearts. Did not our lands get smaller and smaller from 20 million square kilometers down to 780 thousand square kilometers? We have a history in these lands, we have a culture, we came here from those lands (Erdoğan, R. T. 2019b).

## 2.5 The Populist and Civilizationist Underpinnings of Muslim Nationalism

In reconstructing the Turkish nation's symbolic boundaries, collective past, and rightful place and mission in the world, AKP's Islamist/Ottomanist nation-building project has utilized a decisively populist discourse. Given the close association between Islamism and populism in Turkey, this is not surprising at all. As noted above, the state-led modernization process in Turkey, which began in the early 19th century and took on a radical character during the first two decades of the Republican period, has created a cultural rift between the relatively well-educated, urban, and secular segments of the population (the so-called "White Turks") on the one hand and a comparatively less-educated, rural, and conservative majority (the so-called "Black Turks") on the other. Coupled with the tutelary control over elected governments and periodic military interventions in democratic politics, this cultural rift has provided a fertile ground for conservative forms of populism ever since Turkey became a multi-party democracy in 1950 (Aytaç and Elçi 2019; Çinar and Sayin 2014; Gürsoy 2021).[16] Thus, when Erdoğan as a newly-minted prime minister referred to devout Muslims as the "Blacks of Turkey" victimized by a secular elite in 2003 (Demiralp 2012:511), he was drawing on a conservative populist repertoire that had been decades in the making.

At the heart of this repertoire lies a Manichean view of Turkish politics and society, which pits Westernized bureaucrats and intellectuals concentrated in major urban centers against devout (Sunni) Muslims from smaller and less developed Anatolian provinces (Bora and

[16] It should be noted, however, that Turkey also has a radical left populist tradition which was particularly strong in the 1970s (see Morgül 2019).

Erdoğan 2006). This view portrays the former group as a despotic and culturally alienated elite who have usurped the rightful sovereignty of the people and severed the country from its own historical and cultural roots. The latter group, on the other hand, is represented as the most authentic self of the nation, a virtuous majority who embody the true essence of the Turkish-Islamic civilization. These authentic sons and daughters of the nation, as the narrative goes, have been disrespected, mistreated, and subjugated by the elite, consequently becoming "a pariah" (*parya*) in their own homeland as the renowned Islamist poet Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983) once put it. This narrative blames the secular elite also for moving the country from "the political center of the Islamic [world]" to "the periphery of … Western Civilization" (Başkan 2018:274), thereby causing Turkey to lose power and status in the international system (Aslan 2015). Thus, the populist repertoire crafted by Turkish Islamists expresses a strong sense of victimhood on the part of devout Muslims. This, in turn, generates resentment toward secular social sectors, nostalgia for the imperial past, and a neurotic will to power—emotions that bolster right-wing authoritarian projects (Açıkel 1996; Yilmaz 2017).

Perhaps no other politician better articulates this conservative populist repertoire than Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Yilmaz 2017: 483), the current president of Turkey, who not only is an *imam-hatip* graduate well-versed in Turkish-Islamist victimhood narratives[17] but also has been a

[17] In his public speeches, Erdoğan repeatedly mentions the sufferings of practicing Muslims under the Kemalist tutelary regime, sometimes going back to as far as the interwar period. He also quotes Islamist writers and poets regularly, including Necip Fazıl Kısakürek whom he calls "master" (*üstat*) (Yilmaz 2017: 504, fn.21).

victim of the Kemalist state himself. Erdoğan began his political career in the 1970s in Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist-oriented National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*, MSP), which was closed down after the military coup of 1980. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Erdoğan rose within the ranks of Erbakan's Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP), eventually becoming the mayor of Istanbul in 1994. RP won a plurality of the popular vote in the general elections of 1995 and formed a coalition government with the center-right True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi*, DYP) in 1996, with Erbakan assuming the office of the prime minister. However, the Turkish military forced Erbakan to resign from his position in 1997 through what is now called a "postmodern coup,"[18] and the Constitutional Court shut down RP in 1998 for violating Turkey's secular constitution. In the same year, Erdoğan was given a ten-month prison sentence (of which he served four months and ten days) for allegedly inciting religious hatred in a poem he recited during a rally. Erdoğan was also banned from holding political office; however, the parliament revoked Erdoğan's ban through a constitutional amendment in December 2002.[19]

Since his political rise in the 1990s, Erdoğan has painted himself as a man of the people, a humble servant of the nation who not only shares the common values of ordinary citizens but also is willing to fight on their behalf to restore popular sovereignty. For instance, in a campaign rally 10 days before the 2002 general election, he claimed:

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[18] The 1997 military coup d'état has been called a postmodern coup because the Turkish Armed Forces did not directly take control of the government but instead used the mass media to pressure Prime Minister Erbakan into resigning from his post.

[19] For two detailed political portraits of Erdoğan, see Türk (2014) and Cagaptay (2017).

> My story is the story of this people. Either the people will win and come to power, or the pretentious and oppressive minority—estranged from the reality of Anatolia and looking over it with disdain—will remain in power. The authority to decide on this belongs to the people. Enough is enough, sovereignty belongs to the people! (quoted in Yağcı 2009:216).

Nonetheless, given the overpowering influence of tutelary institutions in Turkish politics, Erdoğan was highly prudent in his criticisms of the secular establishment during his first term (2003-2007) as prime minister (Castaldo 2018: 472-5). What led him to drop this cautious approach and ramp up his populist appeals was the intensification of the conflict between AKP and its secular nationalist opponents, starting with the presidential election crisis in 2007 (Altınordu 2021:82–83; Castaldo 2018:476–78; Dinçşahin 2012:627–35). The crisis emerged when AKP nominated Abdullah Gül—a prominent AKP member whose wife wore the Muslim headscarf—as its candidate for president. Gül's candidacy triggered a strong reaction from secular nationalists, including the higher echelons of the military, who saw the presidency as "the last bastion of secularism" in Turkey (Taspinar 2007:114). Although AKP had enough members in the parliament to unilaterally elect Gül as the new president, the Constitutional Court halted the election process on legally dubious grounds (Hale and Özbudun 2010:39–40). Rather than backing down, Erdoğan called for a snap general election as well as a constitutional referendum that proposed electing future presidents directly by popular vote. It was in this context that Erdoğan began to utilize populist rhetoric more audaciously, portraying the secularist opposition to AKP as an undemocratic elite trying to steal power from the people (Dinçşahin 2012:631–34). Furthermore, drawing parallels with the Democratic Party of the 1950s, he connected AKP to the

conservative populist tradition in Turkey and its decades-long fight against the Kemalist establishment (Altınordu 2021:82).

Importantly, the surge in Erdoğan's populist rhetoric continued even after 2011, by which time he had purged secular nationalists from key state institutions. This can be seen in the Global Populism Database (Hawkins et al. 2019) built by an international team of scholars to track populist discourse in the world. The database shows that Erdoğan began using populist appeals more consistently in his second term as prime minister and that he has become "very populist" over the course of his presidency (see Figure 2.2).[20]

[20] The database is based on a "holistic grading" (Hawkins 2009; Hawkins and Castanho Silva 2019) of 728 speeches given by chief executives from 40 countries over the past two decades. Each speech is graded on a three-point scale, ranging from 0 (not populist) to 2 (extremely populist). The scores are then averaged to produce an overall populism score for each leader-term in the dataset. Methodological details are available at populism.byu.edu.

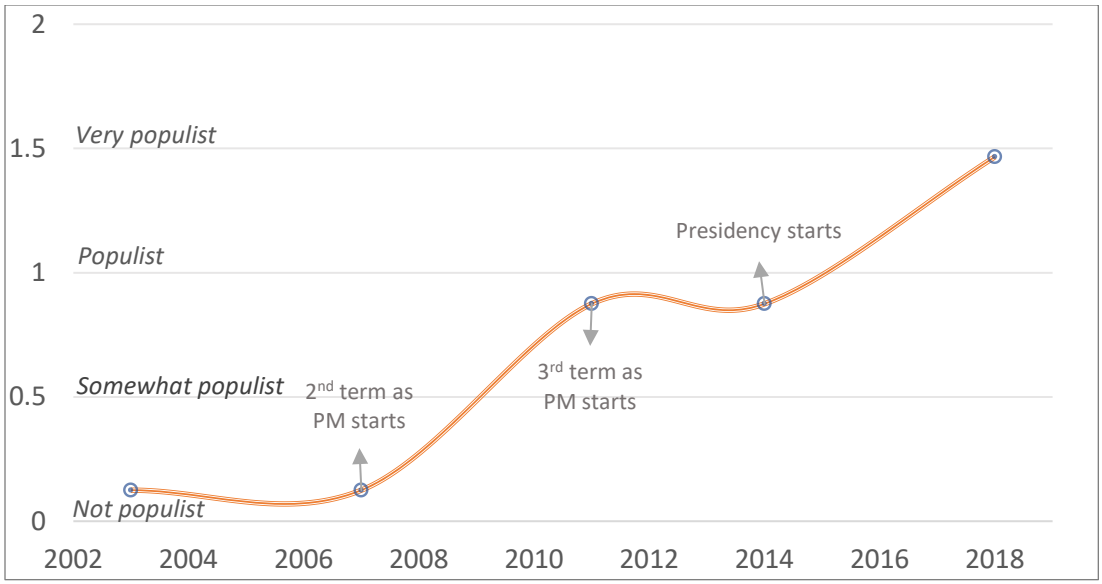


***Figure 3.2*** *The Surge in Erdoğan's Populist Discourse, 2003-2018.* Source: Hawkins et al. (2019), Global Populism Database: Populism Dataset for Leaders 1.0. Available for download at populism.byu.edu. Vertical axis labels are borrowed from Lewis et al. (2019).

Over the past decade, populist appeals by Erdoğan and other AKP leaders have also changed qualitatively. Two of these changes are significant for the purposes of this dissertation. First of all, since the 2011 general election, and especially after the Gezi protests of 2013, AKP's populism has taken on an explicitly ethnoreligious character, excluding all those who defy or fail to fit in Erdoğan's conservative nation-building project from the "true people" (Yabanci 2016; Yabanci and Taleski 2018). In this view, "the people" and "the devout" are synonymous terms, and political dissidents are designated as enemies of both (Yabanci and Taleski 2018: 300). What is more, the AKP has also adopted a more nativist position over the years, claiming to be defending "the native and the national" (*yerli ve mili*) against sinister international powers and their domestic collaborators, who seek to prevent Turkey from reinstating its former glory under the AKP leadership. As Arat-Koç (2018:401) observes:

> The AKP's claims to Black Turk identity were initially used as part of a "soft" populist discourse to articulate demands of conservative Muslims for democratic inclusion in the mainstream of Turkish society, economy, and politics. As these demands lost their urgency and relevance, and as the AKP started to falter in maintaining its political and ideological hegemony, references to White and Black Turks became part of a hardening nativist, Islamist populist discourse. The reconfigured discourse on White and Black Turks is now used in the making and legitimizing of a majoritarian and authoritarian populism, claiming to represent the "native and the national" against those seen as the *inauthentic*, foreign elements in the body politic.

Second, AKP's populist discourse has had an increasingly prominent foreign policy dimension, especially after the appointment of Ahmet Davutoğlu as the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2009. This foreign policy populism initially manifested itself in the form of a critique of Turkey's traditional pro-Western foreign policy as elitist and a concomitant bid for strengthening the country's political and economic ties with former Ottoman territories (Birdal 2014; Ozkan 2014). In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, populist references have come to occupy a more central role in AKP's foreign policy discourse, with the party leadership depicting fellow Islamists, particularly those affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood movement, as the authentic voice of the region's peoples against authoritarian regimes (Başkan 2018; Çınar 2017). In addition, AKP leaders have claimed to be speaking on behalf of a downtrodden ummah (Özpek and Tanriverdi Yaşar 2018:210), hence establishing a populist "chain of equivalence" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) between oppressed Muslim peoples in different countries.

Accompanying this pro-ummah discourse has been a virulent anti-Westernism, whereby "the superior Islamic Turkish self is constructed against the inferior Western other" (Kaliber and Kaliber 2019:3).

In this respect, AKP's Muslim nationalism provides an interesting counterpart to the increasingly salient "civilizationism" (Brubaker 2017a) of right-wing populist forces in contemporary Europe. In an insightful article, Rogers Brubaker (2017a:1193) argues that the "national populisms" of Northern and Western Europe (NWE) constitute a distinct cluster within the larger north Atlantic and pan-European populist conjuncture because they construe "the opposition between self and other not in narrowly national but in broader civilizational terms." This partial shift from nationalism to civilizationism, Brubaker suggests, has been motivated by a growing concern with Islam, which is seen as a foreign civilization at odds with fundamental European values. And it has given rise to a new national-populist "master frame" wherein Christianity is adopted as a cultural identity marker along with a secularist stance aimed at reducing the public visibility of Islam, a philosemitic posture that courts Jews as fellow Europeans threatened by Muslims, and a selective defense of gender equality, gay rights, and freedom of speech as distinctly Western values (2017a:1193–1205). As Brubaker (2017a:1203) observes, embracing philosemitism, gender equality, and gay rights, even if it remains superficial, allows NWE populists to juxtapose a modern, democratic, and tolerant Western civilization with a backward, oppressive, and intolerant Islam.

Brubaker maintains that the civilizationism of the right-wing populist parties in NWE does not displace their nationalism, as these parties continue to be demonstrably nationalist. Nevertheless, since it constructs "a different kind of imagined community, located at a different level of cultural and political space," their civilizationism is not reducible to nationalism either

(2017a:1211). More accurately, then, the right-wing populist parties in the region combine nationalist and civilizationist appeals, framing the opposition between "the nation" and its "enemies" in civilizational terms.

Similarly, the discourse of Erdoğan and his ruling AKP displays a blending of populist (the pious people vs. the secular elite), nationalist (the Turkish nation vs. its internal and external enemies), and civilizationist (Ottoman-Islamic civilization vs. the Judeo-Christian West) antagonisms. There are, however, two significant differences between the "civilizationist populism" (Brubaker 2017b) of Erdoğan's AKP and that of Europe's right-wing populist parties. First, unlike that of NWE populists, AKP's civilizationist populism is substantively religious. As Brubaker (2017a:1200) stresses, NWE populists embrace Christianity not as a religious doctrine or tradition but as a secularized cultural identity to exclude Muslims from "the people." In other words, NWE populists invoke Christianity as a matter of belonging rather than faith (see also DeHanas and Shterin 2018; Roy 2016). By contrast, AKP engages with Islam not simply as a nominal identity marker but as a specific faith with its own theology, rituals, and values. Hence, prominent AKP members incorporate religious symbols and themes into their political performances much more directly and unapologetically than do NWE populists. Moreover, whereas NWE populists endorse secularism and generally have a distanced relationship with religious authorities (Marzouki and McDonnell 2016; Roy 2016), AKP seeks to transform Turkish politics and society along Islamic lines and mobilizes its ties with grassroots religious organizations, as well as the ideological apparatuses of the state, for this purpose. In these respects, the populist Muslim nationalism of Erdoğan and his AKP is more similar to the populist Hindu nationalism of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Indian People's Party

(*Bharatiya Janata Party*, BJP) than it is to the "identitarian Christianism" (Brubaker 2017a) of NWE populists (Gürsoy 2021; Peker and Laxer 2021).

Second, while both NWE populists and the AKP leadership construct a superordinate civilizational identity that extends beyond national borders, these identities perform different political-discursive functions in the two cases. In NWE populism, civilizationism plays a predominantly defensive role, as it is deployed against the perceived threat that Islam and the growing presence of Muslims in Europe pose to the continent's authentic identity and security. As Olivier Roy (2016:197) puts it, Europe's right-wing populists' references to Christian identity are "essentially a means to render Islam foreign and incompatible with integration into the community." Conversely, AKP's civilizationist references to the Muslim ummah have neo-imperial implications, as they seek to expand Turkey's influence over Muslim peoples in the Middle East and beyond. Indeed, Erdoğan presents himself as not only a humble servant of the pious majority in Turkey but also a fearless protector of the entire Muslim ummah who does not shy away from challenging the West's political, economic, and cultural hegemony. In this sense, too, Erdoğan's Muslim nationalism resembles Modi's Hindu nationalism: Like Erdoğan, Modi has pursued a highly activist foreign policy since he came to power in 2014 in order to portray himself as a strong leader "who will make India great again" (Wojczewski 2019:266).

We could thus argue that Erdoğan and his governing AKP's Muslim nationalism represents a particular manifestation of the global rise of civilizationist populism in the 21st century—one that is substantively religious and has a neo-imperialist posture as opposed to the European variety which is only nominally religious and has a defensive posture. It should be noted, however, that these two rival forms of civilizationism reinforce each other. Whereas NWE populists point to Erdoğan's Turkey as the living proof that Islam is incompatible with basic

European values such as democracy, human rights, and freedom of speech, Erdoğan exploits NWE populists' Islamophobia to characterize the West as a fundamentally xenophobic civilization and present himself as a true champion of the Muslim word who is not afraid to confront Western powers and their domestic collaborators.

## 2.6 Summary and Conclusion

The movement of displaced Syrians into Turkey after 2011 has coincided with the restructuring of Turkish politics and society along the lines of an increasingly authoritarian Muslim nation project. Carried out by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his ruling AKP, this project has challenged Kemalist nationalism and its secularist foundations on three main fronts: (i) it has elevated Sunni Islam as the core element of Turkishness; (ii) it has situated the Turkish nation firmly within its Ottoman past; and (iii) it has promoted a neo-imperial vision of Turkey as the natural leader and guardian of Muslims, particularly in former Ottoman territories.

AKP's Muslim nationalism can be characterized as both populist and a civilizationist. It can be characterized as populist because it frames Turkish politics as a perpetual battle between a despotic and culturally alienated elite on the one hand and a hardworking and devout majority on the other. It can also be characterized as civilizationist because it juxtaposes a benevolent and peaceful Ottoman-Islamic civilization with a devious and cruel Western one. Moreover, these two dimensions of Muslim nationalism are mutually implicated. For one, Muslim nationalist discourse accuses the secular elite of not only mistreating pious citizens but also undermining Turkey's power and status in the international arena by betraying the country's civilizational heritage. For another, the AKP leadership portrays itself as not only the authentic voice of the

Turkish people but also a true champion of oppressed Muslims around the world. Through these populist and civilizationist appeals, AKP calls on its supporters, in particular its religious conservative base, to join a high-stakes battle against the nation's internal and external enemies— a battle that AKP leads in order to restore Turkey's former glory and alleviate the suffering and misery of fellow Muslims in the Middle East and beyond.

It is against this backdrop that this dissertation investigates how Erdoğan has represented Syrian refugees in his public speeches and what religious conservatives' think and feel about the growing number of Syrians in their midst.

# CHAPTER III

## Beyond the Exclusion-Inclusion Dichotomy:

## Syrian Refugees in Erdoğan's Muslim Nationalist Discourse

My brothers and sisters,

Children are innocent. Anyone who makes an attempt on children's lives is vile. I curse all those who have massacred innocent people, including children, in Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Iraq. For us, everyone who has come to Turkey to escape persecution and save their lives and honor is at the same level as our own brothers and sisters. In fact, this geography has been a shelter and safe haven for people fleeing persecution in every period of history. These lands have been the destination of the Jews expelled from Spain. These lands have welcomed anyone persecuted in the Caucasus regardless of their language, culture, or faith. From the Balkans to Turkestan, these lands have been the homeland for our brothers and sisters who have fallen on hard times. When the tyranny of the Assad regime began in Syria, we embraced our brothers and sisters who came from there with the same understanding, the same sincerity, and the same affection. We also opened our doors to our brothers and sisters who had to flee when the ISIS persecution began in Iraq. We are a nation with the consciousness of the *ansar* [the helpers]. We see every brother and sister who comes to our country as a *muhajir* [migrant], and we welcome them with love. We open our houses to them and share our bread (Erdoğan, R. T. 2015a).

## 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I documented how AKP's Muslim nationalist project differs from Kemalist nationalism, i.e., its constitutive Other, in its portrayals of the Turkish nation's symbolic boundaries, collective past, and rightful place and mission in the world. In this chapter, I investigate the ways in which President Erdoğan's public speeches on Syrian refugees have echoed his Muslim nationalism and its populist and civilizationist underpinnings. More specifically, I ask three main empirical questions:

1. How have Syrian refugees figured in Erdoğan's Muslim nationalist reconstruction of the Turkish nation's past (*who we were*), present (*who we are*), and future (*who we should be*)?
2. What are the main "us versus them" boundaries Erdoğan has drawn through his discourse on Syrian refugees? To what extent has he included Syrian refugees in his imagined community of "us"?
3. How has Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees evolved over time? Have there been any significant shifts in his discourse? What contextual factors may explain those shifts, if any?

In addressing these questions, the chapter makes two primary theoretical contributions. First, it highlights the narrative dimension of populist nationalism, which I conceptualize as an exercise in "people-making" (Smith 2003), i.e., an exercise in delineating the horizontal and vertical limits of "the people" as a unified political subject and the ultimate source of legitimate

authority. The main argument advanced is this: Grasping the nature and political significance of any given articulation between populism and nationalism requires us to examine how it weaves together the past, present, and future into a more or less coherent meta-narrative that promotes a particular vision of peoplehood and what this vision implies for different groups that collectively make up the social body. With respect to the status of immigrants and refugees in society, this approach suggests that we need to go beyond general statements about the nature of symbolic boundaries defining "the people" in a populist nationalist project and instead examine what implications that project's narratives of peoplehood have for specific migrant communities.

Second, and relatedly, the chapter challenges the tendency in research on populism to rely on a simplistic dichotomy between civic-inclusionary and ethnic-exclusionary forms of national identity construction. To begin with, the assumption that civic criteria for national membership necessarily imply an inclusionary stance toward migrants while ethnic or cultural criteria necessarily imply an exclusionary stance is flawed. As the ways in which Syrian refugees were represented in Erdoğan's Muslim nationalist discourse show, ethnocultural definitions of "the people" may in fact encourage relatively welcoming attitudes toward culturally similar migrants. It is thus problematic to treat migrants as a homogenous group and assume that national symbolic boundaries have the same consequences for all minoritized communities. Indeed, the case of Muslim nationalism in Turkey demonstrates that a populist nationalist project may simultaneously be inclusionary toward some groups and exclusionary toward others. What is more, the current chapter also suggests that inclusion and exclusion are matters of degree and that the extent to which a given populist nationalism is inclusionary or exclusionary toward migrants may change over time depending on the social, economic, and political context.

## 3.2 Literature Review

### *3.2.1 Exclusionary (right-wing) vs. inclusionary (left-wing) populism*

In a recent article, Rogers Brubaker, the well-known scholar of nationalism and ethnicity, argues that "[t]he present conjuncture is not simply populist; it is (with a few exceptions) *national-populist* (2017a:1191, italics in original). Indeed, the contemporary political scene presents no shortage of leaders who combine populist anti-elitism with xenophobia toward immigrants, discriminatory treatment of domestic minorities, and/or a chauvinist defense of the nation against external forces. Some of the most prominent examples include Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro in the Americas; Boris Johnson, Geert Wilders, Marine Le Pen, and Viktor Orbán in Europe; and Imran Khan, Narendra Modi, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Rodrigo Duterte in Asia and the Near East.

The frequency with which populism and exclusionary nationalism are intertwined in contemporary politics has led to a conflation of the two phenomena in academic discourse as well as political commentary. This is particularly true in Northern and Western Europe, where the most influential populists of the past three decades have been right-wing actors with strong anti-immigrant and Eurosceptic views.[21] For instance, in their pioneering work on measuring

[21] As Cas Mudde (2007:22) argues, nativism constitutes the key ideological feature of Europe's populist radical right parties (PRRPs). So much so that some scholars refer to them simply as "anti-immigrant parties" (e.g., Akkerman 2005; Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2007; Van Der Brug et al. 2000).

populism in Belgian political discourse, Jagers and Walgrave (2007:321–25) distinguish between "thin" and "thick" conceptions of populism, with the latter including not only appeals to ordinary citizens but also anti-elitism and exclusion of certain population segments from "the people." Likewise, in their introduction to a widely cited volume on contemporary populism in Western Europe, Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008:3) define populism as "an ideology which pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous 'others' who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice." Along similar lines, in a study on populism in the social media posts of selected politicians from four European countries, Engesser and colleagues (2017:1111–13) treat "ostracizing others" as one of the five key elements of populist communication together with "emphasizing the sovereignty of the people," "advocating for the people," "attacking the elites," and "invoking the heartland."

The tendency to conflate populism with nativist or xenophobic politics has been criticized by scholars who have differentiated "inclusionary" and "exclusionary" varieties of populism. Seminal in this respect was Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's (2013) comparative analysis of European and Latin American populisms. In this work, the authors build on Filc's (2010) three-dimensional (material, political, and symbolic) conception of inclusion/exclusion to examine both the rhetoric and policies of four populist cases: the Austrian Freedom Party/Jörg Haider, the French National Front/Jean-Marie Le Pen, the Bolivian Movement for Socialism/Evo Morales, and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela/Hugo Chávez. Based on this examination, the authors maintain that it is possible to identify two types of populism: a predominantly "exclusionary" type in Europe and a predominantly "inclusionary" type in Latin America.

In the same work, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013:167–68) suggest that the differences between European and Latin American populisms are partly due to the divergent socioeconomic conditions in the two regions. They assert that the higher level of socioeconomic development in Europe has turned cultural issues into a major axis of political contestation, thereby facilitating the rise of nativist political movements. In Latin America, by contrast, material issues have remained at the heart of politics because of the greater levels of poverty and economic inequality therein. Filc (2015) agrees with the characterization of European populism as exclusionary and Latin American populism as inclusionary but contend that the differences between the two are rooted in colonialism. Accordingly, the racist legacy of Europe's colonial past, which was based on a rigid hierarchy between the colonizer and the colonized, continues to influence how populist movements construct "the people" in the continent today. Conversely, Latin American populist movements tend to be inclusionary because they draw on the cultural heritage of an anti-imperialist form of nationalism based on mestizo identity.

More recent studies on populism have decoupled the exclusion-inclusion dichotomy from this geographical association, distinguishing instead between left- and right-wing populisms—a theoretical move in part motivated by the emergence of strong populist contenders on the left of the political spectrum in Europe and North America, such as SYRIZA in Greece, Podemos in Spain, and Bernie Sanders in the United States. These studies have indicated that right-wing populists typically focus on sociocultural concerns, accusing political and cultural elites of betraying the identity, values, and interests of the national majority. Left-wing populists, on the other hand, typically prioritize socioeconomic concerns over cultural ones, blaming economic elites and their political allies for the material hardships of ordinary citizens (March 2017; Otjes and Louwerse 2015; Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017). Correspondingly, it has been suggested

that, unlike their right-wing counterparts, left-wing populists tend to have a pluralist definition of "the people" (Font et al. 2021; March 2017; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014). Hence, Judis (2016:14–15) argues that left-wing populism is "dyadic" as its pits common citizens against those at the top, whereas right-wing populism is "triadic" as it demarcates the authentic "people" from both "elites" and ethnocultural minorities.

### *3.2.2 Populism and nationalism*

Over the past few years, several studies have addressed the relationship between populism and nationalism more directly. Led by a group of scholars working within the tradition of poststructuralist discourse theory formulated by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), these studies have offered a conceptual framework for thinking about both the differences and connections between populist and nationalist discourses. According to that framework, populism and nationalism represent two analytically distinct ways of constructing "the people," the ultimate source of legitimate authority in modern politics. Put briefly, populist discourse is structured around vertical (down/up) antagonisms that pit "the people-as-underdog" against an illegitimate "elite" or "the establishment," whereas nationalist discourse is structured around horizontal (in/out) antagonisms that pit "the people-as-nation" against "foreign" groups or forces threatening its unity and well-being (De Cleen 2017; De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017; Jenne 2018; Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2017). In other words, while populist discourse is chiefly about unequal distribution of power, status, and resources within an individual polity, nationalist discourse has a global frame of reference, delineating a positively valued national community in "a world of distinct nations" (Brubaker 2020:51).

This perspective explains the various connections between populism and nationalism in contemporary politics through the concept of articulation. In Laclau and Mouffe's (1985:105) discourse theory, articulation refers to the practice of linking up different signifying elements in a novel discursive formation, which modifies the meaning of articulated elements. As De Cleen and Stavrakakis (De Cleen 2017; De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017) argue, articulations between populism and nationalism create a multilayered discourse in which the down/up and in/out antagonisms shape and define each other. The resultant structure of meaning, De Cleen and Stavrakakis contend, depends crucially on the kind of nationalist demands with which populism is articulated as well as on whether the vertical or horizontal antagonisms take the center stage. One set of nationalist demands commonly articulated with populism focuses on excluding ethnocultural minorities from the nation and its decision-making structures—demands that are typical in right-wing populist movements. Another set of nationalist demands frequently expressed in populist terms focuses on protecting national sovereignty from the encroachments of supranational political and economic forces—demands that might be voiced by both left- and right-wing populist actors.

Populism, thus, is not necessarily exclusionary, although most populist projects construct "the people" at the national level and express nationalist demands of some sort (Anastasiou 2019; De Cleen 2017; Moffitt 2017). Rather, it is when populism is articulated with ethnocultural forms of nationalism that it becomes exclusionary. In such articulations, the horizontal in/out axis overdetermines the vertical down/up axis, creating what scholars have variously termed "national populism" (Brubaker 2017a; Germani 1978; Taguieff 1995), "nationalist populism" (Carpenter 1997; Gusterson 2017), "ethno-nationalist populism" (Bonikowski 2017; Schertzer and Woods 2021), "ethnopopulism" (Jenne 2018; Zellman 2019), or "populist nationalism"

(Blokker 2005; López-Alves and Johnson 2018). Regardless of the label we choose,[22] the fact remains that this discursive amalgam infuses populist signifiers with nativist content, defining "the people" as a downtrodden ethnocultural majority whose way of life and interests are imperiled by dangerous "outsiders" and their "elite" allies. Nevertheless, the existing literature suggests that populism can also be fused with civic-inclusionary forms of nationalism—as is the case with most populist parties and movements on the left.[23]

### *3.2.3 Limitations of the existing literature*

Insightful as it is, previous research on the populism-nationalism nexus has two major blind spots. First, concentrating mainly on cases from Europe, the United States, and Latin

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[22] I prefer the term populist nationalism over the alternatives; because by treating it as an adjective rather than a noun, this term acknowledges that populism is rarely the primary characteristic of any political project. This is consistent with the notion that populism has little ideational content of its own, and therefore, has to merge with "thicker" ideologies to provide a concrete political agenda (Mudde 2004). It is also consistent with the argument that populism is best viewed as a way of framing political claims, not as an ideology (Aslanidis 2016; Bonikowski 2017; Busby et al. 2019).

[23] While a growing number of scholars agree that populism does not have to be exclusionary, some among them also argue that there are elective affinities between populist and nativist politics, especially due to the populist tendency to construct "the people" as a homogenous political subject with unified interests (Betz 2017; Bonikowski et al. 2019; McKean 2016).

America, it reproduces the "Atlantic bias" (Moffitt 2015) of the larger populism scholarship. It is thus unclear whether the categories and theoretical generalizations derived from these regions extend to populist nationalisms in other parts of the world. Second, apart from a few exceptions such as Bonikowski et al. (2019) and Brubaker (2020), studies on populist nationalist ideology and politics exhibit surprisingly little engagement with the rich literature on nationalism. As a result, the conceptual frameworks utilized in these studies are not informed by the contemporary developments in nationalism scholarship. Indeed, as Matthijs Rooduijn (2019) argues in a recent review article, populism research remains largely detached from adjacent fields, which has impoverished its theoretical foundations.

A closer engagement with nationalism scholarship reveals two specific shortcomings in the literature on populist nationalism. To begin with, in its investigations of nationalist discourse, this literature focuses almost exclusively on criteria for legitimate membership in the people-as-nation, i.e., the question of who is/can be a true member of the national community. While this is a crucial component of any conception of the nation, it does not exhaust the full range of meanings expressed in nationalist discourses. This narrow focus neglects the fact that "people-making" necessarily takes a narrative form, weaving the past, present, and future into more or less coherent meta-stories that seek to inspire citizens to embrace a particular vision of peoplehood over its alternatives (Smith 2003). Scholars of nationalism have long recognized this fact, stressing how national identities are created, sustained, and transformed through compelling narratives that tell people not only who they *are* but also who they *were* and who they *should be*

(Brand 2010; Khoury 2016; Yadgar 2002).[24] It could thus be claimed that ideas about the appropriate symbolic boundaries of a national community are embedded in narratives that depict its collective past, present, and future.

In the same vein, scholars have recently begun to explore the narrative structures underlying populist nationalism, noting how it propagates a story of crisis or decline along with a nostalgic desire to restore the nation to a mythical golden age (Karakaya 2020; Schertzer and Woods 2021; Taş 2022). As Taş (2022:128) puts it, "the core populist narrative about good people reclaiming power from corrupt elites is rooted in evocative stories drawing on mythical pasts, crisis-driven presents, and utopian futures"—a narrative arc neatly encapsulated in Donald Trump's 2016 campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again." Hence, to better understand the implications of a given populist nationalist project for immigrants and refugees, we need to go beyond general statements about who can be a legitimate member of the national community and instead look at how that project constructs the nation's past, present, and future.

The second shortcoming in research on populist nationalism relates to its reliance on the dichotomy between civic-inclusionary and ethnic-exclusionary forms of national identity. This dualism dates back to the German historian Friedrich Meinecke's ([1907] 1970:10) distinction between cultural nations "that are primarily based on some jointly experienced cultural heritage" and political nations "that are primarily based on the unifying force of a common political history and constitution." Further developed by the Jewish American historian Hans Kohn in his influential book *The Idea of Nationalism* (1944), the civic-ethnic dichotomy revolves around the

[24] See Morden (2016) for a brief review of the narrative turn in nationalism studies. See Somers (1994) for a theoretical statement emphasizing the role of narratives in identity formation.

question of how national membership is defined. Accordingly, civic forms of nationalism imagine the nation as a voluntary political community, where membership is based on elective criteria such as subjective identification with the nation and commitment to a set of political principles and institutions. Ethnic forms of nationalism, by contrast, imagine the nation as an organic community, where membership is based on ascriptive or quasi-ascriptive traits such as common ancestry, skin color, native birth, and allegiance to the majority religion (Bonikowski 2017:S187-89; Smith 2003:75–77; Zimmer 2003:174–77). That is to say, civic nationalisms conceive of the nation as a deliberate association between members, thereby highlighting its socially constructed nature, whereas ethnic nationalisms treat the nation as a primordial entity, i.e., an ancient bond that has spontaneously emerged in the course of long-term historical evolution. As the Canadian political theorist Bernard Yack (1996:198, italics in original) states:

> The myth of the *ethnic* nation suggests that you have no choice at all in the making of your national identity: you are your cultural inheritance and nothing else. The myth of the *civic* nation, in contrast, suggests that your national identity is nothing but your choice: you are the political principles you share with other like-minded individuals.

Since the 1990s, the civic-ethnic dichotomy has received significant criticism from nationalism scholars, who have pointed out its empirical, analytical, and normative flaws. Empirically, it has been shown that all nationalist projects blend voluntarist and organicist visions of the nation, though in varying degrees (Kuzio 2002; Nieguth 1999; Smith 1991; Zimmer 2003). Hence, as Brubaker (1999:58) observes, rather than classifying particular

instances of nationalism as either civic or ethnic, the distinction "is now most often used to characterize opposed analytical 'elements' or tendencies and to show how they are mixed in different manners and proportions in concrete cases." Such blending of elective and ascriptive criteria for national membership has also been observed in studies that use inductive methods to map lay understandings of the nation (e.g., Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Kunovich 2009; Schildkraut 2007).

However, even this more analytical approach to the civic-ethnic dichotomy has drawn criticism from scholars. This is mainly due to the uncertain place of culture in the dichotomy. As Brubaker (1999:59–63) explains, if ethnic nationalism is construed narrowly to refer to national membership based on perceived common descent but not on shared cultural traits, then its empirical domain becomes highly restricted. Meanwhile, nationalisms that emphasize shared culture but not common descent are lumped into the civic category, which consequently becomes too heterogeneous to be meaningful. If, on the other hand, ethnic nationalism is construed broadly to mean "ethno-cultural," then the ethnic category becomes too heterogenous to be meaningful, while civic nationalism—understood as a completely voluntary and acultural view of nationhood—is defined out of existence. Along similar lines, several scholars have argued that all nationalisms have a cultural dimension, including the prototypical civic cases, as they all promote or take for granted certain values, myths, and symbols, which often reflect the cultural heritage of a dominant ethnic group (Kymlicka 1999; Smith 1986; Yack 1996). For this reason,

the American political philosopher Kai Nielsen (1999:127) has asserted that "all nationalisms are cultural nationalisms of one kind or another."[25]

Last but not least, scholars have taken issue with the civic-ethnic dichotomy because of its normative implications. Indeed, the efforts to categorize nations and nationalisms into a dualistic framework juxtaposing a civic/political model against an ethnic/cultural one have always been associated with a series of normatively charged binary oppositions such as inclusionary vs. exclusionary, voluntary vs. ascriptive, liberal vs. illiberal, universalistic vs. particularistic, developed vs. backward, and future-oriented vs. past-oriented. As Brubaker (1999:64) asserts, "[w]hen civic and ethnic nationalisms are paired, the former is invariably a term of praise, the latter a term of abuse."

The reality, however, is more complicated than the picture presented by these binary oppositions. Most important for the purposes of this study, the common assumption that civic boundaries necessarily imply an inclusionary stance toward migrants while ethnic or cultural boundaries necessarily imply an exclusionary stance is flawed. For one, ostensibly elective criteria such as commitment to a nation's core political values and institutions may be conceived of in organic/essentialist terms (Zimmer 2003), thus barring certain groups from admission to the national community. The discourse of the populist right in Northwestern Europe, which depicts Muslims as an existential threat to liberal democratic values such as secularism, gender equality, and freedom of speech (Akkerman 2005; Brubaker 2017a) is a case in point. The idea that

[25] The analytical ambiguities of the civic-ethnic scheme have led some scholars to devise more fine-grained conceptual frameworks for analyzing processes of national boundary construction (e.g., Nieguth 1999; Shulman 2002; Zimmer 2003).

seemingly elective criteria for national membership may acquire exclusionary meanings is supported also at the individual level. Using data from the 2008 wave of the European Values Study, for example, Simonsen and Bonikowski (2020) show that while civic/elective conceptions of the nation are negatively associated with anti-Muslim attitudes in much of Europe, adhering to civic criteria for national membership does not make people immune from antipathy toward Muslims in Northwestern Europe. Similarly, Feinstein and Bonikowski (2021) find that not only ethnic/ascriptive (e.g., having been born in Israel) but also civic/elective (e.g., feeling Israeli) criteria for national membership predict negative attitudes toward non-Jewish immigrants and asylum-seekers in Israel.

For another, under certain circumstances, ethnic and cultural criteria for national belonging may serve inclusionary ends, with the former encouraging positive attitudes toward ethnically similar migrants and the latter toward culturally similar ones (Shulman 2002). Thus, it is problematic to treat migrants as a homogenous group and assume that national symbolic boundaries have the same consequences for all migrant communities. Furthermore, we should recognize that inclusion and exclusion are matters of degree, with a broad range of possibilities lying in between full inclusion as equal members and outright exclusion. In other words, just like its physical borders (Anderson 2001:220), the symbolic boundaries of a nation have "differential filtering effects:" some people are welcomed with open arms, others are tolerated, and still others are expelled. Therefore, instead of classifying articulations of populist and nationalist discourses as either inclusionary or exclusionary, we should explore how they put together various symbolic resources to construct a particular vision of the nation-people and what that vision implies for specific groups of migrants.

## 3.3 Data and Methods

The analyses presented in this chapter are based on a corpus of 554 public speeches given by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan between 3 January 2012 and 28 December 2020. The corpus includes 498 speeches Erdoğan delivered after becoming Turkey's 12th president on 28 August 2014. The transcripts of these speeches were downloaded from the website of the Presidency of the Turkish Republic.[26] While this website provides a total of 839 transcripts for the period between August 2014 and December 2020, only those transcripts that included the term *Syria** were selected in the study corpus to exclude irrelevant speeches. In addition, the corpus includes 56 speeches made by Erdoğan from January 2012 through August 2014, when he was the prime minister. These speeches came from multiple sources. I obtained 38 speeches delivered by Erdoğan in AKP's parliamentary group meetings via personal communication with two researchers who provided me with extended extracts containing the terms *Syria*, *Syrian*, *asylum seeker, refugee, migrant,* or *guest* (Devran and Özcan 2016). I identified 11 transcripts involving the term *Syria** in a recent collection of Erdoğan's (2019c) public speeches published under the title *Yeni Türkiye Vizyonu: Mazlumların Sığınağı* (*The New Turkey Vision: A Sanctuary for the Oppressed*). Lastly, through Google and YouTube searches, I found seven additional speeches in which the then-prime minister Erdoğan talked about Syrian refugees. See Table 3.1 below for a breakdown of the entire corpus by political office, audience type, and year.

[26] https://www.tccb.gov.tr/receptayyiperdogan/konusmalar/

**Table 3.1** Breakdown of the Corpus by Political Office, Audience Type, and Year

| | N | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Speeches given as PM | 56 | 10.1 |
| Speeches given as President | 498 | 89.9 |
| Speeches given to domestic audiences | 438 | 79.1 |
| Speeches given to foreign audiences | 116 | 20.9 |
| 2012 speeches | 27 | 4.9 |
| 2013 speeches | 17 | 3.1 |
| 2014 speeches | 38 | 6.9 |
| 2015 speeches | 86 | 15.5 |
| 2016 speeches | 80 | 14.4 |
| 2017 speeches | 26 | 4.7 |
| 2018 speeches | 75 | 13.5 |
| 2019 speeches | 120 | 21.7 |
| 2020 speeches | 85 | 15.3 |
| **Total** | **554** | **100.0** |

The data were analyzed through a mixed methods design inspired by corpus-based approaches in critical discourse studies (CDS)—approaches that integrate a close reading of selected texts with a computerized analysis of linguistic patterns over large amounts of textual data.[27] In the initial stage, I used dictionary-based automated coding on the full corpus to produce a manageable set of texts for qualitative analysis. The dictionary, which was created in view of prior research on the Turkish government's discourse on Syrian refugees (Balkılıç and Teke Lloyd 2021; Devran and Özcan 2016; Kloos 2016; Polat 2018), included the following

[27] Corpus-based approaches in CDS were popularized by Paul Baker and colleagues' (Baker et al. 2008; Baker and McEnery 2005; Gabrielatos and Baker 2008; KhosraviNik 2010) influential project on media representations of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants in the United Kingdom. For a recent meta-analysis, see Nartey and Mwinlaaru (2019).

terms: *Syria**, *migrant**, *migrate**, *asylee**, *asylum**, refugee*, *muhajir**, *ansar**, *oppressed**, *victim**, *temporary protection**, *temporary accommodation**, and *open door**.[28] Through the automated coding procedure, I first generated a new variable measuring the total number of occurrences for these terms in each speech in the corpus. I then used this variable and the date of the speeches to select the texts for qualitative analysis. Two criteria were important in this quantitative "down-sampling" (KhosraviNik 2010:5–7) process:

1. *Semiotic richness*: selected speeches should involve not a passing reference to but a thorough discussion of Syrian refugees, thus providing a rich enough case for close textual analysis.
2. *Temporal distribution*: the sample should be evenly distributed across the entire period from January 2012 to December 2020, thus allowing for the analysis of diachronic change in Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees.

To meet these two criteria, I divided the corpus into 18 six-month periods from January 2012 to December 2020. Then from each period, I selected three speeches with the highest number of occurrences, which yielded a total of 54 texts. This systematic sampling method ensured that no particular period was over- or under-represented in the final sample. Moreover, it allowed me to address a common criticism of qualitative discourse analyses, namely the cherry-picking of the data to confirm a preconceived point of view (Baker and Levon 2015).

In the second stage, the sampled speeches were subjected to a thematic analysis that had both deductive and inductive aspects. The initial codes were derived from my research questions

[28] One term, *guest**, was dropped from the dictionary because it yielded a large number of false positives.

and predefined theoretical interests. In essence, these served as "index codes" which assigned topical labels to data segments for a more focused second reading (Deterding and Waters 2021). Using these initial codes, I identified the passages in which Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees merged with his representations of the Turkish nation's past, present, and future. I also identified the passages in which Erdoğan drew "us vs. them" boundaries via his discussion of Syrian refugees or the refugee crisis. In this process, I also familiarized myself with the data, generating ideas about "analytic codes" that could be applied in the next coding cycle. These more substantive codes and the themes connecting them were developed inductively during the second coding cycle as I worked systematically through all indexed passages. Thus, the themes as repeated patterns of meaning in the data were analytic outputs, not analytic inputs as would be the case with a solely deductive coding exercise (Braun and Clarke 2020). As a last step in this qualitative stage, the themes were checked against the coded extracts and compelling examples were selected for presenting the results (Braun and Clarke 2006:91–92).

In the third and final stage, I created separate dictionaries representing some of the core themes identified through qualitative analysis and used them to perform an automated coding of the full corpus. These analyses served three main purposes. First, they helped me present an overview of the full corpus, providing information about how common the qualitatively identified themes were in the entire data set. Second, they helped me find additional instances of these themes, including their first appearance in the corpus. Finally, and most importantly, they helped me corroborate my provisional qualitative findings about the changes in Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees over time.

All coding and qualitative analyses were conducted using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020. Statistical analyses were conducted using STATA 16.

## 3.4 Findings

### *3.4.1 Who we were: Syrian refugees and "our" collective past as a nation*

The previous chapter has shown that the AKP's Muslim nationalist project situates modern Turkey firmly within its Ottoman past, depicting Turkish citizens as successors to a glorious Ottoman-Islamic civilization. A close reading of Erdoğan's public speeches reveals that he often drew on this Ottomanist/Islamist imagination of history to justify both Turkey's involvement in the Syrian conflict and its open-door policy toward Syrian refugees. At the same time, Erdoğan utilized the discussions around these policies to delegitimize his opponents and their alternative historical perspectives.

Two interrelated themes about the national past were particularly salient in Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees. First, Erdoğan repeatedly emphasized that "our ancestors" (*ecdadımız*) had built a virtuous civilization which always protected the weak and sheltered the oppressed. As he put it in a speech delivered at the General Assembly of the Young Businessmen Confederation of Turkey (*Genç Türk İşadamları Derneği*, TÜGİK) on 11 February 2016, ours was "a civilization of mercy and compassion":

> Our civilization is a civilization of mercy and compassion. Praise be to Allah, the most important feature of our nation is its hospitality, not rejecting those who come to its door. For centuries, these lands have been the symbol of security, peace, tranquility, and solidarity. Throughout history, from Rumelia to the Caucasus, from Spain to the Balkans, those who took refuge in the benevolent

> heart of Anatolia found faces that greeted them with love, and rich hearts that put an extra spoon on the table for them. We don't have strangers, we have guests. Our table is blessed with guests. Our nation is showing the same virtue today for its brothers from Syria and Iraq (Erdoğan, R. T. 2016b).

In his speeches, Erdoğan represented the AKP government as the true inheritor of this benevolent civilizational heritage: "We have stood by the oppressed, and we will continue to do so. Because throughout history, our ancestors stood against the oppressors and sided with the oppressed" (Erdoğan, R. T. 2015b). Moreover, Erdoğan criticized his political opponents, especially the secularist main opposition CHP and its leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, for betraying Turkey's humanitarian cultural legacy by adopting an anti-refugee stance:

> First of all, the guest is sacred and inviolable in our culture, in our traditions. … Those who take refuge in us are safe. They are under our protection. We never look at the language, religion, faith, or sect of the guest. We embraced and protected the Jews who were expelled from Andalusia in the 15th century. We hosted them in our lands. We did what the Westerners didn't do. … When about 1,000 refugees who took refuge in the Ottoman lands were asked back in 1849, the Ottoman Ambassador—look, I'm not even talking about the Sultan or anything—the Ottoman Ambassador said to the Russian Tsar: "According to the eastern culture, it is not possible for us to return the refugees who took refuge in us. The honor of our Sultan is at stake. We will not return the refugees to you."

> We are the grandchildren of such ancestors. Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu, I don't know whose grandson you are (Erdoğan, R. T. 2012a).

Erdoğan made similar remarks in his speeches to foreign audiences, too, particularly when he portrayed Turkey as a soft power that assumed a major role in tackling regional and global humanitarian crises. For example, addressing 50 ombudspersons from 34 countries in Ankara on 3 February 2017, Erdoğan connected his government's policies toward Syrian and Iraqi refugees to what he depicted as Turkey's centuries-old tradition of protecting the oppressed:

> For centuries, these lands have been a safe haven for the oppressed, who have been subjected to persecution, oppression, and violence in their countries. From the Jews fleeing massacre 500 hundred years ago to the Christians and Circassians in Western Europe, all oppressed peoples have found shelter in this country. As I stated before, Turkey is a safe place, a secure home for the oppressed. … We believe that the way to live is to keep others alive; we believe in the blessings of sharing. With this understanding, we have protected our neighbors from Syria and Iraq for the past six years; we have not left them at the mercy of dictators, murderers, and terrorist organizations (Erdoğan, R. T. 2017a).

Likewise, addressing representatives from 47 countries and 15 international organizations in Istanbul on 19 February 2019, Erdoğan argued that Turkey has historically been a safe haven for oppressed people regardless of their ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds:

> We have millions of citizens who have immigrated from the Crimea, the Caucasus, the Balkans, Rumelia, even the Middle and Far East, and South Asia. In our cities, people of different ethnic origins, languages, beliefs, and cultures live together in peace. Not only our ethnic kins but everyone who has been persecuted has found security, liberty, and freedom of religion in these lands. Jews fleeing the massacres in Spain in the 15th century, Christians fleeing the Inquisition, Jewish or Christian citizens of Germany and Austria fleeing the Nazi persecution sought refuge in our country. And today, Turkey is hosting more than 4 million migrants from different countries of the world, including 3.6 million Syrians (Erdoğan, R. T. 2019d).

The second salient theme concerning the national past in Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees was the strength of the historical and cultural connections between Turkey and Syria. In speech after speech, Erdoğan stressed that the Turkish and Syrian peoples were not strangers, that they were tied to one another with bonds forged over centuries. For example, in a speech delivered at a parliamentary group meeting on 7 February 2012, he said:

> Syria is not just another country for us, Syrian people is not just another people for us. From Cilvegözü [one of Turkey's border crossings with Syria] to Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Damascus, and As-Suwayda [Syrian cities], at every step and kilometer, you'll see the traces of our brotherhood, our common history, our common civilization. … From the Crusades to the [Turkish] War of Independence, we lived together in these lands in brotherhood for 1,000 years.

> We defended all those lands together. The Syrian people are our brothers. This is a brotherhood written in history with blood (Erdoğan, R. T. 2012b).

More broadly, Erdoğan emphasized the historical and cultural ties between Turkey and former Ottoman territories, often downplaying the significance of contemporary political boundaries. The following remarks he made in Ankara in a 2017 meeting with mukhtars [elected heads of villages or neighborhoods] exemplify this viewpoint:

> They ask, "What business do you have in Syria?", "What business do you have in Iraq?", "What business do you have in the Balkans, Caucasus, Central Asia, North Africa?". Our answer to these heedless people who don't know history is this: All geographies to the east and north of Ankara are one side of our heart, and all geographies to the west and south of Ankara are the other side of our heart. Can a person break his heart into pieces and forsake a part of it? So, we cannot forsake those places, we cannot forsake our brothers and sisters there (Erdoğan, R. T. 2017b).

Indeed, Erdoğan frequently distinguished between Turkey's "official" and "imagined" borders (Polat 2018:506–7), thereby establishing fraternal bonds between Turkish people and those living in neighboring countries, especially in the Middle East. For instance, in a 2016 speech in Gaziantep, a border city with a large concentration of Syrian refugees, he declared:

> As a country, our official borders are different from the borders of our heart. The borders of our heart include the places where people whom we see as brothers and people who see us as brothers live. Therefore, I say to my brothers from Syria: We see you as our brothers. And if you see us as your brothers, then you are not far from your homeland, you are only far from your home (Erdoğan, R. T. 2016c).

In his seminal book on nations and nationalism, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Anthony D. Smith (1986:187) argues that national narratives make extensive references to natural landscapes and historic sites, because such references allow ethnic groups to lay claim to a specific territory "in virtue of age-long residence and possession." Following a similar line of reasoning, we can argue that Erdoğan's emphases on centuries-long Turkish-Ottoman presence in the Middle East aimed to expand and justify Turkey's involvement in the region. The following remarks he made in September 2012 illustrate this logic:

> We are a country that has a 910-kilometer border, ties of kinship, and historical bonds [with Syria]. We are neither America, nor France, nor England. We are not Iran, we are not Russia, we are not China. We have an intertwined history [with Syria]. We are not just any country in Africa, they can remain indifferent to Syria. Any country in Asia can remain indifferent to Syria. But it is unthinkable for Turkey to remain indifferent. We don't have such a luxury (Erdoğan, R. T. 2012a).

Erdoğan also used Turkey's shared past with Syria and the Middle East to depict the government's open-door policy toward Syrian refugees as a historical responsibility. For example, speaking to members of the parliament from the AKP in October 2012, he argued:

> These lands, where we have existed in peace, justice, and prosperity for hundreds of years, as well as these people are entrusted to us by our history and ancestors. Go all the way to Damascus, go further south. There, my dear brothers, you will see the Ottoman Empire; you will see their works, their everything. Mosques, caravanserais, and everything else. This is how interwoven we are. Is it possible for us to turn our backs on our brothers, with whom we have shared the same cultural sources and the same civilizational wellspring for over 1,400 years? We have no excuse, my friends, no justification for not supporting our brothers today (Erdoğan, R. T. 2012c).

Erdoğan continued making such arguments even after Turkey tightened its border restrictions for people arriving from Syria, allowing only those who had valid travel documents or who needed emergency medical services. In this way, he sought to appease the growing anti-refugee sentiment among Turkish citizens. For example, in a 2018 speech delivered after the Turkish Armed Forces had conducted a military operation in Afrin, a majority-Kurdish district in northwest Syria, Erdoğan once again highlighted the historical bonds between the Turkish people and Syrian refugees. Yet he also underlined that Turkey's main objective with its military interventions in Syria was to provide Syrians a secure living environment in their own country:

> The people we call Syrians, Iraqis, Libyans, Algerians, Afghans, Egyptians, Western Thracians, Georgians, and Crimeans were all citizens of this country just a century ago, just like you and me. Are we going to see our brothers as strangers because of the borders that were set between us? Is it possible for us to turn our backs on these people, with whom we have lived together for centuries, with whom we have been neighbors and relatives, with whom we have shared our joys and sorrows? … As Turkey, our only goal from the very beginning has been the security of our Syrian brothers. And the purpose of the operations we carry out on Syrian territory is to provide millions of people who have been subjected to the regime's oppression and massacres with a secure future in their own homes (Erdoğan, R. T. 2018b).

In summary, Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees was closely connected with his Muslim nationalist imagination of the Turkish nation's collective past. He frequently employed Ottomanist/Islamist historical themes to justify both Turkey's active involvement in the Syrian conflict and its relatively welcoming policies toward Syrian refugees. At the same time, he also used the refugee crisis to promote his particular conception of Turkish history, which not only tied modern Turkey tightly to its Ottoman-Islamic past but also glorified "our ancestors" for having established a "civilization of mercy and compassion" that always protected the weak and sheltered the oppressed.

*3.4.2 Who we are: Syrian refugees and "our" essential traits as a nation*

In his speeches on Syrian refugees, Erdoğan made two main points about who "we" are as a nation. First, in keeping with his glorification of the Ottoman-Islamic civilizational heritage as a benevolent and caring cultural tradition, he portrayed the Turkish nation as a uniquely hospitable people who are compassionate toward the weak and the oppressed:

> This nation is hospitable, this nation is on the side of the oppressed and the aggrieved, this nation is always on the side of justice. … Those who say Syrian refugees should go back, how can they face their neighbors? Those who say Turkey should not be interested in Syria, how can they explain this to their conscience? We are not a racist nation; we are not a selfish nation. What makes us a great nation is the fact that we stand with the oppressed in difficult times (Erdoğan, R. T. 2013b).

> We don't have the slightest regret about hosting 2 million people in our country or being the third country in the world that provides the most humanitarian aid despite our limited resources. On the contrary, we will strive to do more whenever possible. We are a nation that believes in the blessings of sharing, a nation that has a culture of sharing with its guests and the needy, down to the last bread in our cellar (Erdoğan, R. T. 2015c).

Second, like many other prominent AKP members, Erdoğan repeatedly used Islamic tropes to argue that it was a religious, as well as a humanitarian, duty to help Syrian refugees (Devran and Özcan 2016; Kloos 2016; Polat 2018). In so doing, he highlighted the shared Muslim identity between Turkish citizens and Syrians, and made allegiance to Islamic faith a central trait in defining Turkishness.

The most salient of these Islamic tropes was the *ansar-muhajirun* analogy. Drawing on the historical and symbolic significance of the Hijrah,[29] this analogy likens the relationship between Syrian refugees and their Turkish hosts to the one between the first Muslims who fled Mecca with Prophet Muhammad due to religious persecution and the early converts to Islam in Medina who sheltered them. The analogy, therefore, foregrounds the religious bonds between the Syrian and Turkish communities, calling on the latter to act in accordance with the dictates of their faith.

Searching for the terms *ansar** and *muhajir** in the full corpus shows that Erdoğan first used the analogy in 2013 in response to the twin car bombings that took place in the border town of Reyhanlı on 11 May. The bombings killed 53 people and injured over 140, leading some townspeople to protest the growing number of Syrian refugees in their midst. Visiting the town on 25 May, Erdoğan underlined the importance of religious solidarity and cautioned the townspeople against exhibiting hostility toward their Syrian "brothers and sisters":

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[29] In Islamic history, the Hijrah (Arabic: emigration) refers to the migration (622 CE) of Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina to escape persecution. The term *muhajirun* (Arabic: the migrants) denotes the émigrés from Mecca, while the term *ansar* (Arabic: the helpers) stands for the Muslims of Medina who hosted them.

> Here, I would like to remind my brothers and sisters in Reyhanlı that this nation has always been *ansar* to the oppressed in the world. It has always fulfilled its duty toward the oppressed as *ansar*. It has always been *ansar* to *muhajirun*. … We are proud of you. My brothers, you have opened your arms to our brothers and sisters who migrated here from Syria, around 25 thousand of them. You have welcomed them. Don't ever listen to those who are trying to expel them from here. And know that they are our brothers and sisters. They are here because they believe in us. They are here because they trust us (Erdoğan, R. T. 2013c).

Therefore, it could be argued that the *ansar-muhajirun* analogy entered Erdoğan's lexicon as a response to the exigent circumstances in a small border town. As such, its main purpose was to mobilize religious sensibilities to prevent a popular backlash against the Syrian refugees in the border region. Soon, however, it became a central component of Erdoğan's general discourse on refugees, a rhetorical device that he repeatedly used when addressing domestic audiences. For example, speaking in Trabzon, a major AKP stronghold in the northeastern Black Sea region, Erdoğan compared the refugee inflow from Syria and Iraq to the Hijrah and defended his government's open-door policy in Islamic terms:

> We opened our doors to our brothers and sisters fleeing the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. We mobilized our means [for them]. We are hosting more than 1.5 million people in our country right now. Why? This is our humanitarian understanding, our moral understanding, our Islamic understanding. That's why we did these

> things. We couldn't have left them helpless against terrorist acts, bullets, bombs. We couldn't have left them under the murderer Assad's terrorist regime. As they made *hijrah* to this country, we had to become *ansar* to them. And that's what we did and still do (Erdoğan, R. T. 2014a).

Erdoğan's reliance on the *ansar-muhajirun* analogy persisted even after the AKP leadership began to put a growing emphasis on the Syrian refugees' eventual return to their country. In April 2018, for instance, during his reception of officials from the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı,* TİKA), a governmental agency responsible for the majority of Turkey's developmental assistance to poor countries, Erdoğan spoke of the *ansar* status as a blessing from God while also signaling that his government's goal was to create the conditions under which Syrian refugees could return to Syria:

> We are still hosting 4.5 million refugees within our borders, 3.5 million of whom are Syrians. We are not upset about this. We don't ask, "Why is it like this?" We say, "O Lord [*ya Rab*], thank you. You have given us the honor of hosting 4.5 million refugees." We could have been *muhajirun*, but my Lord [*Rabbim*] granted us the honor of being *ansar.* What could be better than being *ansar*? So, we have to fulfill our duty of being *ansar.* Despite the price we pay, we are determined to continue our cross-border [military] operations to ensure a safe, peaceful, and prosperous future for our Syrian brothers and sisters in their own homeland (Erdoğan, R. T. 2018c).

To sum up, Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees drew on Muslim nationalism not only in its Ottomanist conception of Turkish history but also in its emphasis on Islamic identity and values as a central factor in defining what it means to be an authentic member of the Turkish nation.

### *3.4.3 Who we should be: Syrian refugees and "our" rightful place in the world*

As shown in the previous chapter, Muslim nationalism promises to "make Turkey great again" (Cagaptay 2019) by reviving the country's Ottoman-Islamic heritage and mobilizing it as a source of power in international relations. This neo-Ottomanist/neo-imperial perspective envisions Turkey as a major player in global affairs, one that is not only willing but also able to lead and protect oppressed peoples around the world, particularly Muslims.

The traces of this perspective can easily be detected in Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees. Indeed, Erdoğan frequently represented his government's refugee policies as well as its humanitarian and development aid to poor countries as an indication of Turkey's reemergence as a powerful and virtuous international actor. For example, in a speech delivered at the opening ceremony of 22 logistical centers built for Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (*Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı*, AFAD), he portrayed Turkey as a country to which the downtrodden turn for help:

> I would like to remind you of an event that took place in 2012. This is the story of three siblings whose parents lost their lives in a bomb attack by the Assad regime while living in Damascus. This story also tells the experiences of tens of

> thousands of children who took refuge in our country. Do you know what these kids—who were 13, 10, and 8 years old—did when they lost their parents? They set off toward Turkey in tears. … After a 10-hour walk, they crossed the Turkish border in a miserable condition with their feet covered in blood. There, our officials immediately took care of them and settled them in Hatay. That's what it means to be the guardian of the helpless, and it is an honor for us. … We do not only embrace those who come to our borders. We use all our means and strength to make the voices of the downtrodden heard in the world (Erdoğan, R. T. 2015a).

Similarly, speaking at an award ceremony hosted by the Turkish Red Crescent (*Kızılay*), another organization that engages in cross-border aid and disaster management activities, Erdoğan boasted about Turkey's humanitarian endeavors across the world:

> Kızılay and the red crescent representing it have a very important place in the hearts of our nation. This crescent has been a safe haven in which victims and the oppressed take shelter in every disaster, every refugee influx, every important event in our country. The crescent of Kızılay is now waving as a symbol of hope not only in our country but also all over the world. Thank God, our Kızılay is no longer alone in this struggle; it continues its aid activities together with our AFAD, TİKA, and non-governmental organizations. The fact that our Kızılay's flag is flying in places where no one can reach or dare to enter frankly makes us proud. We are right to be proud of having such an institution operating in every

> corner of the world, from Pakistan to Somalia, from Gaza to Haiti (Erdoğan, R. T. 2015c).

For Erdoğan, such endeavors demonstrated Turkey's dramatic transformation under his leadership from "a country that needed outside help" (2015b) to an emerging power actively involved in efforts to address regional and global humanitarian crises, a "refuge for the oppressed" as he put it (Erdoğan, R. T. 2018c, 2018d). It is therefore no surprise that he repeatedly emphasized the surge in Turkey's development assistance to other countries over the past decade, often comparing its contributions to those of rich Western countries. The following remarks are from a 2018 meeting with TİKA officials:

> Thanks to the breakthroughs we have made in every field in the past 15 years, we have transformed Turkey from a country that received aid to one that provides the most development aid in the world. In 2016, Turkey ranked second after America in humanitarian development aid worth $6 billion. In terms of the ratio of this aid to national income, we are by far in the first place with 75 per thousand. This is very important. America says, "We help this way, we help that way"; but the numbers are clear. These are OECD figures (Erdoğan, R. T. 2018c).

Erdoğan made similar comparisons when addressing foreign audiences, too. In fact, in almost every speech he has given at the General Assembly of the United Nations since 2014, Erdoğan highlighted Turkey's growing role in the global refugee protection and development assistance regimes. The following examples are from 2016, 2017, and 2018:

> America, Turkey, and England are in the first three places in terms of support to the least developed countries in the world. Relative to the gross national product, Turkey is the first; it provides the most aid. And as a country that hosts the largest number of refugees, we are also the country that does its best to prevent irregular migration (Erdoğan, R. T. 2016d).

> Turkey is a country that carries out humanitarian and development aid activities around the world. We don't only embrace the refugees who come to our country. Through institutions such as TİKA, AFAD, Kızılay, and various non-governmental organizations, we come to the aid of all downtrodden and oppressed people, no matter where they are in the world (Erdoğan, R. T. 2017c).

> Besides aiding asylum-seekers within and beyond its borders, Turkey provides very important humanitarian development assistance all over the world. As of this year, Turkey ranks sixth in the world in total development aid and first in humanitarian aid. Although we rank 17$^{th}$ in the world in terms of economic size, our position at the top of development and humanitarian aid is an expression of the importance we attach to this issue as a country (Erdoğan, R. T. 2018e).

Overall, then, Erdoğan depicted Turkey's hosting of Syrian refugees and its humanitarian and development assistance to other countries as evidence of its reemergence as both a powerful and a virtuous international actor. Following the example of "our ancestors," Erdoğan argued, the "new Turkey" would become a major political and economic power that protects the weak and shelters the oppressed. It should be emphasized, however, that by "the oppressed," Erdoğan

meant primarily Muslims, which was consistent with his efforts to represent Turkey as the natural leader of the Islamic world. That he usually mentioned Muslim-majority countries or communities when he talked about Turkey's humanitarian and development assistance programs supports this point:

> With its rate of 1.15 percent this year, Turkey exceeded the target, set by the United Nations, of allocating 0.7 percent of its national income to aid. Turkey has also shown great success in the area of emergency and humanitarian assistance. With the help of TİKA and our other institutions, our country is holding the hands of the oppressed and needy in Iraq, Yemen, Arakan, Afghanistan, Somalia, and many geographies, especially the victims of the Syrian war. As the most active country helping the Rohingya Muslims who are ignored by the world, we are continuing our activities in the camps on the Bangladesh border (Erdoğan, R. T. 2020b).

### *3.4.4 Us vs. them: Syrian refugees and Erdoğan's populist civilizationism*

In the previous chapter, I showed that Muslim nationalism has both a populist and a civilizationist character. It has a populist character because it views Turkish history and society through a Manichean lens that pits a despotic and culturally alienated elite against a mistreated conservative majority. It also has a civilizationist character because it sets a virtuous and benevolent Ottoman-Islamic civilization against a devious and brutal Western one. These two antagonisms are interwoven in Muslim nationalism, as the secular elite are accused of

collaborating with Western powers to sever the country from its own cultural roots, whereas the pious majority are seen as embodying the true essence of Turkey's civilizational heritage.

A thematic analysis of Erdoğan's speeches on Syrian refugees shows that he utilized the Syrian conflict and the ensuing refugee crisis to accentuate both of these "us versus them" boundaries. The populist up-down antagonism between a secular elite and a devout people manifested itself in Erdoğan's speeches in two main ways. First, Erdoğan claimed that the main opposition CHP's anti-refugee position and its complaints about Ankara's activist foreign policy in the Middle East reflected the secular elite's cultural disconnect from the Turkish people's historical and religious traditions. The following quote from a speech delivered on 26 June 2012 in an AKP parliamentary group meeting illustrates how Erdoğan used the Syrian crisis to rebuke the opposition for being detached from Turkey's history and ancestral traditions:

> In this geography, we are as close as the fingers of a hand with Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, and others. We are together like the fingers of a hand, we are brothers. Those who are unaware of their own history cannot understand this brotherhood. Those who sympathize with the cruel and puppet administration in Syria cannot understand the ancient fraternity between Turkey and Syria. Those who are unaware of their own history and ancestors cannot properly analyze our AK Party's Syria policy (Erdoğan, R. T. 2012d).

And the following quote exemplifies how Erdoğan used denunciations of Ankara's policies toward refugees to cast his opponents as an arrogant minority estranged from the people's religious beliefs and values:

> If we do not embrace our Syrian and Iraqi brothers in these troubled times today, how can we face them tomorrow? More importantly, how can we face our own nation? If we do not act in this way, won't we betray the trust of our faith, history, and culture? Don't pay attention to those who call the hosting of our Syrian and Iraqi brothers in our country a betrayal. Don't pay attention to those who say they will send the Syrians back to their country when they become the Prime Minister. They don't know what *ansar* means, they don't know what *muhajir* means, they don't know how open the heart of our nation is. Since they don't know these things, they can never be the Prime Minister in this country, and they can never send anyone back to their country (Erdoğan, R. T. 2015a).

Second, and more directly, Erdoğan connected CHP's opposition to his government's Syria and refugee policies to the former's Kemalist roots, which he equated with an elitist and pro-coup mentality. For instance, in a speech he gave on 5 September 2012, Erdoğan argued that there was an emotional bond between the CHP and the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, which took over the government in Syria through a coup d'état in 1963:

> The CHP has established an emotional bond with the Ba'ath Party. Due to this emotional bond, it is trying to ignite serious provocations throughout Turkey, especially in Hatay. … Can you imagine, a CHP deputy comes out and calls on [Turkish citizens] to not rent their houses to the helpless people fleeing massacre. … You look at the demonstrations held in Hatay under the banner of the CHP, and you see they are carrying the pictures of Assad, who is soaked in blood. …

> They have never been on the side of justice[30] and the people. Don't be deceived by the word "people" in the name of their party; they have had nothing to do with the people throughout history. They have always sided with the privileged. And now the privileged is with them again in Turkey. I'm sorry, I'm being frank. But we are on the side of justice and the people (Erdoğan, R. T. 2012a).

Similarly, in a speech delivered on 22 April 2014 in an AKP parliamentary group meeting, Erdoğan said:

> Right now, the number of people coming to our country from Syria is almost 1 million. Now, can we close our doors and say "Die in Syria" to our Syrian brothers and sisters who took refuge in us? Do we have such a right, I ask you? Leave aside the Muslims in Syria; even if someone else comes to your door for help, you have to open your door to him. This is our understanding of humanity; this is our understanding which comes from our faith. … But this understanding does not exist in the CHP. By sending his men to cruel Assad, he [the leader of the CHP] gave a message of unity there. He sided with the putschists. In fact, they have always been pro-coup in their past (Erdoğan, R. T. 2014b).

[30] The Turkish word Erdoğan uses here to denote justice is *hak,* which also means God. In this way, he not only portrays the secularist opposition as being on the wrong side of history but also as being against God or more broadly against the Turkish people's religious traditions.

What is really interesting in these remarks is how easily Erdoğan switched back and forth between Turkey and Syria when he criticized CHP leaders for their allegedly elitist and pro-coup mentality. This was possible because Erdoğan used the same populist language to frame both Turkish and Syrian politics. Using this language, he portrayed the Syrian conflict as a moral struggle between an oppressive regime and the Syrian people, rather than a multisided civil war:

> The Syrian people are very dear to us. But we have a problem with the Syrian regime. Let's separate these two very clearly. And it has become apparent with the resolution [authorizing use of military force in Syria] that the current main opposition [in Turkey] sides with the regime and against the people. … We certainly do not and cannot see the Syrian people as our enemy. We only stand by the Syrian people in its conflict with the current Syrian administration in line with the principles of justice and fairness. Because in our understanding, there is no place for applauding oppression or loving the oppressor (Erdoğan, R. T. 2012c).

> The Syrian people are our brothers. We don't have a problem with the Syrian people. But we have a problem with the Syrian administration, because it is spreading terror. How can we applaud a regime that has killed nearly 250,000 people? If some countries whose people are Muslim, endorses the Assad regime, they cannot account for it either in this world or in the eternal realm (Erdoğan, R. T. 2014a).

Reducing both Syrian and Turkish politics to a moral conflict between the people and an oppressive elite allowed Erdoğan to establish a populist chain of equivalence between various political actors in Turkey and Syria. Thus, AKP's Kemalist opponents and the Ba'athists in Syria became substitutable in their elitism, despotic tendencies, and cultural disdain for ordinary citizens. On the other hand, the Syrian and Turkish peoples became equivalent in their historical experiences of social and political exclusion. A telling instance of this equivalential articulation of identities occurred on 2 July 2016 when Erdoğan addressed an audience including both Turkish citizens and Syrians in Kilis, a city in southern Turkey near the border with Syria. After praising the locals for being *ansar* to their Syrian "brothers and sisters," Erdoğan quoted two poets admired by Turkish Islamists to suggest that victimization at the hands of their own states was a shared experience among the peoples of Turkey and Syria:

> The prayer of the late Arif Nihat Asya is very important. What does the poet say: "My Allah, please don't leave us loveless, thirsty, breathless, and stateless!" Master Necip Fazıl [Kısakürek] says a variation of this. This is for us: "A stranger in your own country, a pariah in your own homeland." We experienced that in this country. Being stateless is very bad. But it is much worse to be an outcast in your own homeland (Erdoğan, R. T. 2016c).

In his speeches on Syrian refugees, Erdoğan also drew on a civilizationist discursive repertoire that contrasted the alleged benevolence of Turkey's Ottoman-Islamic heritage with the West's deep-rooted racism and xenophobia toward refugees (Balkılıç and Teke Lloyd 2021; Polat 2018). Erdoğan targeted European countries in particular, calling attention to the relatively

small numbers of refugees in the old continent as well as to the rise of racist and Islamophobic movements in the wake of the so-called "European refugee crisis" in 2015 and 2016:

> Western countries, which are much richer than us and have much more opportunities, are leaving refugees to die in the middle of the sea—refugees who are fleeing the wars and unrest in the region and looking for a safe place. We have never sent back anyone who has come to our border. We have never closed our doors to anyone fleeing death and misery. Do you know how many refugees there are in Europe? 200 thousand. How many are there in Turkey? 2 million. Do you see the difference? 200 thousand in the whole of Europe. 10 times in our country: 2 million. … Do you know what the issue is? It is humanity (Erdoğan, R. T. 2015b).

> Today, there are many shameful scenes in Europe, from closing the borders with fences to violence against refugees, from confiscating their belongings to housing them in inhumane conditions. Those who did PR work just a few months ago by playing a game on the highway with a little Syrian girl are now coveting the jewelry and savings of refugees via the laws they have passed.[31] This is very revealing. Refugees are seen as foreigners who need to be either assimilated or expelled. Today, we witness that racist currents in many European countries

[31] Here Erdoğan is referring to a law passed in Denmark in January 2016 which allowed the police to search asylum-seekers on arrival and seize their cash and valuables.

> determine the refugee policies of governments. Xenophobic, racist, and Islamophobic movements are no longer marginal; they are increasingly central. While Europe is weltering in this pit of shame, we as a nation are trying to fulfill our humanitarian duties properly (Erdoğan, R. T. 2016b).

Using the refugee crisis, Erdoğan also accused European countries of being hypocritical about democracy, rule of law, and human rights. As such, the exclusionary attitudes of many European countries toward refugees and their indifference to human rights violations in the Middle East gave Erdoğan an opportunity to counter the EU's repeated criticisms concerning the rapid decline of democracy in Turkey:

> Do you know how many Syrian refugees are currently living in Europe? 130 thousand. 2 million here, 130 thousand in the whole of Europe. What happened to human rights? What happened to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? What happened to protecting oppressed people? What happened to the European Union acquis? … The person who dies in the West is a soul, and those who die here are each also a soul. It is neither humane nor conscientious for those who stood up for the 12 people that died in Paris to ignore the 350 thousand people massacred in Syria (Erdoğan, R. T. 2015a).

> We have protected our neighbors from Syria and Iraq for six years; we have not left them at the mercy of dictators, murderers, and terrorist organizations. We have mobilized all our resources for our brothers and sisters who are trying to

> hold on to life both inside our country and on the border. … Unfortunately, developed countries have not expended one-tenth of Turkey's efforts. Why did those countries which try to teach our country a lesson on democracy and law at every opportunity remain silent about the violation of the most basic human rights in regions such as Syria and Iraq? (2017a).

As Turkey's relationship with the EU further deteriorated, the tone in Erdoğan's denunciation of Europe regarding refugees got progressively harsher. For example, addressing representatives from 46 countries and 14 international organizations in Istanbul on 19 February 2019, Erdoğan said:

> While we have protected 4 million people for eight years, countries with more economic opportunities than us are fighting with each other to not accept 100-150 immigrants. European politicians, especially racist parties, are calculating to gain seats on the basis of hostility towards refugees. Today, refugees and foreigners are seen as the biggest threat in many countries that teach democracy and human rights lessons to other states of the world. Xenophobia and Islamophobia are spreading day by day in European societies, just like poison ivy. Every day, we receive news of fascist attacks against our citizens, of their rights being usurped just because they are Turkish and Muslim (Erdoğan, R. T. 2019d).

The animosity with which Erdoğan attacked Europe's treatment of refugees reached its peak in March 2020, when the Greek forces pushed thousands of refugees back to Turkey

following Ankara's declaration earlier that it had opened its western borders for refugees willing to go to Europe. Condemning the use of force against refugees, Erdoğan accused "the Greeks" of committing Nazism on behalf of "the West":

> There is no difference between what the Nazis did and these images on the Greek border. Whatever they did in the Nazi camps, you see, the Greeks are doing the same on behalf of the West, as salaried officers of the West. … As a country that has embraced every oppressed person who has come to its doorstep over the years and allowed 4 million people to live on its lands by providing all kinds of humanitarian aid and support, we are truly saddened by this picture. It is barbaric in the truest sense of the word that innocent people, who have no purpose other than to save their lives and build a better future for their children, are fired upon and subjected to all kinds of inhumane treatment, from tear gas to boiling water (Erdoğan, R. T. 2020c).

In the same speech, Erdoğan also maintained that fascism, not democracy and human rights, was the "true face of Europe":

> At a time when we are trying to prevent a new wave of immigration from Idlib involving 1.5 million people, Europe could not tolerate even a few hundred thousand refugees. Those who claim to be the champions of democracy and human rights have shown the whole world that they are pure fascists. Our Human Rights Investigation Commission of the Turkish Grand National Assembly went

> to the border, determined the situation there, and reported its findings. The images on the borders of Greece are the clearest reflection of the true face of Europe, and this attitude is not new (Erdoğan, R. T. 2020c).

Overall, then, Erdoğan made use of the Syrian conflict and the resultant refugee crisis to reinforce both the populist up-down and civilizationist in-out antagonisms that lie at the heart of Muslim nationalism. Regarding the former antagonism, Erdoğan claimed that the main opposition CHP's disapproval of Ankara's Syria and refugee policies reflected the secular elite's estrangement from the Turkish people's historical and religious traditions. He also connected CHP's position to its leaders' allegedly elitist and pro-coup mindset—a mindset, he claimed, they had inherited from the party's Kemalist history. Through this rhetoric, Erdoğan established chains of equivalence among Turkish and Syrian political actors such that Kemalists and Ba'athists became interchangeable in their despotic tendencies and cultural alienation from the people, while the Turkish and Syrian peoples became substitutable in their historical experiences of oppression. Erdoğan coupled this populist discourse with a civilizationist one, contrasting the alleged benevolence of Turkey's Ottoman-Islamic heritage with what he saw as Europe's deep-rooted racism and xenophobia toward refugees. This allowed Erdoğan to not only glorify "our civilization" over "the West" but also to deflect the criticisms of the EU about the deterioration of democracy, rule of law, and human rights in Turkey.

*3.4.5 Limits of inclusion in Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees*

The findings presented above may suggest that Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees was unambiguously inclusionary. There is no question that Erdoğan had a more welcoming attitude toward Syrian refugees than did most of his domestic opponents.[32] It is also true that he employed a more refugee-friendly rhetoric than most of the government leaders in Europe and the Middle East. In fact, on certain occasions, Erdoğan seemed to be arguing that there were no distinctions at all between Turkish citizens and their Syrian "brothers," which implied that Syrian refugees were fully included in his conception of "who we are":

> By no means are these people foreigners. By no means are these people strangers. They are us! They are who we are! After all, how many years of history do the borders between us have? Until yesterday, Antep was what Aleppo was, Raqqa was what Urfa was, Latakia was what Hatay was. … Those who do not look at the issue from this perspective are those who are alienated from their own history, their own civilization, and their own culture (Erdoğan, R. T. 2015b).

[32] The main exception in this regard has been the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP). Initially hesitant about adopting a pro-refugee stance, HDP has more recently become a staunch critic of the Turkish government's refugee policies from the left, demanding equal citizenship for Syrian refugees and endorsing programs that can facilitate their social and economic integration (see HDP 2016).

Yet, a careful analysis of Erdoğan's speeches also expose the limits of inclusion in his discourse on Syrian refugees. To begin with, despite all his talk of religious and historical brotherhood among the Turkish and Syrian peoples, Erdoğan established a hierarchical relationship between the two groups, a relationship based on a logic of charity and paternalistic protection rather than equal status. As we have seen above, Erdoğan used the refugee crisis to represent Turkey as the natural leader and guardian of oppressed Muslims, particularly in former Ottoman territories. He thus often portrayed Syrian refugees as powerless victims in need of Turkey's assistance, rather than as equal members of the society capable of exerting agency to rebuild their lives. The following quote from a speech delivered in an *iftar* dinner on 11 June 2016 illustrates this paternalistic mindset quite clearly:

> We have seen and experienced how important the richness of the heart is in attitudes toward refugees fleeing the conflicts in Syria and Iraq for the last six years. … We have given more than 10 billion dollars from the state budget. Our non-governmental organizations and municipalities have given at least as much. Why? Because Islam is at the foundation of this nation. Because we believe that the hand that gives is better than the hand that takes. From 7-year-olds to 70-year-olds, all of Turkey mobilized in an issue that the whole world turned its back on and ignored. We took care of everyone who came to our door, regardless of their origin and disposition, and we put a spoon on our table for them (Erdoğan, R. T. 2016e).

Erdoğan's reference to the Islamic hadith on charity ("The hand that gives is better than the hand that takes") is striking here, as it both promotes helping the needy and establishes a clear hierarchy between the giver and the taker. Searching for the phrase "the hand that gives" in the full corpus shows that Erdoğan used this hadith at least 17 times between 2012 and 2019 when mentioning Turkey's refugee policies or humanitarian assistance to less developed countries. For example, in a meeting with mukhtars on 20 December 2017, he said: "Where are the 3.5 million Syrian refugees now? In our land. We have become *ansar* to them. Why is that? Because in our culture, in our belief, in our civilization, the hand that gives is better than the hand that takes" (Erdoğan, R. T. 2017d).

It might of course be argued that Erdoğan cited the Islamic hadith on charity simply to encourage pro-refugee attitudes among conservative social segments without necessarily endorsing its paternalistic implications. However, he also used the same hadith to claim that under his leadership Turkey was reemerging as a major power, a claim that made the hierarchical logic of the hadith evident. For instance, in an *iftar* dinner organized by Kızılay on 10 August 2012, Erdoğan asserted that Turkey was no longer the hand that takes, for it had "risen" to become the hand that gives:

> Thank God, wherever there is a cry for help, wherever there is a call for help, wherever there are needy people, we, as Turkey, reach there through many paths, show our presence there, and make them feel that we are with them. Today, Turkey is no longer the hand that takes; it has risen to become the hand that gives. Just like in our history, just like our ancestors did. With the legacy we have

> inherited from them, we are at the service of humanity today (Erdoğan, R. T. 2012e).

In addition to creating a superior-subordinate relationship between the Turkish nation and Syrian refugees, Erdoğan also represented the refugees as a social and economic burden Turkey was left to shoulder by itself. Indeed, Erdoğan frequently emphasized how much money and resources Turkey had spent on refugees and complained how little financial assistance it had received from the international community:

> Look, 1.5 million people are in my country right now, we are keeping them safe. We are covering all of their food, medicine, education, and health services. Do we receive any serious support from the world? Unfortunately, no. The resources we have used for Syrian refugees so far have exceeded 3.5 billion dollars (Erdoğan, R. T. 2014c).

> Our spending for those coming from Syria has exceeded 7.5 billion dollars. The total amount of aid from outside has barely reached 417 million dollars. This situation is not sustainable. We are currently hosting the largest number of refugees in the world (Erdoğan, R. T. 2015d).

> Do you know how much we've spent so far? 25 billion dollars, including the amount spent by our NGOs. What did the European Union promise to us? At the beginning of July 2016, they were going to pay us 3 billion euros. Has it come?

> No, it hasn't. How much has come? I'll say it, too: 725 million dollars. How much has come through all the donors of the United Nations Refugee Council? 520 million dollars. At the moment, as Turkey, we are having difficulties in meeting such a huge budget (Erdoğan, R. T. 2017e).

Erdoğan was much more explicit in depicting Syrian refugees as a liability when he used them as a bargaining chip in Turkey's relations with the EU. For instance, in a speech delivered on 11 February 2016, at a time when the EU leaders were trying to reach an agreement with Ankara to curb refugee inflows from the Middle East, Erdoğan emphasized the financial burden of hosting refugees and demanded that the monetary contributions from the EU should continue as long as the refugee problem remained unresolved. Moreover, Erdoğan warned Brussels that Ankara may allow irregular migrants to cross into Europe unless European countries did their part to cover the costs:

> I'm sorry, but it doesn't say "sucker" on our forehead. We'd be patient up to a point, and then we'd do whatever is necessary. We don't have buses for nothing; we don't have airplanes for nothing. … We put people on buses in Edirne [a city bordering Greece and Bulgaria] and then stopped them. But this would happen only once or twice. After that we'd open the doors [to Europe] and say, "Have a nice trip!" (Erdoğan, R. T. 2016b).

Later, in February 2019, when Turkey faced the possibility of a new wave of migration from the Idlib region, Erdoğan again referred to Syrian refugees as a "burden," one that Turkey was neither willing nor able to carry by itself anymore:

> Keeping refugees within our borders cannot be seen as the only solution to the problem of migration originating from Syria. Turkey does not have to carry such a burden, such a heavy responsibility forever. In the last eight years, our country has taken responsibility on behalf of humanity and the international community. I'm telling you clearly and unequivocally: In the event of a new wave of migration, we will no longer be able to face it alone (Erdoğan, R. T. 2019d).

In the same speech, Erdoğan also characterized the refugees as a potential security threat for European countries and said they may "end up at the gates of Europe" unless the EU backed Turkey's efforts to create a "safe zone" in Syria for refugee resettlement:

> Today, the regions that our country has freed from terrorism are the most livable and peaceful areas of Syria. The safe zone formula that I brought up in the first years of the crisis is the most practical solution for the return of Syrian refugees. The feasibility of this formula depends on Turkey's control of the safe zone and other countries' logistical support to us. If we, as Turkey, cannot return the millions of Syrians living on our lands to their homes in this way, eventually the problem will end up at the gates of Europe. … I would like to underline that the support to be given to our country regarding the safe zone will also contribute to

> the national security of European countries by preventing the influx of refugees and terrorist threats (Erdoğan, R. T. 2019d).

Ultimately, Erdoğan acted on his periodic threats to send the refugees to Europe after an airstrike conducted by the Russian and Syrian air forces killed 34 Turkish soldiers in Idlib on 27 February 2020. Speaking in an AKP parliamentary group meeting on 11 March, Erdoğan once more alluded to the refugees as a burden and rebuked the EU for evading its responsibilities:

> After the increase in attacks against our soldiers, we have decided not to prevent the refugees from going to Europe. This is not forced; they want to go. We've fed them, clothed them, done everything for nine years. Now they want to go to Europe, so we aren't blocking them. And what did I say to the West months ago? I said, "Look, if you don't accept fair burden-sharing, we'll open the doors." … Even half of the 6 billion Euros committed to us with the 18 March agreement have not actually reached us. While we are trying to establish peace and prevent the refugee crisis by paying a great price in Idlib, we have not received proper support from Europe (Erdoğan, R. T. 2020c).

Finally, and most importantly, Erdoğan's growing emphasis on the eventual return of Syrian refugees to their country significantly limited the extent to which his discourse was inclusionary toward them. The first time Erdoğan explicitly stated that Syrian refugees would eventually return to Syria was in May 2013, when he addressed the townspeople following the aforementioned car bombings in the Reyhanlı district of Hatay. So, in the same speech that he

introduced the *ansar-muhajirun* analogy, Erdoğan also asked Turkish citizens to be patient, for the Syrians were not to stay in Turkey permanently:

> I want you to know this: God willing, the day when Syria achieves peace, the day when the dictatorship ends in Syria, the day when the will of the people in Syria comes to power, our brothers here will return to their homes. … Turkey is a strong country. Don't worry. These days will pass. God willing, the opposition forces in Syria will take down this dictator as soon as possible. That day is near (Erdoğan, R. T. 2013c).

We now know that Erdoğan was mistaken in estimating that the Syrian regime would collapse quickly, thereby allowing the refugees to return to their homes safely. Defying Ankara's expectations, and thanks largely to Russia's support, the Assad regime survived. Furthermore, the Syrian conflict escalated into a full-blown civil war, leading more and more people to take refuge in neighboring countries, chief among them Turkey. In response to these developments, Ankara came up with the idea of creating a "safe zone" in Syria, where displaced Syrians could be resettled. In February 2016, Erdoğan explained this idea as follows:

> We told them at the G-20 meeting and all previous international meetings. We said, "Let's establish a terror-free zone in Northern Syria, let's declare a no-fly zone." We said, "Look, there is an area of 4,500-5,000 square kilometers here, let's declare this area as a terror-free zone and at the same time declare a no-fly zone so that donors can get together quickly and build residences there. Let's make this a city of peace and let's settle in these residences those who are fleeing

> Syria or those who are in Turkey. Let's build these residences together with the social areas and infrastructure." They all listen kindly. But when we say, "Let's take a step," they say, "Let's evaluate" (Erdoğan, R. T. 2016b).

Curiously, in July of the same year, Erdoğan (2016c) also announced plans to grant citizenship to Syrian refugees who were willing to become Turkish citizens. However, answering questions from reporters on his return from the NATO summit in Poland (8-9 July 2016), he qualified his remarks, indicating that the government's proposal targeted mainly highly skilled refugees who could contribute to the Turkish economy ("Suriyeliye TOKİ Formülü" 2016). Erdoğan made this point more clear in a conference held in Bahrein in February 2017:

> We will make some of the Syrians coming to Turkey our citizens so that they can easily find a job. Because there are qualified personnel among them. There are people with careers. There are doctors, there are engineers, there are lawyers, there are teachers. We will work on this. Because these people lived very different lives in Syria. Would it be right to confine such people to tents now? Would it be right to confine these people to containers? We see it as a humanitarian, conscientious, and fraternal duty to prepare an environment and a basis for them to return to their normal lives (Erdoğan, R. T. 2017e).

In other words, Erdoğan's citizenship proposal was selective in its coverage, excluding the overwhelming majority of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey. What Erdoğan had in mind for this group was resettlement in Syria in a safe zone controlled by Turkey. As a matter of fact, in

the above-mentioned conference in Bahrein, Erdoğan also brought up Ankara's safe zone project and asked the Gulf countries to support it:

> I expressed this to Mr. Obama and now to Mr. Trump. I said: "Let's start the construction of houses in a safe zone completely free from terrorism. We are a successful country in housing construction, we can do these constructions. But you should support us financially. If necessary, we can even build houses with original architecture within 500 square meters of gardens. Let's settle the refugees there. In fact, let's send our Syrian brothers and sisters who took refuge in us back to their own lands. And let them have social areas and everything." … The Gulf countries have an important role to play here. Let's all take this step together and prevent the suffering of our [Syrian] brothers and sisters (Erdoğan, R. T. 2017e).

Erdoğan's emphasis on the resettlement of Syrian refugees in Syria grew stronger from 2018 onwards, as the Turkish economy began to falter and the public resentment toward the refugees intensified. In this period, Erdoğan repeatedly mentioned the resettlement of refugees as a key reason for Turkey's military operations in Syria. For example, addressing policymakers and businesspeople from around the world at the Global Entrepreneurship Congress held in Istanbul in April 2018, Erdoğan stated that a main purpose of Turkey's operations was to "create a safe, peaceful, and habitable region in Syria for refugees living in our country":

> Our operations have two purposes. First, to eliminate the threats against our country. Second, to create a safe, peaceful, and habitable region in Syria for

> refugees living in our country. In fact, hundreds of thousands of refugees have returned to the Syrian lands that we have made safe. During the Operation Euphrates Shield, 160,000 refugees returned to Jarablus, Bab, and Rai. Now at least as many will return to Afrin. In Syria, such returns are happening only to the places under Turkish control. … We will continue the peace operations in the region for the safety of ourselves, the Syrian people, and the whole world, especially Europe (Erdoğan, R. T. 2018f).

Likewise, speaking to the international press during the Operation Peace Spring in October 2019, Erdoğan said that Ankara was "planning to return 1 to 2 million Syrian refugees to the safe zone":

> Our Peace Spring operation has two main objectives. The first is to drive the PKK-YPG terrorist organization away from our borders. The second is to settle a portion of the 3.6 million Syrians living in our country in the safe zone. We ensured the return of 365 thousand refugees to an area of 4 thousand square kilometers that we had previously secured. We are planning to return 1 to 2 million Syrian refugees to the safe zone, which is 444 kilometers long and 30-35 kilometers deep, from Manbij to the Iraqi border (Erdoğan, R. T. 2019e).

Tellingly, the resettlement of the refugees in Syria was a central theme also in the speeches Erdoğan gave prior to the rerun of the mayoral election in Istanbul on 23 June 2019. The opposition had narrowly won the first election on 31 March, but the results were later

annulled by the Supreme Election Council (*Yüksek Seçim Kurulu*, YSK), the highest electoral authority in Turkey, on highly dubious grounds. After the first election, many commentators suggested that an important reason for the AKP's defeat in Istanbul was the growing anti-refugee sentiment in the city. It is therefore no surprise that Erdoğan brought up the issue of refugee resettlement when he campaigned for the AKP's candidate for the mayor of Istanbul. However, trying to navigate a fine line between promoting Muslim nationalist themes and placating anti-refugee attitudes, Erdoğan's discourse became highly ambiguous, even inconsistent. On the one hand, he maintained his emphasis on the religious and historical brotherhood between the Turkish and Syrian peoples. On the other hand, however, he also underlined his government's efforts to ensure that the refugees could safely go back to Syria, thus relieving the Turkish public of the burden of caring for them. The following quote from a speech Erdoğan gave in Istanbul's Sancaktepe district, which has a high concentration of refugees, illustrates this ambiguity:

> We're *ansar* [to the Syrians]. They fled bombs; they fled barrel bombs; they fled cluster bombs. They took shelter in us, and we took them under our protection. We're Muslims; we have nothing to say to those who haven't had their share of Islam. Mr. Kemal said, "I will send them to Syria"; the other one said, "I will send them to Syria." As we get the job done [in Syria], we're sending them there anyway. What have we done to 330 thousand Syrians so far? We've sent them to Jarablus. We're sending them to places where the situation has calmed down, and we'll continue to do so (Erdoğan, R. T. 2019f).

*3.4.6 Sending "our brothers and sisters" back to "their own country"?*

I used dictionary-based automated coding to verify Erdoğan's growing emphasis on the refugees' eventual return to Syria as well as his continuing references to them as "our brothers and sisters." I created two dictionaries: one to capture the discourse of brotherhood and another to capture the discourse of refugee resettlement. I constructed both dictionaries inductively on the basis of the qualitative evidence presented above. The dictionary for the discourse of brotherhood included the following terms: *ansar*, muhajir*, religious brother*, Muslim brother*, co-religionist*, Syrian brother**. On the other hand, the dictionary for the discourse of refugee resettlement included the following terms: *go back, send back, return to their home*, return to their land*, return to their countr*, safe zone**.[33]

For each of the two discourses, a speech was coded 1 if it involved any of the terms in the corresponding dictionary, and 0 if otherwise. To ensure the validity of the findings, I checked every occurrence within its co-text (the sentence and paragraph within which it was embedded) and dropped those occurrences that were clearly false positives. Figure 3.1 below presents the percentage of speeches coded 1 for the brotherhood and refugee resettlement discourses across four two-year periods from 2012 to 2019 and a fifth period that comprises only 2020.[34]

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[33] The dictionary for the discourse of refugee resettlement included all tenses of the verbs *go*, *send*, and *return*.

[34] The averaging across two-year periods was done because the corpus is quite thin in some years. For example, there are only 17 speeches from 2013 and 26 speeches from 2017. The year 2020 (85 speeches) was treated separately not only because it is the final year in the corpus but

As can be seen at the top panel in Figure 3.1, Erdoğan's emphasis on the brotherhood between the Turkish people and the Syrian refugees remained relatively stable over the past nine years, except for a slight decrease in 2020. By contrast, the bottom panel in the figure shows that his emphasis on resettling the refugees in Syria steadily increased over time, with a dramatic (almost three-fold) spike in 2018/19. There was a modest decline in the discourse of refugee resettlement in 2020; however, as in the case of the discourse of brotherhood, this might be partly due to the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic took the center stage in Erdoğan's agenda that year. Therefore, apart from several speeches that almost exclusively focused on the refugee crisis, Syrian refugees generally occupied less space in Erdoğan's speeches. Taken as a whole, these findings support the argument that Erdoğan's discourse on the refugees became more ambiguous and less inclusionary over time, especially beginning with the year 2018.

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also because it was a unique year, with the Covid-19 pandemic eclipsing all other issues in the political agenda.

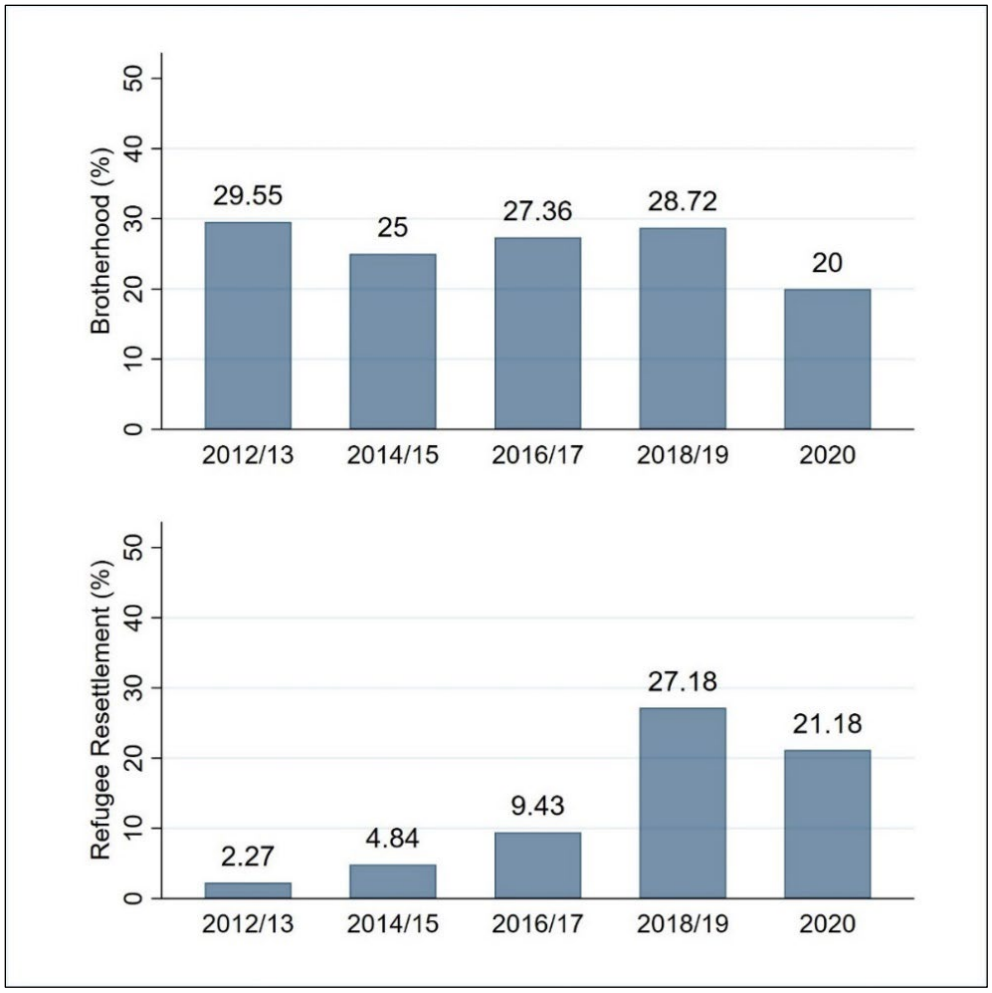


**Figure 3.4**. Brotherhood and Resettlement Discourses in Erdoğan's Speeches, 2012-20

This argument is also supported by two basic logistic regressions in which brotherhood and resettlement discourses were regressed on the length of the speech (total number of words), the weight of the refugee crisis in the speech (total number of occurrences for the dictionary terms used to down-sample the corpus), audience type (1: primarily domestic, 0: primarily foreign), and a binary period variable coded 1 if the speech was given in 2018-2020 and 0 if otherwise. Table 3.2 below presents the results.

**Table 3.2.** Logistic Regressions Predicting Brotherhood and Resettlement Discourses[a]

| | **Brotherhood** | **Resettlement** |
|---|---|---|
| **Predictors** | | |
| *2018-2020* | 0.0204 | 2.478** |
| | (0.210) | (0.432) |
| *length of the speech* | 0.164 | 0.457* |
| | (0.108) | (0.223) |
| *weight of the refugee crisis* | 0.808** | 1.231** |
| | (0.130) | (0.235) |
| *domestic audience* | 0.281 | -0.778* |
| | (0.291) | (0.342) |
| *constant* | -1.340** | -3.103** |
| | (0.268) | (0.468) |
| *N* | 554 | 554 |
| *Pseudo R-sq* | 0.111 | 0.344 |

[a] Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. All continuous variables were standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.
** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two-tailed).

As the table shows, the only variable that has a statistically significant association with the brotherhood discourse is the weight of the refugee crisis in the speech as operationalized by the total number of hits for the dictionary terms that were used to down-sample the corpus for qualitative analysis. The coefficient on the period variable is both statistically and substantively negligible, indicating that there is no meaningful difference between speeches given before and after the start of 2018 in terms of the odds of the speech drawing on the brotherhood discourse. The results are quite different when we look at the second outcome variable, i.e., the resettlement discourse. Here not only do all variables have a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable but also the period variable has the largest coefficient.

To facilitate the interpretation of these findings, Figure 3.2 presents the predicted probability of each outcome by period (2012-2017 vs. 2018-2020) while holding all other

variables at their means. As can be seen in the figure, the predicted probability of the brotherhood discourse does not depend on whether the speech was given during 2012-2017 or 2018-2020 (around 25 percent for both periods). By contrast, there is a large and statistically significant difference between the two periods when we look at the predicted probability of the resettlement discourse (2.2 percent for 2012-2017 vs. 22 percent for 2018-2020).

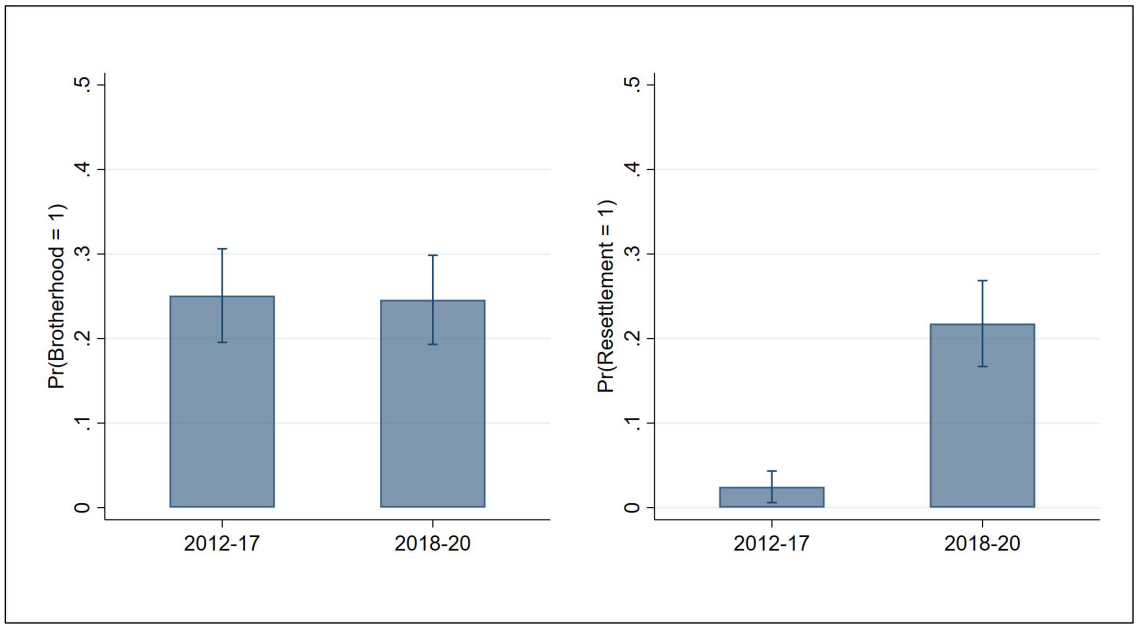


**Figure 3.5.** Predicted Probability of the Outcomes by Period Holding Covariates at Means

In summary, Erdoğan had a more welcoming attitude toward Syrian refugees than did most of his domestic opponents and foreign counterparts. And yet, his discourse on the refugees also had exclusionary elements. To begin with, despite his repeated references to the religious and historical bonds among the Turkish and Syrian peoples, Erdoğan established a hierarchical relationship between the two groups, a relationship that was based on a logic of charity and paternalistic protection rather than equal status. Second, frequently emphasizing how much money Turkey had spent on Syrian refugees and how little financial assistance it had received

from the international community, Erdoğan depicted the refugees as a significant burden on the Turkish economy and society. This negative depiction was particularly evident in Erdoğan's periodic warnings that Ankara may allow the refugees to cross into Europe freely, warnings in which he also portrayed the refugees as a potential security threat for European countries. Finally, while Erdoğan proposed granting citizenship to highly skilled refugees, the vast majority of Syrian refugees living in Turkey were denied even the right to apply for Turkish citizenship. For this group, Erdoğan advocated the creation of a "safe zone" in Syria where they could be resettled. Moreover, as the public hostility toward Syrian refugees grew, so did Erdoğan's emphasis on their eventual return to Syria, which made his discourse on the refugees incoherent and less inclusionary.

## 3.5 Summary and Conclusion

Combining qualitative thematic analysis with dictionary-based automated coding on a corpus of 554 public speeches, this chapter has investigated the traces of Muslim nationalist ideology in President Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees. The findings show that the ways in which Erdoğan talked about the refugees both reflected and reproduced his Muslim nationalist construal of the Turkish nation's past (*who we were*), present (*who we are*), and future (*who we should be*).

To begin with, Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees was closely related to his Muslim nationalist understanding of Turkish history. Indeed, he often drew on Ottomanist historical themes to justify both Turkey's active involvement in the Syrian conflict and the AKP government's open-door policy toward Syrian refugees. Two such themes were particularly

prominent. First, Erdoğan lauded "our ancestors" for having established a "civilization of mercy and compassion" which always sided with the oppressed, and presented the AKP as the true inheritor of this benevolent civilizational heritage. Second, Erdoğan underlined the close ties that had been forged between the Turkish and Syrian peoples during the centuries-long Ottoman rule in the Middle East. In this way, he not only placed modern Turkey firmly within its Ottoman past but also represented his government's Syria and refugee policies as a reflection of Turkey's historical obligations toward peoples living in former Ottoman territories.

Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees drew on Muslim nationalism not only in its Ottomanist conception of Turkish history but also in its emphasis on Islamic identity and values as a central element in defining "who we are" as a nation. Especially after the deadly terrorist attack in the border town of Reyhanlı in May 2013, Erdoğan began to make heavy use of Islamic tropes, in particular the *ansar-muhajirun* analogy, to prevent a popular backlash against Syrian refugees. Tapping into the cultural significance of the *Hijrah* in Islamic history and reminding Turkish citizens that the Prophet Muhammad, too, was once a refugee, the *ansar-muhajirun* analogy suggested that hosting the refugees was a religious responsibility that the Turkish people had toward their Syrian "brothers and sisters." At the same time, calling on Turkish citizens to act in accordance with Islamic principles, the analogy reaffirmed Turkey as a Muslim nation.

Erdoğan's discourse on Syrian refugees reiterated the Muslim nationalist view of the ideal future as well, since he portrayed Ankara's refugee polices and development assistance to poor countries as an indication of Turkey's reemergence as a major power at the international stage. Moreover, this was a virtuous power actively involved in efforts to address humanitarian crises in both its own region and across the globe. Erdoğan claimed that under his leadership Turkey was following the example of "our glorious ancestors" and thus becoming a "refuge for

the oppressed." Importantly, by the term "the oppressed," he primarily denoted Muslims, which was in keeping with his efforts to represent Turkey as the natural leader of the Islamic world.

Furthermore, Erdoğan utilized the Syrian conflict and the ensuing refugee crisis to bolster the populist (down/up) and civilizationist (in/out) antagonisms that lie at the heart of Muslim nationalism. Drawing on a populist repertoire created by Turkish Islamists, Erdoğan asserted that the political opposition to his government's Syria and refugee policies revealed the secular elite's cultural alienation from the Turkish people's historical and religious traditions. Accusing the secular opposition of having an elitist and pro-coup mindset, Erdoğan also established a chain of equivalence between his Kemalist detractors and the Ba'athists in Syria on the basis of their alleged despotism and cultural disdain for ordinary people. Meanwhile, his rhetoric rendered the Turkish and Syrian peoples substitutable in their historical experiences of victimization by their respective state elites. Erdoğan blended this populist language with a civilizationist one, juxtaposing the alleged benevolence of Turkey's Ottoman-Islamic heritage with Europe's deep-rooted racism and xenophobia toward refugees. This civilizationist frame enabled him to not only to glorify "our ancestors" but also deflect the criticisms of the EU regarding the worsening of democracy, rule of law, and human rights in Turkey.

It should be stressed, however, that Erdoğan's discourse was not fully inclusive of Syrian refugees. First of all, despite his repeated references to the religious and historical brotherhood among Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees, Erdoğan established a hierarchical relationship between the two communities whereby the latter was dependent on the charity and protection provided by the former. Second, repeatedly bringing up how much money Turkey had spent on Syrian refugees and how little financial assistance it had received from the international community, Erdoğan also represented the refugees as a heavy burden Turkey was left to carry on

its own. This negative portrayal became more clear when Erdoğan threatened European countries that he might send the refugees to their way. Finally, while he actively supported full citizenship for a minority of highly skilled refugees, Erdoğan's proposed solution for the vast majority of displaced Syrians was their resettlement in a "safe zone" inside Syria. As the Turkish economy plunged into a crisis in 2018 and public hostility toward refugees surged, Erdoğan's emphasis on the eventual return of Syrian refugees to their country grew stronger. As a result, although his allusions to the brotherhood between Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees remained relatively stable, Erdoğan's refugee discourse became increasingly ambiguous and less inclusionary.

By bridging the divide between populism and nationalism studies and focusing on a non-Western case, this chapter makes two main contributions to the scholarship on populist right-wing parties and movements. First, highlighting the storied nature of people-making, it shows how populist nationalist identity-work produces narratives that tell citizens not only who they *are* but also who they *were* and who they *should be*. Hence, to better understand the implications of a populist nationalist project for immigrants and refugees, we need to go beyond general observations about the nature of national symbolic boundaries and examine in detail how that project narrates "the people."

Second, and relatedly, the chapter challenges the tendency in populism research to rely on a crude dichotomy between civic-inclusionary and ethnic-exclusionary forms of national identity construction. To start with, as the case of Erdoğan and his Muslim nationalist discourse on Syrian refugees demonstrates, right-wing populism and the ethnocultural forms of people-making associated with it do not necessarily lead to an exclusionary stance toward migrants. Depending on how they interpret the nation's collective history and its rightful place and mission

in the world, right-wing populist leaders may in fact adopt a relatively welcoming attitude toward migrants whom they see as ethnically and/or culturally similar to "us."

This also suggests that it is problematic to treat migrants (and domestic minorities) as if they were a homogenous group and assume that they all would occupy an identical position in populist nationalist narratives. Indeed, as the Turkish case shows, a populist nationalist project may simultaneously be inclusionary toward some social groups and exclusionary toward others. For example, Erdoğan and his ruling AKP's Muslim nationalist conception of "the true people" excluded various social segments, such as the Alevis, Kurdish nationalists, and those with secular lifestyles. However, Erdoğan also had a more refugee-friendly disposition than most of his political opponents.

Finally, this chapter underscores that inclusion and exclusion are matters of degree, with a wide range of possibilities lying in between full inclusion as equal members and outright exclusion. Therefore, instead of categorizing articulations of populism and nationalism as either inclusionary or exclusionary, we should explore how a given populist nationalist project narrates "the people" and what implications that narrative has for specific groups of migrants and their political, economic, and social rights. Moreover, we should recognize that the degree to which a populist nationalism is inclusionary or exclusionary toward a social group can change over time due to contextual factors. Thus, we should adopt a relational perspective on populist nationalism, approaching it as an ongoing negotiation between political elites and their mass audiences under specific political, social, and economic circumstances.

# CHAPTER IV

## Identity or Interests?

## Religious Conservatives' Attitudes toward Syrian Refugees in Turkey[35]

- We did everything we can for them. We welcomed [them], we helped [them]. But this should be the limit. I think Turkey should now take care of its own poor, needy, and unemployed people. There are so many suicides from unemployment. We should see them [Syrians] off.
- I also think we should see them off. I don't think we can contribute anything more to them. Their stay [in Turkey] should end.
- Yes, I strongly agree that their return [to Syria] should be ensured through the creation of a safe zone there. I agree with everything my friend said. We should be able to stand on our own feet. …
- Everyone welcomed them and showed love. I think we took care of them well. They should go back if there is a safe zone.
- I definitely agree with my friends. They should go back. We should care about our own people now. (Lower-income Turkish women, 2019.11.11).

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[35] A shorter version of this chapter has been published as a co-authored article in *Migration Studies* (Morgül and Savaşkan 2021). I am fully responsible for the theoretical framing, research design, and all of the statistical analyses presented. My co-author, Dr. Osman Savaşkan from the Department of Local Governments at Marmara University in Istanbul, contributed to data collection and qualitative analyses. However, I played the leading role in these processes as well.

## 4.1 Introduction

The literature on migration attitudes shows that religious concerns may play an important role in driving opposition to refugees and immigrants. Recent meta-analyses, for example, have reported a statistically significant association between religious affiliation and anti-migrant sentiments (Anderson and Ferguson 2018; Cowling et al. 2019; Deslandes and Anderson 2019). Scholars have also found that support for Christian nationalist views predicts negative attitudes toward migrants both in Europe (McAndrew 2020; Storm 2011) and the United States (McDaniel et al. 2011; Sherkat and Lehman 2018). Moreover, a growing body of experimental research has demonstrated that native-born citizens (i.e., "natives") in Western societies tend to prefer non-Muslim migrants over Muslims (Adida et al. 2019; Bansak et al. 2016; Valentino et al. 2019).

Much of this literature focuses on Europe, North America, and Australia, where populist-nativist forces have utilized religious beliefs and symbols to represent newcomers as culturally alien and thus unfitting for legitimate membership in the nation (Brubaker 2017a; DeHanas and Shterin 2018; Roy 2016). Given this social context, scholars have discussed religion mainly in terms of its potentially negative effects on migrants' reception by and integration into the host society. Hence, little attention has been paid to cases where natives and migrants have a common religious identity and where political elites have employed religiously-informed narratives to promote acceptance of newcomers—a gap that limits our understanding of the relationship between religion and migration attitudes.

In this chapter, I seek to address this gap by examining attitudes toward Syrian refugees in Turkey, a Muslim-majority country currently hosting the largest refugee population in the

world (UNHCR 2020). What makes the Turkish case theoretically interesting is the government's response to the Syrian refugee crisis and the broader political context within which that response has developed. To begin with the latter, the movement of displaced Syrians into Turkey after 2011 has coincided with the restructuring of Turkish politics and society along the lines of an increasingly authoritarian (Castaldo 2018) and populist (Yabanci and Taleski 2018) Muslim nation project. As shown in Chapter II, this project has challenged Kemalist nationalism and its secularist underpinnings on multiple fronts: It has elevated (Sunni) Islam as the core element of Turkishness, situated the Turkish nation firmly within its Ottoman past, and promoted a neo-imperial vision of Turkey as the natural leader and guardian of Muslims, particularly in former Ottoman territories (Saraçoğlu and Demirkol 2015; White 2014). Muslim nationalism, thus, has interwoven the domestic and the international, allowing the AKP leadership to portray itself as not only the authentic representative of pious citizens in Turkey but also a true champion of oppressed Muslims around the world.

It is within this context that the Turkish government instituted an "open door" policy for refugees during the early years of the Syrian civil war, providing them with shelter and access to basic social services under a "temporary protection" regime. More importantly, as shown in the previous chapter, prominent AKP members such as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have relied heavily on Muslim nationalist frames to both justify Turkey's involvement in the Syrian conflict and prevent a popular backlash against the growing refugee population (Devran and Özcan 2016; Polat 2018). Widely propagated by the pro-government media, these frames have highlighted the religious and historical bonds between Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees, constructing in effect a shared identity between the two communities.

How do religious conservative Turkish citizens make sense of appeals asking them to treat Syrian refugees as their religious brothers and sisters? How is religious conservatism related to attitudes toward Syrians? This chapter addresses these questions through a sequential (QUAL→QUAN) mixed methods design, whereby nine focus group discussions (n = 59) conducted with religious conservatives in Istanbul in November 2019 were complemented by an original survey of Istanbul residents (n = 2,284) fielded in July-August 2020.

A thematic analysis of the focus group data revealed that the majority of the participants acknowledged their religious duty to help Syrian refugees; yet they were also deeply concerned about the material impact of the refugee crisis on themselves and their communities. Thus, calls for Islamic solidarity with Syrians were in tension with how the participants perceived their economic interests. The survey data provided additional evidence on this tension between religious imperatives (identity) and material concerns (interests). Consistent with identity-based approaches, religious conservatives displayed less hostility toward Syrian refugees than did other members of the Sunni Muslim majority, even after controlling for partisanship, multiculturalism, and various demographic attributes. Nonetheless, the results also showed that the association between religious conservatism and pro-Syrian attitudes diminished as personal economic concerns increased.

To ensure that these results do not simply reflect the unique conditions of Istanbul, which is home to the largest refugee community in Turkey, I replicated my quantitative analyses with data from a publicly available national survey (n = 2,649) conducted in February 2016. The timing of this survey allowed me to investigate religious conservatives' attitudes toward Syrian refugees at a time when the AKP government's religiously-legitimated pro-refugee discourse was at its strongest and the Turkish economy had not yet plunged into a crisis characterized by

double-digit inflation and unemployment rates. Even under these more favorable conditions, my replication analyses showed statistically significant interactions between religious conservatism and economic insecurity, with migration attitudes among conservative Sunni Muslims being dependent on individuals' assessment of their personal economic circumstances.

Taken together, these results indicate that religious motives have a bias-reducing effect on religious conservatives' attitudes toward Syrian refugees in Turkey; however, such motives are not powerful enough to overcome egocentric economic concerns. More broadly, the results suggest that researchers should be cautious about generalizing findings from Western societies to non-Western contexts and pay greater attention to the ways in which cultural and economic factors may interact in shaping natives' migration preferences.

## 4.2 Explaining Native-Born Citizens' Migration Attitudes

Research on migration attitudes focuses on natives' threat perceptions as the key mechanism driving opposition to migrants and pro-migrant policies. These studies can be divided into two broad traditions, one prioritizing group identities and the other material interests (Sides and Citrin 2007). Building on social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986) and the symbolic racism literature (Kinder and Sears 1981; McConahay 1982), the former tradition postulates that enmity toward migrants is rooted in perceived threats to natives' ingroup identities, cultural values, and ways of life—"symbolic threats" in the terminology of the integrated threat theory (Stephan et al. 1998). The latter tradition, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of "realistic threats" resulting from competition over power and resources. Some scholars in this tradition draw on Blumer's group position model (Blumer 1958; Bobo and

Hutchings 1996; Quillian 1995) as well as various forms of realistic group conflict theory (Blalock 1967; Bobo 1983; Olzak 1992; Sherif and Sherif 1969) and point at collective interests as the primary determinant of people's migration attitudes. Others, however, draw from the economic literature on the income-distribution effects of immigration (Bonacich 1972; Borjas 1994) and claim that individual self-interest, especially as it relates to labor market outcomes, is indispensable to explaining natives' migration preferences. I briefly review these approaches below, with a particular focus on the role religious identity and economic insecurity play in shaping public opinion on migrants.

### *4.2.1 Identity-based approaches: The role of religious identity*

Identity-based approaches contend that cultural concerns connected to individuals' salient ingroup identities constitute a potent source of outgroup negativity, even in the absence of intergroup competition over power and resources. From this perspective, natives should be less likely to welcome migrants whom they perceive as culturally distinct from and therefore potentially threatening to their ingroups (Harell et al. 2012). Consistent with this argument, many studies have found that concerns about migrants' cultural impact on the host society exert a strong influence over natives' migration preferences, one that often outweighs the influence of material considerations (Card, Dustmann, and Preston 2012; Ivarsflaten 2005; Sides and Citrin 2007; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004).

Studies in this vein tend to emphasize concerns related to national and ethnoracial identities. Regarding national identity, prior studies have demonstrated that natives who define the nation in civic terms are more likely to accept immigrants and asylum-seekers than their

conationals who define it in ethnocultural terms (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Hjerm 1998; Kunovich 2009; Pehrson, Brown, and Zagefka 2009; Reijerse et al. 2013). Scholars have also revealed that a chauvinistic belief in the superiority of one's own nation over others (Ceobanu and Escandell 2008; de Figueiredo and Elkins 2003) and agreement with national victimhood and exceptionalism narratives (Feinstein and Bonikowski 2021) predict xenophobic attitudes. More broadly, experimental evidence suggests that priming individuals to think of themselves as members of their national group, rather than as unique individuals, increases their opposition to immigration (Sniderman et al. 2004)—a finding that corroborates the causal link between national identification and migration preferences.

Previous scholarship has also investigated how natives' ethnoracial attitudes affect their migration preferences, usually finding a robust relationship between the two constructs. One variant of this research has shown that general ethnocentrism is a strong predictor of opposition to immigration among non-Hispanic White Americans (Kinder and Kam 2010). This literature suggests that dominant group members who express negative feelings toward one subordinate group are likely to express negative feelings toward other subordinate groups as well (Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner 2009). A different variant, on the other hand, has explored the influence of group-specific prejudices on migration attitudes, revealing that negative feelings toward Asian and Hispanic Americans (Citrin et al. 1997), degrading stereotypes about Blacks and Hispanics (Burns and Gimpel 2000), and implicit biases against Latinx immigrants (Pérez 2010) predict support for restrictionist immigration policies among White Americans. Similarly, using data on 19 countries included in the fifth round of the European Social Survey (ESS), Gorodzeisky and Semyonov (2016) have found that anti-immigrant attitudes are more prevalent among individuals who are prejudiced toward non-European/non-White populations. Furthermore, experimental

evidence from the United States has demonstrated that racialized cues invoking the Hispanic background of immigrants tend to boost opposition to immigration among non-Hispanic Whites (Brader et al. 2008; Mukherjee, Adams, and Molina 2018; Valentino et al. 2013).

In addition to concerns associated with national and ethnoracial identities, considerable research indicates that religious concerns may motivate anti-migrant attitudes. Indeed, recent meta-analyses have reported a statistically significant association between religious affiliation and negative attitudes toward refugees and immigrants (Anderson and Ferguson 2018; Cowling et al. 2019; Deslandes and Anderson 2019). Moreover, it has been shown that religious ideology can shape natives' migration attitudes via its impact on popular conceptions of the nation. Several studies, for example, have revealed that support for Christian nationalist views predicts anti-migrant sentiment in both Europe (McAndrew 2020; Storm 2011) and the United States (McDaniel et al. 2011; Sherkat and Lehman 2018).

Scholars have examined the effect of religion on citizens' migration preferences also by focusing on the religious background of migrants. Relying mainly on survey experiments, these studies have demonstrated that natives in Western countries tend to prefer non-Muslim migrants over Muslims. For instance, in a conjoint experiment fielded in 15 European countries, Bansak and colleagues (2016) found that Muslim asylum seekers were about 11 percentage points less likely to be accepted than Christian asylum seekers with otherwise similar traits. Likewise, in a survey experiment conducted in 11 countries from 4 continents, Valentino and colleagues (2019) found that immigrants from majority-Muslim countries received less support than those from Latin America or Asia in 8 of the 11 countries. Similar findings were also reported by single-country experiments carried out in Britain (Hellwig and Sinno 2017), Germany (Hager and Veit 2019), and the United States (Adida et al. 2019).

*4.2.2 Interest-based approaches: The role of economic insecurity*

According to interest-based approaches, anti-migrant attitudes are predicated on the threats, whether real or imagined, that migrants pose to natives' material well-being. These "realistic threats," as they are called in the literature, may spring from a variety of sources, including the belief that migrants reduce native workers' wages and employment opportunities, strain the social security system, overcrowd public services, increase crime levels, escalate the risk of terrorism, and spread dangerous diseases (Esses et al. 2017). In examining whether such concerns influence individuals' migration attitudes, some researchers have relied on composite measures, with individual items tapping into different kinds of realistic threats that newcomers may pose to the host society (Semyonov et al. 2004; Stephan et al. 1998, 2005). Operationalized in this way, realistic threats have proved to be a strong predictor of anti-migrant attitudes (Cowling et al. 2019).

Since competition over economic resources play a predominant role in interest-based accounts of intergroup conflict, substantial research has concentrated on economic threats as the motivational basis of anti-migrant attitudes. As Sides and Citrin (2007:479) observe, this literature differs over whether such threats are conceptualized at the collective or the individual level. When treated as a collective phenomenon, economic threats relate to the perceived impact of migrants on the economic well-being of the host community as a whole. From this perspective, what animates intergroup conflict is the notion of a zero-sum economic relationship between "us" and "them." In line with that assertion, both observational (Sides and Citrin 2007) and experimental (Bansak et al. 2016; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Valentino et al. 2019) studies have shown that "sociotropic" economic considerations have a large and statistically

significant effect on natives' migration attitudes. Moreover, previous research has found that poor economic conditions tend to boost anti-migrant sentiments (Coenders et al. 2008; Meuleman, Davidov, and Billiet 2009; Wilkes, Guppy, and Farris 2008), particularly in the presence of a large migrant population (Hopkins 2010; Quillian 1995). These findings support the idea that resource scarcity has a negative impact on intergroup relations.

Members of the host community may also see migrants as undermining their own personal ("egocentric") economic interests, which is how scholars drawing on immigration economics construe economic threats. Treating individuals as self-interested utility-maximizers with a fairly accurate understanding of their economic environment, these scholars argue that opposition to immigration should be highest among those segments of the native population that have been (or are most likely to be) negatively affected by its distributional consequences. Studies in this vein usually focus on immigration's impact on the labor market, predicting that native workers with skill sets similar to those of newcomers would oppose immigration the most, as they may suffer lower wages and/or higher unemployment due to an increase in the supply of substitute labor (Huber and Oberdabernig 2016:54).

The evidence for this argument, called the labor market competition (LMC) hypothesis, is at best mixed. Consistent with the hypothesis, several studies have found that support for restrictionist migration policies (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2016; Kunovich 2004; Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Coenders 2002) and anti-migrant parties (Arzheimer 2009; Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2002; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012) is more common among natives occupying relatively vulnerable socioeconomic positions, such as blue-collar workers and the unemployed. It has also been shown that natives with higher skill levels (as measured by education) are more likely than natives with lower skill levels to hold pro-immigration attitudes (Mayda 2006;

Scheve and Slaughter 2001). Yet, more direct tests of the hypothesis, including a significant number of survey experiments, have failed to support it, repeatedly showing that natives of all skill levels equally prefer highly skilled migrants to lower-skilled ones (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Valentino et al. 2019).

This does not, however, mean that personal economic concerns have no influence on individuals' migration attitudes. An alternative strand of the LMC hypothesis argues that what motivates opposition to migration among native workers is not actual competition with similarly-skilled migrants but a subjective sense of job insecurity and a concomitant fear of competition with foreigners. Pardos-Prado and Xena (2019) provide strong support for this argument, using both cumulative data from the first six rounds of the ESS (2002-2012) and panel data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (yearly surveys from 1994 to 2014). Their results show that high levels of skill-specificity and occupational unemployment increase native workers' perception of job insecurity, which, in turn, has a robust and significant effect on anti-immigrant attitudes. Importantly, these results hold regardless of natives' income, level of education, and actual exposure to competitive threats from immigrants. Further support for the role of perceived, rather than actual, labor market threats in fueling anti-migrant attitudes comes from Pecoraro and Ruedin (2016). Analyzing data from the 1999 and 2011 waves of the Swiss Household Panel, these researchers find that perceived risk of unemployment decreases pro-migrant attitudes among native workers who are highly educated or employed in jobs that demand high skills.

Pardos-Prado and Xena (2019:302) argue that their reinterpretation of the LMC hypothesis "fits into soft rational choice frameworks of analysis, since the mechanism is based on self-interest but does not require high levels of sophistication." This is an important statement, because it highlights the fact that the actual effects of migration on natives' wages and

employment opportunities are not nearly as important as public perceptions of those effects for explaining people's migration preferences. In other words, perceived economic threats at the individual level may stimulate anti-migrant attitudes among natives, even if those threats have no basis in empirical reality. All that is needed is a cognitive link relating one's personal economic insecurities to the presence of migrants in the country—a link that is readily made available by xenophobic political actors and media outlets. There is, in fact, substantial evidence to extend this argument beyond the labor market, as a significant number of studies have found that feelings of personal economic insecurity predict anti-migrant attitudes among native-born citizens, even after controlling for a host of demographic, political, and ideological correlates (Citrin and Sides 2008; Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2016; Scheepers et al. 2002; Semyonov, Raijman, and Yom-Tov 2002; Sides and Citrin 2007).

### *4.2.3 Limitations of the existing literature*

This chapter addresses two shortcomings in the above-reviewed literature. First of all, much of the scholarship on how religion shapes attitudes toward migrants focuses on Western countries, where religious beliefs and symbols have been used to amplify the cultural differences between natives and newcomers (Brubaker 2017a; DeHanas and Shterin 2018; Roy 2016). Understandably, most of these studies discuss religion in terms of its potentially negative effects on migrants' reception by and integration into the host society. Yet there are also cases like Turkey where majority members and migrants have a shared religious affiliation and where political elites have employed religiously-informed narratives to promote acceptance of newcomers. There is some evidence to argue that religious motives may have a positive effect on

natives' migration attitudes in such cases (Ben-Nun Bloom, Arikan, and Courtemanche 2015; Lazarev and Sharma 2017).

Second, the existing literature tends to treat cultural and economic explanations as competing perspectives, debating whether social identities or material interests play a more significant role in the formation of majority members' migration preferences. While this might be an important question to tackle, I argue that it has also kept scholars from investigating the ways in which cultural and economic considerations may interact in shaping natives' views about migrants and migration policies.

There are, however, some studies suggesting that the effects of economic and cultural considerations may depend on one another. In two experiments conducted in the United States, for instance, Brader and colleagues (2008) show that news emphasizing the costs of immigration increases anti-immigrant attitudes among Whites more strongly when it features Latinx, rather than European, immigrants. In addition, using a survey of public attitudes toward Syrian refugees in Jordan and an embedded conjoint experiment, Alrababa'h and colleagues (2021) argue that humanitarian motives can outweigh economic concerns but only in contexts where the native and migrant populations are culturally similar. Most relevant for this chapter, in a field experiment conducted on a sample of 1,140 male respondents from two Turkish cities, Lazarev and Sharma (2017) demonstrate that religious cues reduce natives' bias against Syrian refugees, whereas exposure to economic cost information about the refugees removes that effect. Drawing on the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000), the authors argue that inducing people from different groups to recategorize themselves as members of a shared superordinate identity helps reduce intergroup prejudice; however, perceived competition over scarce resources

increases the salience of group boundaries, thereby undermining recategorization and its intended effects.

### *4.2.4 Hypotheses*

The identity-based approaches discussed above would suggest that Erdoğan and his government's Muslim nationalist appeals, if effective, should reduce anti-Syrian hostility among religious conservative social segments, for they are more likely than other citizens to endorse the collective identity (i.e., the Muslim ummah) forged by those appeals. Therefore, I hypothesize (H1) that relative to other majority members, religious conservatives should be less hostile toward and more accepting of Syrian refugees. However, since prior research indicates that material insecurity may heighten group boundaries between native-born citizens and migrants, I also hypothesize (H2) that the bias-reducing effect of religious conservatism should be moderated by egocentric economic concerns.

## 4.3 Research Design

This chapter examines conservative Sunni Muslims' attitudes toward Syrian refugees in Turkey through a sequential (QUAL→QUAN) mixed methods design, one that combines qualitative data from nine focus groups discussions conducted with religious conservatives in Istanbul in November 2019 and quantitative data from an original survey of Istanbul residents fielded in July-August 2020. Mixed methods research is employed primarily as a triangulation strategy in which qualitative and quantitative findings complement and corroborate each other.

The present study focuses on Istanbul for two main reasons. First, as Turkey's most populous city and economic capital, Istanbul is fairly heterogenous in terms of the social class, cultural background, and political preferences of its inhabitants. This diversity enhances the transferability of theoretical inferences to other provinces. Second, Istanbul is home to the largest refugee community in Turkey. According to data from the Directorate General of Migration Management, there are about 525 thousand temporary protection (TP) beneficiaries in Istanbul.[36] Moreover, many refugees live and work in Istanbul despite being registered in other cities. A recent study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2019) estimates that the city hosts over 960 thousand Syrian refugees. Hence Syrians are highly visible in both everyday life and the labor market in Istanbul, which makes them a convenient scapegoat for native-born citizens' economic woes. As such, Istanbul presents an ideal context for studying the interplay between cultural and material considerations in the formation of natives' migration attitudes. However, to ensure that the findings do not simply reflect the unique circumstances in Istanbul, I replicated my quantitative analyses with data from a nationally representative survey carried out in February 2016 by KONDA, a well-known public opinion company in Turkey.

### *4.3.1 Focus group discussions*

The qualitative stage of this study is based on nine focus group discussions (n = 59) conducted with religious conservatives in Istanbul. Of these, eight were conducted with ethnic

[36] The number of Syrians registered under the TP regime can be traced from the webpage of the General Directorate of Migration Management: https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27.

Turks and one with ethnic Kurds. The discussions with Turkish participants were stratified by sex (male/female) and socioeconomic status (lower-income/higher-income), whereas the discussion with Kurdish participants included only men with modest incomes, who are among the social groups most likely to compete with Syrian refugees in the labor market (International Crisis Group 2018).

Participants were recruited by an Istanbul-based research company experienced in focus group methodology from a database including approximately 40 thousand individuals. For this purpose, the database was first filtered by age, sex, socioeconomic status, and district of residence to create a pool of potential participants. Then, calls were made to these participants to administer a short survey on their demographic backgrounds, income levels, religiosity, and political preferences. Finally, invitations were made to individuals that fit the sampling criteria. Each discussion had six or seven participants. The discussions with women were facilitated by a professional woman moderator hired from the aforementioned research company. I facilitated the discussions with men myself. Table 4.1 summarizes participant characteristics.

**Table 4.1.** Focus Group Participants

| | Number of Discussions | Number of Participants | Age Range | Mean Age | Mean Monthly Family Income |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Higher-income Turkish men | 2 | 12 | 24–60 | 35.75 | TRY 8,833[a] |
| Higher-income Turkish women | 2 | 12 | 33–54 | 41.75 | TRY 7,417 |
| Lower-income Turkish men | 2 | 14 | 24–40 | 33.14 | TRY 3,679 |
| Lower-income Turkish women | 2 | 14 | 27–43 | 34.71 | TRY 3,893 |
| Lower-income Kurdish men | 1 | 7 | 37–43 | 40 | TRY 3,357 |
| **Total** | **9** | **59** | **24–60** | **36.61** | **TRY 5,500** |

[a] TRY = Turkish New Lira. At the time of the discussions, 1 US dollar was roughly 5.70 Liras.

The discussions lasted about two hours. To avoid imposing our preconceptions on attendees and help them express their genuine thoughts and feelings, a collage technique was implemented in the first half of the discussions. To start with, the moderator divided focus group participants into two subgroups and gave each group magazines of varying content (history, cinema, fashion, etc.).[37] After that, the moderator presented the theme of the discussion to the research subjects: "Living together with Syrian refugees." Participants were then asked to express their thoughts and feelings on this theme, whether positive or negative, using images from the magazines. Each subgroup was instructed to prepare a visual collage (see Figure 4.1 for an example), which was followed by oral presentations and discussions. This procedure proved useful for stimulating discussions on a controversial and politically charged issue. The focus groups, however, did not rely on only an unstructured discussion format. In the second half of the discussions, a semi-structured discussion guide was used to initiate conversation around questions central to the study. The details of this guide can be seen in the Appendix.

[37] All collage groups were given the same set of magazines.


**Figure 4.6** A Visual Collage Created by a Group of Lower-Income Turkish Men

The discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed. To analyze the data, I and Dr. Savaşkan first went over the transcripts and our analytic memos, noting the emergent themes regarding how our participants brought up their identities and interests in the discussions. We then coded sections of the transcripts that aligned with these themes, which helped us clarify the basic patterns in our data and select excerpts for presenting the results. The analysis was done using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020.

*4.3.2 The original survey*

For the quantitative stage of the study, I use data obtained via computer-assisted personal interviews with a representative sample (n = 2,284) of adult Turkish citizens living in Istanbul.

The sample was selected through a multistage and stratified sampling design, in which the primary sampling units were neighborhoods. Overall, 111 neighborhoods from 34 of Istanbul's 39 districts were selected. In each of these neighborhoods, a primary and a substitute street were randomly chosen for administering the survey. Sex (male, female) and age (18-32, 33-46, 47+) quotas were applied to complete the interviews. Since Muslim nationalism targets individuals who at least nominally identify with Sunni Islam and since religious conservatism would mean different things among different religious groups, the analyses presented here include only the Sunni Muslim majority (n = 1,838), leaving out the Alevis (the largest religious minority in Turkey) and the small groups (< 1%) of non-Muslim or non-religious respondents.

The study has two outcome variables. The first one, *feelings toward Syrians,* was measured via an 11-point feeling thermometer, in which 0 represents "Very negative, cold feeling" and 10 represents "Very positive, warm feeling." The midpoint of the scale, 5, was labeled as "Neither positive nor negative feeling." The second outcome variable, *support for integration*, was derived from four statements, each rated on a five-point response scale running from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree):

- Syrian refugees should be supported to learn Turkish.
- Refugee children should be able to receive adequate levels of education.
- Syrian refugees should be given work permits.
- Syrian refugees who are employed in needed professions and have no criminal record should be given citizenship.

The scale was created by taking the average of the individual items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.92, indicating a high level of internal consistency. Higher values on this measure represent greater levels of support for integration policies.

The key independent variables of the study capture respondents' religious conservatism and sense of economic insecurity. The former was measured in two alternative ways. First, respondents were asked to select the primary and secondary sociopolitical identities that come to their mind when they say, "We." Those who selected "Conservative/Devout" as their primary identity were coded 1, while those who selected other options such as "Laic/Secular," "Turkish nationalist," "Leftist/Social democrat," and "Liberal" were coded 0. To avoid false positives, a small group of respondents who combined "Conservative/Devout" primary identity with "Laic/Secular" secondary identity (n = 60) were also coded 0 (*religious conservative*).[38] Second, to identify more directly those who subscribe to the idea of religious fraternity with Syrian refugees, the survey asked respondents the degree to which they agreed that "Syrian refugees are our religious brothers" (1: Strongly disagree, 5: Strongly agree). Those who strongly or somewhat agreed were coded 1, while other respondents were coded 0 (*religious fraternity*).

*Economic insecurity*, on the other hand, was measured with a question probing the extent to which respondents were concerned about the financial situation of their household (1: Not at

[38] It should be noted that this way of measuring religious conservatism is consistent with qualitative evidence on how Turkish citizens self-identify themselves. For example, in her ethnographic work on the rise of Muslim nationalism in Turkey, Jenny White (2014) shows that religious conservatives self-identify primarily as Muslim and secondarily as Turkish, whereas Muslimhood is typically a secondary identity for other members of the Sunni Muslim majority.

all concerned, 5: Extremely concerned). This measure was replaced with *monthly family income* (continuous) in alternative specifications, which serves as a robustness check. Respondents were asked to indicate their total monthly family income by selecting one of the following categories: a) Less than TRY 2,500; b) TRY 2,500-3,500; c) TRY 3,501-5,000; d) TRY 5,001-7,500; e) 7,501-10,000; f) 10,001-15,000; g) More than TRY 15,000. To create a continuous variable from this question, the midpoint of each category was assigned to the observations in that category.[39]

The statistical models control for several variables that are likely to confound the relationship between the dependent and key independent variables. The first of these is *party affiliation,* which is included in the analyses to rule out the possibility that religious conservatives would report less biased attitudes toward Syrian refugees simply because they are more likely to identify with the AKP government. This variable was operationalized by asking respondents which party they would vote for "if there were a general election today." Based on their responses, survey participants were classified into six partisan groups:

(1) Supporters of the religious conservative AKP

(2) Supporters of the secularist main opposition CHP

(3) Supporters of the far-right Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi,* MHP)

(4) Supporters of the pro-Kurdish and left-wing HDP

(5) Supporters of the secular-nationalist Good Party (*İyi Parti*, IYIP)

(6) Other/Undecided citizens

[39] I did not have to choose an arbitrary truncation point for the highest category, because no one in the analytic sample picked that category.

Second, the models control for *multiculturalism* through a binary variable coded 1 if the respondent would prefer to live in an ethnically diverse neighborhood, and 0 if otherwise. Adding this variable to the models allows me to examine Sunni citizens' attitudes toward Syrian refugees, net of their attitudes toward ethnic outgroups in general. Third, since contact with outgroup members may influence intergroup attitudes, all models control for the ratio of Syrians to natives in the district population (*Syrians/natives in district*). This variable was constructed by using data from the aforementioned IOM study on migrant presence in Istanbul. Additionally, the models account for respondents' *age* (continuous)*, sex* (1: Male, 0: Female)*, education* (1: Primary school or less, 5: College degree), *ethnic background* (1: Turkish, 2: Kurdish, 3: Other), and *occupational status* (1: Self-employed, 2: Wage-worker, 3: Not employed).

To facilitate comparisons across observed relationships, all continuous variables were standardized by subtracting the mean and dividing by the standard deviation. Table 4.2 below reports summary statistics.

**Table 4.2.** Summary Statistics for the Study Variables (Unweighted)

| Variable | Obs. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Dependent Variables*** | | | | | |
| Feelings toward Syrians | 1838 | 2.24 | 2.83 | 0 | 10 |
| Support for integration | 1838 | 2.76 | 1.27 | 1 | 5 |
| ***Key Predictors*** | | | | | |
| Religious conservative | 1838 | .372 | .483 | 0 | 1 |
| Religious fraternity | 1838 | .477 | .5 | 0 | 1 |
| Economic insecurity | 1838 | 2.98 | 1.12 | 1 | 5 |
| Monthly household income | 1838 | 4376.9 | 2092.1 | 1250 | 12500 |
| ***Control Variables*** | | | | | |
| Multiculturalism | 1838 | .17 | .376 | 0 | 1 |
| Turkish | 1838 | .92 | .271 | 0 | 1 |
| Kurdish | 1838 | .075 | .263 | 0 | 1 |
| Other ethnicity | 1838 | .005 | .074 | 0 | 1 |
| AKP | 1838 | .577 | .494 | 0 | 1 |
| CHP | 1838 | .268 | .443 | 0 | 1 |
| MHP | 1838 | .05 | .217 | 0 | 1 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| HDP | 1838 | .033 | .179 | 0 | 1 |
| IYIP | 1838 | .016 | .125 | 0 | 1 |
| Other party/Undecided | 1838 | .057 | .231 | 0 | 1 |
| Self-employed | 1838 | .097 | .297 | 0 | 1 |
| Wage-worker | 1838 | .607 | .489 | 0 | 1 |
| Non-employed | 1838 | .295 | .456 | 0 | 1 |
| Male | 1838 | .502 | .5 | 0 | 1 |
| Age | 1838 | 38.43 | 11.00 | 18 | 72 |
| Education | 1838 | 3.27 | 1.28 | 1 | 5 |
| Syrians/natives in district | 1838 | .064 | .053 | .003 | .185 |

I employ Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression in my analyses, where robust standard errors are clustered at the neighborhood level to adjust for the possible non-independence of the error terms. I use calibrated weights to match the distribution of partisanship in the sample to official data from the last general election held on 24 June 2018.[40] For both dependent variables, the preferred model includes, besides all controls, the interaction between religious conservatism and economic insecurity. Due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, I interpret the results in terms of associations.

## 4.4. Findings

### *4.4.1 Qualitative Findings*

A small minority of the focus group participants unequivocally endorsed AKP's Muslim nationalist discourse on Syrian refugees, fully subscribing to the idea of religious solidarity with

[40] The calibration was performed using the *ipfraking* package in Stata (Kolenikov 2014). Unweighted estimations produce substantively similar results, which are available upon request.

newcomers and taking pride in Turkey's alleged leadership among Muslim nations. One participant, for instance, likened Turkey to a caring parent for the Muslim world:

> In the geography of Islam, we, as Turkey, are a mother or a father. Those in Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Lebanon; at the end of the day, they'll come seeking their father, they'll seek refuge in their mother. Just as we seek help from our parents when we face problems even if we're 40 and have three kids of our own. … So, I think Turkey should, like an affectionate mother or father, take care of and support these countries. (Lower-income Turkish men, 2019.11.14).

Similarly, using the image of a struggling boat (see Figure 4.2), another participant argued that Turkey was the last hope for Muslims across the world:

- We don't have anywhere else to go. Everyone is on the same boat. If this boat sinks, we'll sink altogether. …
- Moderator: Just to clarify, is the title [of your collage] "Muslims on the edge of a cliff"?
- Yes, it is.
- Moderator: And are those who are on the boat Muslim peoples?
- Yes, Muslim peoples in the world. … And this is the last boat. Like it or not, the Republic of Turkey is our last state. We're standing on the edge of a cliff; there's nowhere else to go. (Lower-income Kurdish men, 2019.11.20).

**Figure 4.7** A Struggling Boat Representing Turkey's Guardianship of Muslim Peoples

A higher-income male participant was even critical of Erdoğan's periodic threats to send the refugees to Europe, as he believed such threats violated the principle of Islamic brotherhood and solidarity. For this participant, unlike ordinary citizens, politicians were not sincere in their use of religious discourse regarding the refugees:

> You said "my brothers," you said "ansar"; you admitted them [Syrian refugees] using these terms. It isn't proper to say "Let's use you" at the smallest opportunity. … That means you aren't really pro-ummah. You admitted them as a bargaining chip. You admitted them for the benefits. You admitted them for

> money. You didn't admit them because you are pro-ummah. (Higher-income Turkish man, 2019.11.12).

At the other end of the spectrum were participants who unequivocally rejected the AKP government's religiously-legitimated pro-refugee discourse. For example, when asked her opinion about the idea of religious brotherhood with Syrians, one participant said, "I don't want them in any way. I don't see them as my brothers" (Lower-income Turkish women, 2019.11.08). Another participant shared this attitude and suggested that it was mutual:

> I don't see them as our religious brothers. And I don't think they see us as their religious brothers. I personally talked about this with a Syrian, who speaks very good Turkish. I said, "What do you think?" She said, "We hate [the Turks]. I said, "Why?" She said, "Because the Turks were the last to accept Islam. You became Muslims due to violence and fear. Otherwise, you wouldn't have [accepted Islam]. You don't have anything to do with Islam." … They hate the Turks, they don't find [our religious beliefs] serious. (Higher-income Turkish woman, 2019.11.07).

In addition, some participants denied that they have a religious obligation toward Syrian refugees by questioning the latter's religiosity. This questioning focused on Syrians' purported failure to observe basic religious practices and meet the Islamic standards of cleanliness:

> There aren't many Syrians in our neighborhood, but as far as I could observe, most were eating and drinking in the streets during Ramadan. If they are Muslims, what kind of Muslims are they? Are they only Muslims in their own country? (Lower-income Turkish woman, 2019.11.11).

> Say, there are 10 Syrians in the neighborhood. Only one of them might go to the mosque. And that one prattles there instead of worshipping. (Higher-income Turkish man, 2019.11.12).

> We wouldn't have these problems if they [the Syrians] were religious. The man comes to the mosque, walks barefoot outside, and then comes back in [with dirty feet]. A Turkish Muslim wouldn't do such a thing. (Lower-income Turkish man, 2019.11.13).

Nevertheless, the majority of the participants fell between these two extremes. They acknowledged their religious duty to help Syrian refugees; however, they were also quick to underline the conditional limits of their responsibilities. These limits were usually defined in socioeconomic terms, with participants stressing the material challenges faced by their families or the nation as a whole:

- Yes, we're brothers-in-religion, but there're so many people in our country, too, who are in need. I don't want to share [our resources]. Rather than me feeding [them], they should feed themselves by fighting in their own country. …

- But dear, we opened our door to people who were in a difficult situation. Because they fled war.
- It's very nice to help one another, of course, but how can I help others when I don't have enough income myself? (Lower-income Turkish women, 2019.11.11).

Why wouldn't we help if we had sufficient economic resources? Turkey isn't that powerful. It pretends to be but isn't. We're just using up our stocks. (Lower-income Turkish man, 2019.11.13).

As a person supporting a four-member family with a single salary, as someone who has a heavy weight to bear, what can I do? I can pray [for Syrians.] If you ask for it, I can give alms when I go to the mosque for the Friday prayer. (Higher-income Turkish man, 2019.11.19).

Indeed, most of our subjects were deeply concerned about the economic impact of Syrian refugees. Lower-income participants, in particular, drew on their personal experiences to complain about decreasing job opportunities and wages. For example, a Kurdish participant who had only primary-school education claimed that he was unemployed because of the refugees who work cheaply:

- I do drywall work. Syrians work for half the pay.
- Moderator: Half the pay you ask for?

- Yes, half the pay. Say, I work for 15 liras, but he works for 7 liras.
- Moderator: How does that affect you?
- It affects me a lot. I've been unemployed for four months.
- Moderator: So, it has cost you your job?
- Of course, it has. I'm making an offer [to the client] at 20-22 liras. He tells me the other guy made an offer at 10 liras. I don't know what to do. (Lower-income Kurdish man, 2019.11.20).

Another participant from the same focus group discussion made similar remarks although he had earlier referred to the Syrians as "our religious brothers":

> The Kyrgyz, the Afghans, and especially the Syrians, they are employed in construction. Whereas a [native] worker works for 100-110 liras, they [employers] are giving him [the refugee] 60 or 50 liras. Another example is the Kyrgyz and the Turkomans in restaurants. I'm a personal witness as I've worked in all sectors. … They hire a Turkoman at the restaurant. If my pay is 60-70 liras, his pay is 30 liras without insurance. When inspectors come from the revenue office, they send him to the back of the restaurant. (Kurdish man, 2019.11.20).

It was not only the Kurdish participants who maintained that migrants were detrimental to their employment chances and wages. Lower-income Turkish participants, too, held refugees responsible for the difficulties they faced in the labor market:

> I'd like to tell something I witnessed. My sister's son got a job related to his major. He had a dispute with his boss about meal fees. His boss found an excuse and fired him. He hired a Syrian instead. Why hire a Syrian? Because he won't pay insurance. He won't cover the meals. And he'll make the child [Syrian worker] work without limits. (Lower-income woman, 2019.01.08).

> It is very hard for me to find a job now. Syrians can work more cheaply and without insurance. That's why we are starving ourselves in our own country. (Lower-income woman, 2019.11.11).

> I'm working in the textiles industry, for example. They [the employers] are hiring Syrians and making them work without insurance. The wages have dropped. (Lower-income man, 2019.11.13).

Since the discussions were conducted in the context of a major economic downturn, financial concerns were salient also in discussions with relatively higher-income participants, who associated refugees with rising inflation and worsening living standards. One such participant, for example, used the image of a new house and products flying away (see Figure 4.3) to assert that a comfortable life was becoming increasingly difficult to attain because of Syrian refugees:

> That [picture] represents luxurious life. Luxurious life has become just a dream because of them [Syrians]. You have to save money for 15 years to buy a house.

> You need to make a down payment, get a loan, and pay your debt in 15-20 years. This [a new house] is just a dream. New things are just a dream for us now. (Higher-income Turkish woman, 2019.11.18).

**Figure 4.8** Image Representing the Increasing Difficulty of Attaining a Comfortable Life

For most of the participants, then, calls for religious solidarity with Syrian refugees were in tension with how they perceived their material interests. This tension led these participants to adopt an ambivalent attitude toward Syrians. In fact, several participants spontaneously brought

up being torn between their conscience and economic well-being. The following conversation transpired in a focus group in which the participants used the image of a mosque to represent "our conscience":

- They're in a difficult situation; they experience the "life, death, and hope" [title of the collage] triplet. That's why they're in search. That's why they've migrated to our country at the risk of death. … We see they're happy here. But we aren't happy in the same way. Because we're already an overcrowded city. So, we don't know what to do. As a country, we listened to our conscience and accepted those who fled war. But we're now desperate about what to do. …
- What will happen to us while living with them? Should we shelter them among us, or should we completely exclude them? We're living these contradictions. …
- Moderator: If I understand you correctly, you don't know what to do, you're conflicted between your conscience and other issues. Is that correct?
- Exactly. The scales of justice should be well-balanced. We're very worried.
- We're concerned about the future. (Lower-income Turkish women, 2019.11.11).

Relatedly, a group of higher-income female participants juxtaposed being conscientious and becoming a powerful country by using a visual in which they crossed out a headline reading "We are the biggest in Europe":

- We say, “We are the biggest in Europe.” We’re trying to join the European Union. In reality, there is no way we can a big [powerful] country. Hence the cross sign.
- Moderator: Why do you think like that?
- There is no way as long as we are conscientious.
- Moderator: Is conscience something that contradicts being big [powerful]?
- Definitely. We cannot progress if we embrace everyone. (Higher-income Turkish women, 2019.11.18).

Moreover, several participants stated that their stance vis-à-vis Syrians hardened over time as the social and economic costs of hosting them became too burdensome:

> I felt sorry for the refugees when they came to our country. I was even pleased that Turkey was the only country to offer help in their very difficult times. But I thought it’d be a temporary process, that it wouldn’t last this long. Did we assist them in time of need? Did we take them under our wings? Did we give them shelter and help them stand up on their feet? Yes, we did! But now they’re causing us to experience hard times. (Higher-income Turkish woman, 2019.11.07).

Despite such concerns, however, when asked directly, many participants acknowledged that the shared religious identity they have with Syrian refugees was important:

- To me religious brotherhood is important. I'd rather Muslims come [to Turkey] than Christians.
- The Ansar-Muhajir relationship, as expressed by our Prophet, is important. (Lower-income Turkish women, 2019.11.11).

- You can't accept five million Jews or Christians, for example. That's a different thing.
- Moderator: So, you're saying it's important that they [Syrians] are Muslim?
- Of course.
- If you admit five million [non-Muslims], it will lead to missionary activities.
- We sent them to the Balkans at the turn of the [20th] century through population exchanges. (Higher-income Turkish men, 2019.11.12).

For these participants, spatially segregating the refugees seemed like a reasonable compromise between their material interests and the normative implications of their religious identity and beliefs:

> Muslims have to help Muslims. But they [Syrians] should've been kept in a buffer zone or in refugee camps. It was unnecessary to let them spread all across the city. (Higher-income man, 2019.11.19).

> I accept religious brotherhood, but only if *Kızılay* [the Red Crescent] sends food and tents to their country. (Lower-income woman, 2019.11.08).

- For instance, Turgut Özal [the 8th President of Turkey] also admitted immigrants from Bulgaria when they were deported. But he had to do that, and he took in our citizens. But when he did [admit the immigrants], he identified certain regions. When the immigrants were settled in those regions, they were admitted in an orderly way. …
- This might have to do with the numbers.
- [It could have been] more planned, more…
- 3.5 million people came only from Syria.
- Then, [the government] shouldn't have let [them] in Istanbul or Ankara. In Istanbul and Ankara, [our own population] is already excessive. (Lower-income Turkish men, 2019.11.14).

Overall, the qualitative findings presented above point to a tension between Islamic solidarity and material concerns in religious conservatives' attitudes toward Syrian refugees. The majority of the respondents acknowledged their religious duty to Syrian refugees; however, they were also deeply concerned about the refugees' material impact on themselves and their communities. Blaming the refugees for their economic woes and stressing the conditional limits of Islamic solidarity, these respondents minimized their responsibilities toward newcomers. In fact, some even denied that they have any religious obligations toward Syrian refugees by claiming that Syrians were not good Muslims. Both of these discursive strategies allowed the participants to withhold support from Syrian refugees while at the same time maintaining their self-identity as devout Muslims.

These findings are consistent with the notion that perceived economic insecurity may undermine efforts to build identity-based solidarities between native and migrant communities (Lazarev and Sharma 2017). Indeed, material concerns prevented the majority of our religious conservative participants from fully endorsing the Turkish government's Muslim nationalist rhetoric, which constructs a shared identity as well as normative obligations between Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees. Among our participants, then, perceived economic security was a precondition for the idea of transnational Islamic solidarity to take hold.

This can be understood in reference to Rogers Smith's (2003) theory of people-making, where he argues that political communities are not created in a top-down fashion but via an asymmetrical and constrained relationship between the leaders and the led. This relationship is asymmetrical because it is primarily political elites who articulate novel conceptions of peoplehood. However, it is also a constrained relationship because in their efforts to forge and institutionalize a new imagined community, political leaders confront populations with preexisting identities, interests, and ideals. In particular, the findings presented in this section support Smith's (Smith 2003:40) contention that "a political people can never be created or sustained without some viable economic arrangements that can largely meet the felt material needs and wants of, at least, that people's core constituents."

Below, I examine this tension between religious identity and material interests quantitatively via an original survey of Istanbul residents.

*4.4.2 Quantitative findings*

Table 4.3 presents OLS regressions where religious conservatism is measured as a sociopolitical identity. For both outcome variables, I present results from three models. Model 1 includes only demographic and political controls. Model 2 adds *religious conservative*, *economic insecurity*, and *multiculturalism* to Model 1. Finally, Model 3 adds the interaction between my two key predictors: *religious conservative* and *economic insecurity.*

**Table 4.3.** OLS Regressions Predicting Feelings toward Syrians and Support for Integration[a]

| | Feelings toward Syrians | | | Support for Integration | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (1) | (2) | (3) |
| Key Predictors | | | | | | |
| *Religious conservative* | | 0.544** | 0.475** | | 0.449** | 0.405** |
| | | (0.0896) | (0.0850) | | (0.0906) | (0.0802) |
| *Economic insecurity* | | -0.0920* | 0.0652 | | -0.0923* | 0.0100 |
| | | (0.0417) | (0.0517) | | (0.0403) | (0.0488) |
| *Multiculturalism* | | 0.379** | 0.371** | | 0.294** | 0.288** |
| | | (0.0926) | (0.0901) | | (0.0900) | (0.0884) |
| *Rel. cons. X Econ. insecurity* | | | -0.366** | | | -0.238** |
| | | | (0.0712) | | | (0.0698) |
| Ethnicity (Turkish) | | | | | | |
| *Kurdish* | 0.506** | 0.421** | 0.428** | 0.234+ | 0.172 | 0.177 |
| | (0.116) | (0.114) | (0.111) | (0.121) | (0.122) | (0.124) |
| *Other ethnicity* | -0.163 | 0.0235 | -0.0479 | -0.199 | -0.0358 | -0.0822 |
| | (0.343) | (0.318) | (0.273) | (0.239) | (0.261) | (0.259) |
| Partisanship (AKP) | | | | | | |
| *CHP* | -0.273** | -0.0972 | -0.0912 | -0.842** | -0.692** | -0.688** |
| | (0.0993) | (0.0909) | (0.0873) | (0.114) | (0.114) | (0.112) |
| *MHP* | -0.210 | -0.0842 | -0.0310 | -0.306** | -0.194+ | -0.160 |
| | (0.129) | (0.128) | (0.127) | (0.115) | (0.116) | (0.119) |
| *HDP* | -0.133 | 0.163 | 0.128 | -0.343** | -0.0887 | -0.111 |
| | (0.198) | (0.195) | (0.180) | (0.129) | (0.149) | (0.143) |
| *IYIP* | -0.548** | -0.232+ | -0.255* | -0.766** | -0.493** | -0.508** |
| | (0.145) | (0.129) | (0.124) | (0.154) | (0.143) | (0.141) |
| *Other/Undecided* | 0.175 | 0.312* | 0.356* | -0.282** | -0.159 | -0.130 |
| | (0.164) | (0.154) | (0.154) | (0.104) | (0.0962) | (0.0996) |
| Employment (Self-employed) | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Wage-worker* | -0.186* | -0.141+ | -0.135+ | -0.108 | -0.0708 | -0.0673 |
| | (0.0868) | (0.0825) | (0.0782) | (0.0830) | (0.0777) | (0.0779) |
| *Non-employed* | -0.163+ | -0.0642 | -0.0581 | -0.195* | -0.111 | -0.107 |
| | (0.0876) | (0.0828) | (0.0832) | (0.0918) | (0.0846) | (0.0833) |
| Other Controls | | | | | | |
| *Male* | -0.0018 | 0.0183 | 0.0170 | -0.0402 | -0.0234 | -0.0243 |
| | (0.0505) | (0.0499) | (0.0491) | (0.0498) | (0.0497) | (0.0489) |
| *Age* | -0.0617* | -0.0611* | -0.0614* | -0.0359 | -0.0358 | -0.0360 |
| | (0.0309) | (0.0305) | (0.0297) | (0.0244) | (0.0248) | (0.0245) |
| *Education* | 0.0155 | 0.0386 | 0.0282 | 0.0614+ | 0.0811* | 0.0744* |
| | (0.0321) | (0.0303) | (0.0289) | (0.0339) | (0.0319) | (0.0322) |
| *Syrians/natives in district* | 0.105+ | 0.146** | 0.143** | -0.0166 | 0.0180 | 0.0162 |
| | (0.0578) | (0.0516) | (0.0481) | (0.0479) | (0.0415) | (0.0396) |
| Constant | 0.124 | -0.291** | -0.323** | 0.346** | -0.0003 | -0.0209 |
| | (0.121) | (0.101) | (0.100) | (0.116) | (0.112) | (0.113) |
| N | 1838 | 1838 | 1838 | 1838 | 1838 | 1838 |
| R-sq | 0.088 | 0.189 | 0.217 | 0.133 | 0.201 | 0.213 |
| adj. R-sq | 0.082 | 0.181 | 0.210 | 0.127 | 0.194 | 0.206 |
| AIC | 4999.8 | 4791.9 | 4727.2 | 4956.9 | 4811.7 | 4786.1 |

[a] Robust standard errors are clustered at the neighborhood level. All continuous variables, including the outcomes, are standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two-tailed).

When we look at Model 1 across both outcomes, two findings stand out in light of the existing literature. First, while prior studies show that left-leaning individuals are generally more accepting of migrants, in my analysis supporters of the religious conservative AKP appear to have the most positive (least negative) attitudes toward Syrian refugees. Controlling for other variables in the model, supporters of the two secular-nationalist opposition parties, the center-left CHP and the center-right IYIP have the most exclusionary attitudes. The differences between AKP partisans and other voter groups are especially pronounced in support for integration policies. Second, while the literature points to education as one of the strongest predictors of pro-migrant attitudes, in the present study it has no relationship with feelings toward Syrians and a negligible relationship with support for integration policies. The latter relationship becomes

statistically significant in the second and third models; however, it remains substantively insignificant: holding other variables constant, a one standard deviation increase in education is associated with an increase of only about 0.08 standard deviations in support for integration policies. These findings cast doubt on the generalizability of findings from Western societies to non-Western contexts.

The second and third models yield similar results for both dependent variables. Model 2 indicates that religious conservative identity has a large and statistically significant relationship with attitudes toward Syrian refugees, even after accounting for partisanship, multiculturalism, and a host of other control variables. In line with H1, identifying as a religious conservative predicts an increase of 0.54 standard deviations in feelings toward Syrians and 0.45 standard deviations in support for integration policies. Meanwhile economic insecurity appears to have a small negative effect on both outcomes.

Model 3 tests whether economic insecurity moderates the relationship between religious conservative identity and attitudes toward Syrian refugees. The coefficient on the interaction term is large and statistically significant for both outcome variables. Consistent with H2, the signs of the interaction terms suggest that the pro-refugee effect of religious conservativism decreases as personal economic concerns increase. Alternative specifications where I used monthly household income instead of economic insecurity produced substantively and statistically similar results (see Table 4.4): The pro-refugee effect of religious conservative identification increases as monthly household income increases.

**Table 4.4**. OLS Models with Household Income as a Key Predictor[a]

| | Feelings toward Syrians | | Support for Integration | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (2) | (3) | (2) | (3) |
| Key Predictors | | | | |
| *Religious conservative* | 0.590** | 0.590** | 0.483** | 0.483** |
| | (0.089) | (0.090) | (0.095) | (0.095) |
| *Household income* | -0.032 | -0.102** | 0.053+ | 0.012 |
| | (0.037) | (0.039) | (0.031) | (0.034) |
| *Multiculturalism* | 0.400** | 0.395** | 0.296** | 0.293** |
| | (0.091) | (0.091) | (0.090) | (0.090) |
| *Rel. cons. X Hh. income* | | 0.169** | | 0.100* |
| | | (0.054) | | (0.048) |
| Ethnicity (Turkish) | | | | |
| *Kurdish* | 0.381** | 0.400** | 0.148 | 0.159 |
| | (0.116) | (0.116) | (0.131) | (0.130) |
| *Other ethnicity* | -0.021 | -0.025 | -0.080 | -0.082 |
| | (0.287) | (0.290) | (0.266) | (0.262) |
| Partisanship (AKP) | | | | |
| *CHP* | -0.102 | -0.098 | -0.695** | -0.692** |
| | (0.087) | (0.086) | (0.110) | (0.111) |
| *MHP* | -0.128 | -0.092 | -0.232+ | -0.210+ |
| | (0.132) | (0.130) | (0.119) | (0.120) |
| *HDP* | 0.138 | 0.121 | -0.115 | -0.125 |
| | (0.189) | (0.192) | (0.146) | (0.146) |
| *IYIP* | -0.282* | -0.273* | -0.526** | -0.520** |
| | (0.128) | (0.127) | (0.142) | (0.141) |
| *Other/Undecided* | 0.273+ | 0.266+ | -0.171+ | -0.175+ |
| | (0.154) | (0.157) | (0.102) | (0.101) |
| Employment (Self-employed) | | | | |
| *Wage-worker* | -0.158+ | -0.156+ | -0.0388 | -0.0374 |
| | (0.086) | (0.085) | (0.076) | (0.077) |
| *Non-employed* | -0.091 | -0.089 | -0.094 | -0.093 |
| | (0.083) | (0.082) | (0.085) | (0.084) |
| Other Controls | | | | |
| *Male* | 0.009 | 0.005 | -0.018 | -0.020 |
| | (0.049) | (0.049) | (0.050) | (0.051) |
| *Age* | -0.061* | -0.052+ | -0.042 | -0.036 |
| | (0.030) | (0.030) | (0.026) | (0.025) |
| *Education* | 0.050 | 0.054 | 0.050 | 0.052 |
| | (0.037) | (0.037) | (0.036) | (0.036) |
| *Syrians/natives in district* | 0.136** | 0.137** | 0.012 | 0.012 |
| | (0.051) | (0.051) | (0.043) | (0.043) |
| Constant | -0.266* | -0.278** | -0.020 | -0.026 |
| | (0.105) | (0.104) | (0.113) | (0.113) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| N | 1838 | 1838 | 1838 | 1838 |
| R-sq | 0.182 | 0.189 | 0.196 | 0.198 |
| Adj. R-sq | 0.175 | 0.181 | 0.189 | 0.191 |
| AIC | 4806.2 | 4793.1 | 4823.1 | 4819.9 |

[a] Robust standard errors are clustered at the neighborhood level. All continuous variables, including the outcomes, are standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two-tailed).

As a further robustness check, I replicated the second and third models using a direct measure of religious fraternity with Syrians. Table 4.5 presents the results. As Model 2 shows, endorsing the idea of religious fraternity with Syrian refugees predicts an increase of 0.79 standard deviations in feelings toward Syrians and 1.06 standard deviations in support for integration policies, net of political and demographic controls. Moreover, similar to the findings discussed above, Model 3 reveals that the positive association between religious fraternity and attitudes toward Syrian refugees diminishes as economic insecurity increases.

**Table 4.5** OLS Models with Religious Fraternity as a Key Predictor[a]

| | Feelings toward Syrians | | Support for Integration | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (2) | (3) | (2) | (3) |
| Key Predictors | | | | |
| *Religious fraternity* | 0.790** | 0.777** | 1.055** | 1.039** |
| | (0.086) | (0.087) | (0.077) | (0.071) |
| *Economic insecurity* | -0.116** | 0.090* | -0.097* | 0.143** |
| | (0.043) | (0.042) | (0.038) | (0.043) |
| *Multiculturalism* | 0.339** | 0.296** | 0.223* | 0.174* |
| | (0.089) | (0.086) | (0.085) | (0.078) |
| *Rel. frat. X Econ. insecurity* | | -0.408** | | -0.474** |
| | | (0.068) | | (0.064) |
| Ethnicity (Turkish) | | | | |
| *Kurdish* | 0.494** | 0.499** | 0.243* | 0.249* |
| | (0.103) | (0.099) | (0.113) | (0.109) |
| *Other ethnicity* | 0.106 | 0.079 | 0.126 | 0.094 |
| | (0.289) | (0.241) | (0.160) | (0.211) |
| Partisanship (AKP) | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *CHP* | 0.024 | 0.060 | -0.433** | -0.391** |
| | (0.081) | (0.080) | (0.082) | (0.074) |
| *MHP* | -0.186 | -0.161 | -0.306** | -0.277** |
| | (0.119) | (0.111) | (0.087) | (0.078) |
| *HDP* | 0.003 | -0.007 | -0.177 | -0.189 |
| | (0.168) | (0.178) | (0.230) | (0.201) |
| *IYIP* | -0.179 | -0.220 | -0.311* | -0.359** |
| | (0.137) | (0.141) | (0.127) | (0.127) |
| *Other/Undecided* | 0.243 | 0.234 | -0.186* | -0.197* |
| | (0.158) | (0.157) | (0.086) | (0.090) |
| Employment (Self-employed) | | | | |
| *Wage-worker* | -0.103 | -0.092 | -0.002 | 0.011 |
| | (0.080) | (0.080) | (0.067) | (0.066) |
| *Non-employed* | -0.018 | -0.021 | -0.020 | -0.024 |
| | (0.084) | (0.083) | (0.078) | (0.074) |
| Other Controls | | | | |
| *Male* | 0.030 | 0.012 | -0.008 | -0.029 |
| | (0.051) | (0.050) | (0.040) | (0.040) |
| *Age* | -0.056+ | -0.049 | -0.038 | -0.030 |
| | (0.031) | (0.031) | (0.024) | (0.023) |
| *Education* | 0.011 | 0.011 | 0.048+ | 0.048+ |
| | (0.031) | (0.032) | (0.028) | (0.027) |
| *Syrians/natives in district* | 0.135* | 0.129** | 0.007 | -0.001 |
| | (0.053) | (0.049) | (0.042) | (0.037) |
| Constant | -0.532** | -0.540** | -0.473** | -0.482** |
| | (0.107) | (0.109) | (0.099) | (0.097) |
| N | 1838 | 1838 | 1838 | 1838 |
| R-sq | 0.275 | 0.314 | 0.409 | 0.461 |
| Adj. R-sq | 0.268 | 0.308 | 0.404 | 0.456 |
| AIC | 4585.6 | 4484.9 | 4257.9 | 4091.4 |

[a] Robust standard errors are clustered at the neighborhood level. All continuous variables, including the outcomes, are standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.
** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two-tailed).

To get a better sense of the interaction between religious conservatism and material concerns, Figure 4.4 displays the marginal effects of religious conservative identity on both outcome variables across different levels of economic insecurity, while holding all other variables in Model 3 at their means. The figure makes it clear that the relationship between

religious conservatism and attitudes toward Syrian refugees depends on individuals' assessment of their personal economic circumstances. When economic insecurity is at minimum, identifying as a religious conservative is associated with an increase of 1.16 standard deviations in feelings toward Syrians and 0.85 standard deviations in support for integration policies. By contrast, when economic insecurity is at maximum, the differences between religious conservatives and other citizens are no longer statistically significant, which helps explain the prevalence of anti-Syrian attitudes among religious conservatives.

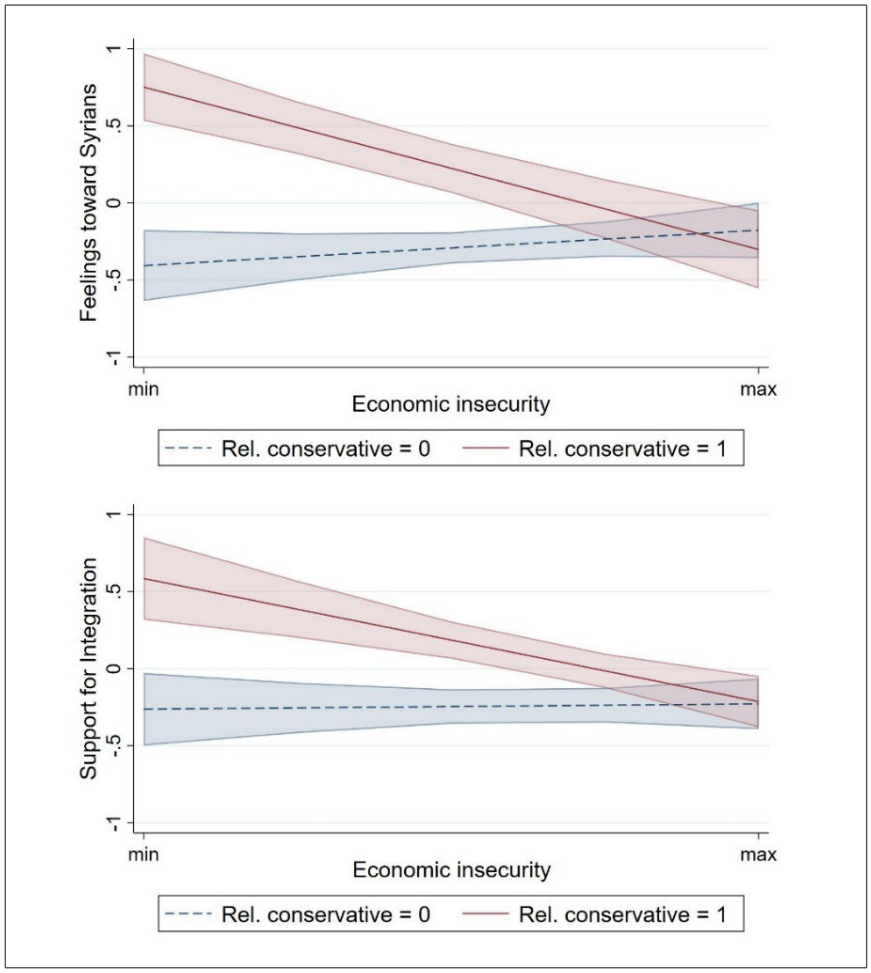


**Figure 9.4**. Marginal Effects of Being a Religious Conservative by Economic Insecurity. Note: Predicted values are in standard deviation units, and the shaded areas represent 95% confidence intervals. All control variables are held at their means.

## 4.5 Replication with KONDA Data

The statistical analyses presented above support my hypotheses; however, the sample does not allow for generalizing the findings to the Turkish population at large. To address this limitation in external validity, I replicated my analyses with data from a nationally representative survey conducted in February 2016 by KONDA, a reputable public opinion company in Turkey. In addition to its national coverage, the timing of this survey makes it possible to investigate public attitudes toward Syrian refugees at a time when the government's religiously-legitimated pro-refugee discourse was at its strongest and the Turkish economy had not yet plunged into a crisis. Given these relatively favorable conditions, the KONDA data provides a more stringent test of my second hypothesis, which suggests that the pro-refugee effect of religious conservative identity should diminish as economic insecurity increases.

### *4.5.1 Data and methods*

The data I use in this section were obtained through face-to-face interviews with a representative sample (n = 2,649) of Turkish citizens aged 17 and over. The interviews were carried out in respondents' homes by KONDA as part of its "Barometer" survey series. For this survey, KONDA employed a multistage sampling method, in which the primary sampling units (PSUs) were neighborhoods or villages. Overall, 136 PSUs were selected from 27 provinces in 12 regions. In each PSU, age and gender quotas were applied to complete the interviews. Similar to the analyses with original data from Istanbul, my analyses here include only those respondents who self-identify as Sunni Muslim (n = 2,412).

Again, I have two dependent variables. The first of these, *cultural similarity*, was measured by a single item that reads, "I think we are culturally similar to Syrians." Participants indicated their degree of agreement with this statement via a six-point response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The second outcome, *support for integration,* was derived from two items assessing respondents' level of support for giving Syrian refugees residence and work permits, respectively. Support for both policies was measured via a six-point agree-disagree scale. The two items were averaged to yield a summary score running from 1 (no support at all) to 6 (maximum support). The Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.84.

As in previous analyses, the key independent variables capture respondents' religious conservatism and sense of economic insecurity. The former was assessed with the following question: "With respect to lifestyle, which of the following three groups do you belong to?" (1: Modern, 2: Traditional conservative, 3: Religious conservative). In the Turkish context, the term "modern" indicates a relatively secular and Westernized outlook on life, in which religion has a limited role in shaping one's social relationships and everyday conduct. Conversely, Islamic beliefs and values usually exert a heavy influence on the social and political lives of "religious conservatives." Finally, "traditional conservative" is an intermediate category, referring to social traditionalists who tend to have a moderately religious way of life. It should be noted, however, that "traditional conservative" is an academic term rather than an everyday one; therefore, respondents may have interpreted it in different ways. In the analyses below, I use a binary variable, *religious conservative,* which is coded 1 if the respondent selected "religious conservative" as his/her lifestyle group, and 0 if otherwise.

The second key predictor, *economic insecurity*, was measured by a question probing whether the respondent was able to get by last month. The response options were as follows: 1

("Yes, I saved some money, too"), 2 ("I managed to get by"), 3 ("Actually, I was not able to get by"), and 4 ("No, I incurred debt"). Since the last two options are semantically very close, I combined them into one group, which resulted in a new variable with three categories: low, moderate, and high economic insecurity.

The control variables mirror those included in previous analyses. To begin with, *party affiliation* (1: AKP, 2: CHP, 3: MHP, 4: HDP, 5: Other/Undecided, 6: Non-voter) is again included in the analyses to rule out the possibility that religious conservatives would report more positive attitudes toward Syrian refugees only because they are more likely to support the AKP government. Second, as a proxy for *multiculturalism*, I control for respondents' level of agreement with allowing Kurdish children to receive education in their native language (1: Strongly disagree, 6: Strongly agree), an issue that has long been a major point of contention between ethnonationalist and multiculturalist camps.[41] Third, all models contain two variables that seek to capture respondents' level of social contact with Syrian refugees. The first one, *border city residence*, is a dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent dwells in a province close to Turkey's Syrian border.[42] The second one, *everyday contact*, is an ordinal

[41] Admittedly, this is not a very good measure of attitudes toward ethnic outgroups in general, because it specifically deals with the polarizing Kurdish issue. However, in the absence of a better measure, I make do with what I have.

[42] The KONDA sample included respondents from the following border provinces: Adana, Hatay, Mersin, Gaziantep, and Şanlıurfa. In all of these border provinces, the proportion of Syrians to the native-born population far exceeds the national average.

variable with seven categories measuring the frequency with which the respondent encounters Syrian refugees in his/her daily life (1: Never, 7: Everyday).

In addition, the models control for *age* (continuous), *sex* (1: Male, 0: Female), *education* (1: No schooling, 7: Graduate degree), *ethnic background* (1: Turkish, 2: Kurdish, 3: Other), *urban-rural status* (1: Rural, 2: Urban, 3: Metropolis), and *occupational status* (1: Employed, 2: Retired, 3: Homemaker, 4: Student, 5: Unemployed/Unable to work). See Table 4.6 below for summary statistics.

**Table 4.6** Summary Statistics (KONDA Survey)

| Variable | Obs. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Dependent Variables*** | | | | | |
| Cultural similarity | 2369 | 2.61 | 1.61 | 1 | 6 |
| Support for integration | 2365 | 3.09 | 1.66 | 1 | 6 |
| ***Key Predictors*** | | | | | |
| Religious conservative | 2380 | .27 | .44 | 0 | 1 |
| High econ. insecurity | 2412 | .28 | .45 | 0 | 1 |
| Moderate econ. insecurity | 2412 | .54 | .5 | 0 | 1 |
| Low econ. insecurity | 2412 | .17 | .38 | 0 | 1 |
| ***Control Variables*** | | | | | |
| Multiculturalism | 2378 | 3.43 | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| Turkish | 2412 | .82 | .38 | 0 | 1 |
| Kurdish | 2412 | .12 | .33 | 0 | 1 |
| Other ethnicity | 2412 | .05 | .22 | 0 | 1 |
| AKP | 2412 | .48 | .5 | 0 | 1 |
| CHP | 2412 | .16 | .37 | 0 | 1 |
| MHP | 2412 | .07 | .26 | 0 | 1 |
| HDP | 2412 | .06 | .24 | 0 | 1 |
| Other party/Undecided | 2412 | .14 | .35 | 0 | 1 |
| Non-voter | 2412 | .08 | .27 | 0 | 1 |
| Employed | 2412 | .42 | .49 | 0 | 1 |
| Retired | 2403 | .14 | .34 | 0 | 1 |
| Homemaker | 2403 | .3 | .46 | 0 | 1 |
| Student | 2403 | .09 | .28 | 0 | 1 |
| Unemployed/Unable to work | 2403 | .05 | .23 | 0 | 1 |
| Male | 2412 | .48 | .5 | 0 | 1 |
| Age | 2410 | 40.95 | 14.61 | 17 | 88 |
| Education | 2406 | 4.16 | 1.32 | 1 | 7 |
| Border city residence | 2412 | .14 | .34 | 0 | 1 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Everyday contact | 2400 | 5.14 | 2.17 | 1 | 7 |

I use OLS regression in the analyses below, where robust standard errors are clustered at the neighborhood level. All continuous variables, including the outcomes, are standardized by subtracting the mean and dividing by the standard deviation. I did not impute missing values, because the proportion of missingness is fairly small across the analyses (6.6 percent for *cultural similarity* and 6.8 percent for *support for social integration*).

### *4.5.2 Findings*

Table 4.7 below presents the results. For each dependent variable, I report results from three models. As was the case with previous analyses, Model 1 includes only demographic and political controls. Model 2 adds *religious conservative*, *economic insecurity*, and the proxy for *multiculturalism* to Model 1. Finally, Model 3 adds the interaction terms created by multiplying *religious conservative* and *economic insecurity*.

**Table 4.7.** OLS Regressions Predicting Cultural Similarity and Support for Integration[a]

| | Cultural Similarity | | | Support for Integration | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (1) | (2) | (3) |
| Key Predictors | | | | | | |
| *Religious conservative* | | 0.143* | 0.287* | | 0.116* | 0.291** |
| | | (0.060) | (0.126) | | (0.053) | (0.105) |
| *Moderate econ. insecurity* | | -0.113 | -0.091 | | -0.210** | -0.160* |
| | | (0.072) | (0.079) | | (0.064) | (0.072) |
| *High econ. insecurity* | | -0.232** | -0.130 | | -0.391** | -0.309** |
| | | (0.081) | (0.094) | | (0.068) | (0.078) |
| *Multiculturalism* | | 0.168** | 0.169** | | 0.228** | 0.228** |
| | | (0.031) | (0.031) | | (0.030) | (0.030) |
| *Rel. cons. X Mod. econ. insecurity* | | | -0.069 | | | -0.171 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | (0.136) | | | (0.118) |
| *Rel. cons. X High econ. insecurity* | | | -0.394* | | | -0.301* |
| | | | (0.160) | | | (0.152) |
| Ethnicity (Turkish) | | | | | | |
| *Kurdish* | 0.397** | 0.285* | 0.286** | 0.060 | -0.084 | -0.081 |
| | (0.106) | (0.109) | (0.109) | (0.107) | (0.106) | (0.106) |
| *Other ethnicity* | -0.202+ | -0.263* | -0.263* | -0.073 | -0.165 | -0.166 |
| | (0.116) | (0.131) | (0.131) | (0.107) | (0.126) | (0.125) |
| Partisanship (AKP) | | | | | | |
| *CHP* | -0.321** | -0.263** | -0.259** | -0.355** | -0.291** | -0.290** |
| | (0.072) | (0.069) | (0.068) | (0.072) | (0.067) | (0.067) |
| *MHP* | -0.322** | -0.196* | -0.191* | -0.451** | -0.292** | -0.290** |
| | (0.083) | (0.083) | (0.083) | (0.100) | (0.091) | (0.091) |
| *HDP* | -0.269 | -0.325+ | -0.329+ | 0.082 | -0.011 | -0.017 |
| | (0.164) | (0.166) | (0.167) | (0.160) | (0.155) | (0.154) |
| *Other/Undecided* | -0.212** | -0.170** | -0.163* | -0.256** | -0.202** | -0.200** |
| | (0.067) | (0.064) | (0.064) | (0.069) | (0.066) | (0.066) |
| *Non-voter* | -0.424** | -0.374** | -0.374** | -0.221* | -0.159 | -0.156 |
| | (0.076) | (0.074) | (0.074) | (0.108) | (0.098) | (0.098) |
| Employment (Employed) | | | | | | |
| *Retired* | 0.023 | -0.003 | -0.007 | -0.057 | -0.093 | -0.096 |
| | (0.084) | (0.085) | (0.085) | (0.081) | (0.080) | (0.080) |
| *Homemaker* | 0.045 | 0.051 | 0.048 | -0.002 | 0.020 | 0.021 |
| | (0.069) | (0.067) | (0.068) | (0.074) | (0.068) | (0.068) |
| *Student* | -0.010 | -0.031 | -0.028 | 0.283** | 0.258** | 0.262** |
| | (0.087) | (0.085) | (0.085) | (0.082) | (0.083) | (0.082) |
| *Unemployed/Unable to work* | 0.012 | 0.053 | 0.059 | -0.004 | 0.057 | 0.058 |
| | (0.091) | (0.092) | (0.089) | (0.103) | (0.098) | (0.098) |
| Rural-urban status (Rural) | | | | | | |
| *Urban* | -0.025 | -0.023 | -0.021 | -0.113 | -0.110 | -0.110 |
| | (0.123) | (0.124) | (0.123) | (0.109) | (0.107) | (0.107) |
| *Metropolis* | -0.049 | -0.072 | -0.065 | 0.044 | 0.015 | 0.019 |
| | (0.107) | (0.107) | (0.106) | (0.087) | (0.086) | (0.085) |
| Other Controls | | | | | | |
| *Male* | -0.101+ | -0.105+ | -0.104+ | 0.044 | 0.030 | 0.030 |
| | (0.057) | (0.055) | (0.055) | (0.060) | (0.055) | (0.055) |
| *Age* | 0.068+ | 0.055 | 0.052 | 0.071+ | 0.056 | 0.055 |
| | (0.037) | (0.037) | (0.037) | (0.038) | (0.037) | (0.037) |
| *Education* | -0.035 | -0.029 | -0.030 | 0.049+ | 0.046 | 0.046 |
| | (0.033) | (0.033) | (0.032) | (0.029) | (0.028) | (0.029) |
| *Border city residence* | -0.339* | -0.330* | -0.336* | -0.253* | -0.244* | -0.248* |
| | (0.130) | (0.130) | (0.131) | (0.100) | (0.100) | (0.100) |
| *Everyday contact* | -0.046 | -0.046 | -0.049 | -0.023 | -0.021 | -0.022 |
| | (0.036) | (0.035) | (0.034) | (0.028) | (0.027) | (0.027) |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 0.229* | 0.322** | 0.276* | 0.139+ | 0.342** | 0.289** |
| | (0.095) | (0.111) | (0.112) | (0.079) | (0.090) | (0.093) |
| N | 2254 | 2254 | 2254 | 2247 | 2247 | 2247 |
| R-sq | 0.071 | 0.105 | 0.109 | 0.049 | 0.113 | 0.115 |
| Adj. R-sq | 0.063 | 0.096 | 0.100 | 0.041 | 0.104 | 0.106 |
| AIC | 6256.8 | 6180.3 | 6172.9 | 6276.2 | 6127.1 | 6126.2 |

[a] Robust standard errors are clustered at the neighborhood level. All continuous variables, including the outcomes, are standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.
** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two-tailed).

As can be seen in Table 4.7, the results are very similar to those obtained from the Istanbul data and support both of my hypotheses. Looking at Model 1 across the two outcomes, we see once again that party identification is a strong predictor of attitudes toward Syrian refugees, with AKP partisans perceiving greater cultural similarity with the refugees and lending a higher degree of support to their social integration compared with other voter groups. We also see that education is not correlated with Sunni Muslim majority members' attitudes toward the refugees. In other words, the counterintuitive findings from the Istanbul data are replicated with a nationally representative dataset as well.

When we look at Model 2 across both outcomes, we see that, despite the potential measurement error in how religious conservativism was measured in the KONDA survey, it has a statistically significant relationship with attitudes toward Syrian refugees. Consistent with H1, religious conservatives tend to perceive greater cultural similarity with Syrian refugees and have more support for integration policies even after controlling for partisanship, multiculturalism, and a set of demographic variables.

Model 3 tests the hypothesized interaction between religious conservative identity and perceived economic insecurity. The results show that the interaction term between *religious conservative* and *high economic insecurity* is large and statistically significant for both dependent

variables. Consistent with H2, the signs of the interaction terms are negative, meaning that the pro-refugee effects of religious conservative identity are largest when perceived economic insecurity is low.

To illustrate these findings, Figure 4.5 displays the predicted effect of religious conservativism (in standard deviation units) on each of the outcome variables at different levels of economic insecurity, while holding all other variables at their means. When economic insecurity is low, identifying as a religious conservative is associated with an increase of roughly 0.29 standard deviations in both perceived cultural similarity with Syrian refugees and support for integration policies. When economic insecurity is high, however, there is no statistically significant difference between religious conservatives and other members of the Sunni Muslim majority in terms of their attitudes toward Syrian refugees.

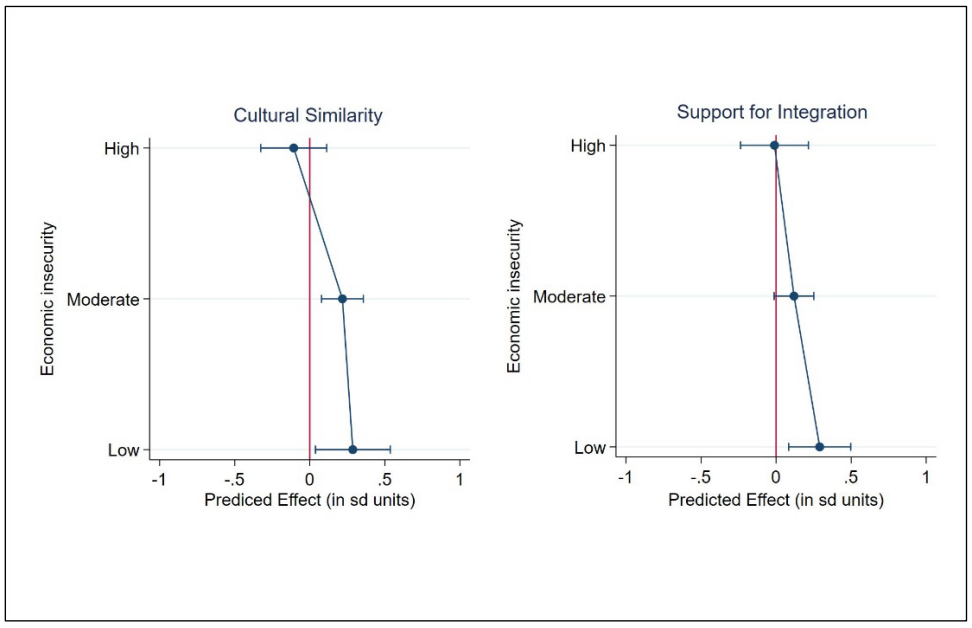


**Figure 4.10.** Predicted Effects of Religious Conservative Identity by Economic Insecurity. Note: The effects are presented in standard deviation units, and the error bars denote 95 percent confidence intervals. All control variables are held at their means.

As a robustness check, I ran additional models in which *religious conservative* is replaced with a binary variable coded 1 if the respondent is an AKP supporter, and 0 if otherwise (*AKP)*. For each outcome, Table 4.8 presents results from two separate models. Model 1 includes all variables except the interaction terms between *AKP* and *economic insecurity.* Model 2 adds to Model 1 those interaction terms.

**Table 4.8.** OLS Regressions with *AKP* as a Key Predictor[a]

| | Cultural Similarity | | Support for Integration | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (1) | (2) |
| Key Predictors | | | | |
| *AKP* | 0.278** | 0.410** | 0.241** | 0.443** |
| | (0.050) | (0.116) | (0.052) | (0.105) |
| *Moderate econ. insecurity* | -0.107 | -0.059 | -0.205** | -0.081 |
| | (0.072) | (0.100) | (0.064) | (0.093) |
| *High econ. insecurity* | -0.228** | -0.084 | -0.398** | -0.260* |
| | (0.080) | (0.116) | (0.068) | (0.103) |
| *Multiculturalism* | 0.166** | 0.168** | 0.234** | 0.235** |
| | (0.031) | (0.031) | (0.031) | (0.031) |
| *AKP X Mod. econ. insecurity* | | -0.085 | | -0.230+ |
| | | (0.134) | | (0.124) |
| *AKP X High econ. insecurity* | | -0.316* | | -0.275* |
| | | (0.152) | | (0.137) |
| Ethnicity (Turkish) | | | | |
| *Kurdish* | 0.242* | 0.235* | 0.012 | 0.007 |
| | (0.099) | (0.099) | (0.103) | (0.103) |
| *Other ethnicity* | -0.283* | -0.276* | -0.162 | -0.158 |
| | (0.130) | (0.131) | (0.123) | (0.124) |
| Employment (Employed) | | | | |
| *Retired* | -0.010 | -0.016 | -0.098 | -0.103 |
| | (0.084) | (0.084) | (0.078) | (0.078) |
| *Homemaker* | 0.054 | 0.041 | 0.016 | 0.010 |
| | (0.067) | (0.066) | (0.068) | (0.068) |
| *Student* | -0.042 | -0.045 | 0.254** | 0.254** |
| | (0.085) | (0.085) | (0.086) | (0.086) |
| *Unemployed/Unable to work* | 0.037 | 0.035 | 0.060 | 0.057 |
| | (0.088) | (0.088) | (0.099) | (0.099) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rural-urban status (Rural) | | | | |
| *Urban* | -0.043 | -0.045 | -0.118 | -0.119 |
| | (0.123) | (0.122) | (0.107) | (0.106) |
| *Metropolis* | -0.081 | -0.081 | 0.009 | 0.010 |
| | (0.104) | (0.103) | (0.085) | (0.085) |
| Other Controls | | | | |
| *Male* | -0.113* | -0.102+ | 0.031 | 0.034 |
| | (0.055) | (0.055) | (0.055) | (0.055) |
| *Age* | 0.053 | 0.054 | 0.055 | 0.056 |
| | (0.036) | (0.036) | (0.036) | (0.036) |
| *Education* | -0.042 | -0.042 | 0.035 | 0.035 |
| | (0.031) | (0.031) | (0.027) | (0.027) |
| *Border city residence* | -0.342** | -0.335* | -0.247* | -0.245* |
| | (0.130) | (0.131) | (0.099) | (0.100) |
| *Everyday contact* | -0.039 | -0.039 | -0.012 | -0.0137 |
| | (0.033) | (0.033) | (0.0270) | (0.027) |
| Constant | 0.112 | 0.040 | 0.142 | 0.035 |
| | (0.118) | (0.126) | (0.102) | (0.113) |
| N | 2307 | 2307 | 2300 | 2300 |
| R-sq | 0.096 | 0.100 | 0.104 | 0.106 |
| Adj. R-sq | 0.090 | 0.092 | 0.097 | 0.099 |
| AIC | 6338.6 | 6334.2 | 6297.6 | 6295.9 |

[a] Robust standard errors are clustered at the neighborhood level. All continuous variables, including the outcomes, are standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two-tailed).

Looking at Model 1 across both outcomes, we see that being an AKP supporter is linked to greater perceived cultural similarity with Syrian refugees and higher support for integration policies. The results from Model 2, however, reveals that this relationship hinges on respondents' sense of economic insecurity. When economic insecurity is low, being an AKP supporter is associated with an increase of 0.41 standard deviations in perceived cultural similarity with Syrian refugees and 0.44 standard deviations in support for integration policies. When economic insecurity is high, these figures fall to 0.09 and 0.17 standard deviations respectively, with the former effect being no longer statistically significant at p<0.05. In other words, we see the same

conflict between identity and interests in Sunni Muslim majority members' attitudes toward Syrian refugees when we look at partisanship instead of religious identification.

## 4.6 Summary and Conclusion

How do conservative Turkish citizens make sense of Muslim nationalist appeals asking them to treat Syrian refugees as their religious brothers and sisters? How is religious conservatism related to attitudes toward Syrians? I addressed these questions through a sequential mixed methods design, whereby qualitative data from nine focus group discussions conducted with religious conservatives in Istanbul in November 2019 were complemented by an original survey of Istanbul residents fielded in July-August 2020. A thematic analysis of the focus group data revealed that a small minority of the participants unequivocally endorsed AKP's Muslim nationalist discourse, fully subscribing to the idea of religious solidarity with Syrian refugees and taking pride in Turkey's alleged leadership among Muslim nations. The majority, however, had ambivalent attitudes. While these participants acknowledged their religious duty to help Syrians, they were also deeply concerned about the material impact of the refugee crisis on themselves and their communities. Thus, they underlined the conditional limits of their responsibilities toward refugees—limits they defined primarily in socioeconomic terms.

Using data from an original survey, I provided further evidence on this tension between Islamic fraternity (identity) and material concerns (interests) in religious conservatives' attitudes toward Syrian refugees. Consistent with identity-based approaches, my findings revealed that conservative Sunni Muslims had warmer feelings toward Syrian refugees and were more supportive of integration policies compared with other members of the Sunni Muslim majority,

even after accounting for political and demographic factors. However, I also found that the relationship between religious conservatism and attitudes toward Syrian refugees depended on individuals' assessment of their personal economic circumstances. At lower levels of perceived economic insecurity, religious conservatism had a large and statistically significant association with pro-refugee attitudes. But this association diminished with increasing material concerns, so much so that religious conservatives were statistically indistinguishable from other citizens at the highest levels of economic insecurity.

To ensure that these findings do not simply reflect the unique conditions in Istanbul, a gigantic city hosting the largest refugee population in the country, I replicated my quantitative analyses with data from a nationally representative public opinion survey carried out in February 2016. The timing of this survey allowed me to investigate religious conservatives' attitudes toward Syrian refugees at a time when the AKP government's religiously-legitimated pro-refugee discourse was at its strongest and the Turkish economy had not yet plunged into a crisis. Even under these more favorable conditions, the replication analyses revealed statistically significant interactions between religious conservatism and economic insecurity, with migration attitudes among conservative Sunni Muslims being dependent on individuals' assessment of their personal economic circumstances.

Taken together, these results suggest that religious motives have a bias-reducing effect on Sunni Muslim majority members' attitudes toward Syrian refugees in Turkey; nevertheless, such motives are not powerful enough to override personal economic concerns.

The cross-sectional nature of the data used in this study constitutes a major limitation. Although I frame my research questions and hypotheses by referring to the AKP leadership's discourse on Syrian refugees, the analyses fall short of causally establishing that majority

members' attitudes toward Syrians were indeed affected by political appeals. Virtually all of the focus group participants were aware of the government's religiously-informed narratives on the refugee crisis; however, proving a causal relationship between these narratives and mass attitudes would require an experimental design where participants are exposed to contending refugee discourses.

Despite this limitation, however, this study makes important contributions to the existing literature. First, it underscores the fact that religious concerns may play a positive role in shaping citizens' migration attitudes depending on the social and political context. In Western countries, where many migrants come from distant lands and practice different religions, politicians have used religious symbols primarily to represent newcomers as culturally alien and thus threatening to host societies. Given this background, it is not surprising that scholars have found a link between religious concerns and anti-migrant attitudes. By contrast, the ruling conservative party in Turkey has employed religious symbols and tropes to promote acceptance of Syrian refugees, who not only come from a neighboring country but also practice the same majority religion with Turkish citizens. This sociopolitical environment has made it possible for religion to have a bias-reducing impact on citizens' attitudes toward migrants.

Relatedly, I also show that political orientation and educational attainment do not have the same effects in Turkey and Western countries. While research conducted on Western samples shows that left-leaning individuals are generally more accepting of migrants, my analyses reveal that supporters of the religious conservative AKP have on average the most refugee-friendly attitudes. Likewise, while the literature points to education as one of the strongest predictors of pro-migrant attitudes, I find that it has at best a negligible relationship with Turkish citizens'

attitudes toward Syrian refugees. I thus urge scholars to pay greater attention to the scope conditions of the prevailing theories and predictive schemes in research on migration attitudes.

Finally, instead of pitting identities against interests, this study illustrates how they may interact in shaping natives' views about migrants and migration policies. The existing literature tends to view cultural and economic explanations as competing perspectives, debating whether collective identities (symbolic threats) or material interests (realistic threats) play a more important role in the formation of individuals' migration preferences. My findings suggest that this debate is counterproductive, for it prevents us from considering how interests come to be defined on the basis of established identities and how identities are (re)constructed against the backdrop of preexisting interests.

# CHAPTER V

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have examined the official discourse on and public attitudes toward Syrian refugees in Turkey within the context of a populist and civilizationist Muslim nation project championed by President Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party—a project that has elevated Sunni Islam as the defining characteristic of Turkish nationhood and promoted a neo-imperial vision of Turkey as the natural leader and guardian of Muslims, particularly in former Ottoman territories. In doing so, I have sought to advance our understanding of populist nationalism and its relationship with public sentiment toward international migrants.

My findings call into question the prevailing conceptual frameworks in the literatures on populist nationalism and public attitudes toward migrants by showing that these frameworks may need significant revision before they can be applied to cases outside Western Europe and North America. In particular, I challenge the tendency in both literatures to rely on a simplistic dichotomy that juxtaposes civic, liberal, and inclusionary understandings of the nation against ethnocultural, illiberal, and exclusionary understandings.

This dichotomy occupies a central place in the literature on populist nationalism. Indeed, scholars analyzing the populism-nationalism nexus often draw on a binary opposition between civic and ethnocultural nationalisms in order to distinguish left-wing and inclusionary varieties of populism from right-wing and exclusionary ones. However, as I have argued in Chapter III, right-wing populism and the ethnocultural forms of people-making associated with it do not necessarily lead to an outright exclusion of migrants from the national community. Depending on how they construe the nation's collective past and its rightful place and mission in the world,

right-wing populist leaders may in fact adopt a relatively welcoming stance toward migrants whom they see as culturally similar to "us." As shown in Chapter III, Erdoğan's references to the Turkish nation's Ottoman past and Islamic identity, as well as his attempts to position Turkey as the leader of the Muslim world, have led him to promote acceptance of Syrian refugees. Thus, unlike its counterparts in Northern and Western Europe, the rise of civilizationist populism in Turkey has not resulted in an exclusionary reaction to refugees. On the contrary, through their civilizationist appeals, Erdoğan and other prominent AKP members have called on Turkish citizens to extend solidarity to their "oppressed brothers and sisters" from the Middle East.

There are two additional ways in which this dissertation challenges the inclusion-exclusion dichotomy inherent in research on populist nationalism. First, it shows that a populist nationalist project may be simultaneously exclusionary toward some minority groups and inclusionary toward others. As discussed in Chapter II, over the past decade, AKP has purged a series of social groups from its definition of the "true people" whose collective will it claims to represent. In addition to Kemalist bureaucrats and intellectuals (the "secular elite"), AKP's "true people" now excludes communities as diverse as the Alevis, Kurdish nationalists, atheists, feminists, LGBTQ individuals, people with secular lifestyles, liberal democrats, and even conservative groups that oppose the government's authoritarian tendencies. And yet, as we have seen in Chapter III, Erdoğan has also adopted a more inclusionary position on Syrian (and other Sunni Muslim) refugees compared with most of his domestic opponents and international counterparts. Hence, not all cases of populism can be easily categorized along the inclusion-exclusion dichotomy.

Second, the dissertation postulates that inclusion and exclusion are matters of degree, with a wide range of possibilities lying between full inclusion as equal members and outright

exclusion. Erdoğan's government has admitted around 4 million displaced Syrians into Turkey, making the country home to the largest refugee population in the world. Erdoğan has also employed a refugee-friendly rhetoric over the past 10 years, referring to Syrian refugees as "our brothers and sisters" to whom we have both religious and historical responsibilities. However, as Chapter III has demonstrated, Erdoğan's politics and discourse on Syrian refugees have not been entirely inclusionary. Most notably, apart from a minority of highly skilled refugees, Erdoğan has not advocated a permanent legal status or full citizenship rights for displaced Syrians. In fact, for the vast majority of Syrian refugees, he has supported a policy of resettlement in a "safe zone" within Syria. What is more, Erdoğan's emphasis on Syrians' eventual return to "their own country" has become much stronger since 2018 in response to deteriorating economic conditions and surging public hostility toward refugees. That is to say, the extent to which a minority group is included in or excluded from the imagined "We" of a populist nationalist project can vary over time as the populist leader modifies his/her policies and rhetoric in accordance with the signals from his/her mass audiences.

The dualism between civic-inclusionary and ethnocultural-exclusionary boundaries is also central to the literature on public attitudes toward refugees and immigrants. As I have noted in the Introduction, this literature claims that native-born citizens who subscribe to a civic and cosmopolitan conception of the political community tend to be more welcoming of international migrants compared with their compatriots who subscribe to a more ethnocultural and parochial conception. Consistent with this claim, many studies have shown that dominant group members who have high levels of educational attainment, espouse a liberal/left-leaning ideology, hold egalitarian ethnoracial attitudes, or claim no religious affiliation are less likely to endorse restrictionist immigration and asylum policies than those who have low levels of educational

attainment, espouse a conservative/right-leaning ideology, hold ethnocentric attitudes, or identify with an established religion.

As we have observed in Chapter IV, however, this predictive scheme does not work well in explaining public attitudes toward Syrian refugees in Turkey. As a matter of fact, in Turkey, it is not the usual suspects but the relatively well-educated and cosmopolitan secular Turks who tend to hold the most anti-refugee attitudes. Supporters of the religious conservative AKP, on the other hand, tend to display more refugee-friendly attitudes. Moreover, multivariate analyses reveal that conservative Sunni Muslims have warmer feelings toward Syrian refugees and are more supportive of integration policies than other citizens, even after accounting for political and demographic factors—though this association is moderated by individuals' assessment of their personal economic circumstances.

These seemingly counterintuitive findings are not that surprising when we consider the specific social and political context in Turkey. In affluent Western countries, especially those in Western Europe, most migrants come from distant lands, exhibit distinct phenotypical features, and practice different religions than native-born citizens. In these countries, right-wing populist politicians have used ethnoracial and religious cues to represent newcomers as culturally alien and therefore threatening to host societies. Given this sociopolitical background, it is no wonder that higher education, left-wing/liberal ideology, and lack of religious affiliation predict pro-migrant attitudes. By contrast, the ruling conservative populist party in Turkey has utilized religious as well as neo-Ottomanist narratives to promote acceptance of Syrian refugees, who not only come from a neighboring country but also practice the same majority religion with native-born Turkish citizens. It is in this context that Turkish citizens have developed their views about Syrian refugees.

Overall, then, I argue that to better understand the political nature of a given populist nationalist project and its implications for international migrants, we need to go beyond the binary opposition between civic-inclusionary and ethnocultural-exclusionary notions of the nation. We should instead look at how exactly that project puts together various symbolic resources to construct particular narratives of peoplehood and what those narratives imply for specific groups of migrants. In addition, we should look at how citizens respond to and negotiate with the visions of peoplehood offered in the political field.

More broadly, I contend that grasping the relationship between populist nationalism and public attitudes toward migrants necessitates a dynamic and relational approach. We need a dynamic approach, because "the people" as an object of identification is not a fixed entity but a symbolic construct whose meaning is continually contested and thus susceptible to change. Moreover, this contestation takes place through contending narratives, which are inherently process-oriented as they provide accounts of political communities moving in space and time. At the same time, our approach needs to be relational as well. After all, new visions of peoplehood are not created in a vacuum but through interactions between political elites and mass publics in the context of changing social, economic, and political circumstances. As the American political scientist Rogers Smith (2003:32–36) explains, these interactions are both asymmetrical and constrained. They are asymmetrical because it is primarily political elites who articulate novel conceptions of peoplehood. They are constrained because in crafting a particular vision of peoplehood, political elites confront populations with preexisting identities, interests, and ideals, who therefore may reject, fully or in part, the particular vision they are presented with.

It might of course be claimed that Turkey is too exceptional a case to have any relevance for populist nationalisms elsewhere. Therefore, the theoretical arguments made above may seem

premature. It is certainly true that the Turkish case is atypical, especially when compared with populist nationalisms in Western Europe and North America. This is, after all, what makes Turkey a negative case, which we can use to question the prevailing conceptual categories and predictive schemes in the literature. It is also true that there are obvious limits to drawing broad inferences from a single case.

I should stress, however, that the Turkish case is not entirely unique. As noted in Chapter II, there are significant parallels between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's populist Muslim nationalism and Narendra Modi's populist Hindu nationalism. To begin with, Modi and his BJP, much like Erdoğan and his AKP, define the "true people" in ethnoreligious terms, claiming to represent a historically marginalized Hindu majority against a Westernized elite "who defend secularism at the expense of the authentic, Hindu identity of the nation" (Jaffrelot and Tillin 2017:184). Hence, the religious/secular divide is as central to BJP's Hindu nationalism as it is to AKP's Muslim nationalism (Gürsoy 2021; Peker and Laxer 2021). Moreover, similar to Erdoğan's civilizationist narratives about the Turkish nation, Modi represents modern India as the inheritor of a glorious Hindu civilization and promises to enhance his country's power and status in the world by reviving its unique civilizational heritage (Wojczewski 2019:261–66).

Notably, Modi's BJP resembles Erdoğan's AKP also in how it displays both exclusionary and inclusionary elements in its policies and discourse. On the one hand, BJP explicitly vilifies cultural minorities, in particular India's large Muslim community, who do not fit in with the party's Hindu nationalist view of Indian nationhood. To give an example, during the 2019 general election campaign, Amit Shah, India's current Minister of Home Affairs, referred to Muslim migrants from Bangladesh as "infiltrators" and vowed to "throw them into the Bay of Bengal" (Ghoshal 2019). On the other hand, the party has adopted a fairly welcoming stance

toward Hindu migrants from neighboring countries. For instance, the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 has granted amnesty to non-Muslim (mostly Hindu) irregular migrants who came to India from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, or Pakistan before 2015, making them eligible for Indian citizenship (Malik, Mukherjee, and Verghese 2019). This protectionism toward Hindu migrants has long been a cornerstone of Modi's political discourse, as he has sought to portray himself as a fearless defender of Hindus both inside and outside India. The following remarks delivered by Modi during a campaign rally in 2014 in the state of Assam bordering Bangladesh are highly reminiscent of Erdoğan's pro-ummah rhetoric:

> What was the fault of the [Hindu Bangladeshi] people whose wives and daughters were raped? The Hindus have been displaced from their land because of harassment. India is the land for Hindus across the globe and they are welcome to stay here. … We have a responsibility toward Hindus who are harassed and suffer in other countries. Where will they go? India is the only place for them. Our government cannot continue to harass them. We will have to accommodate them here (quoted by Ghosh 2014).

Long story short, Erdoğan's Muslim nationalism does not represent a one-of-a-kind phenomenon. Rather, it exemplifies the potential for culturally selective, and thus discriminatory, forms of transnationalism and humanitarianism intrinsic to civilizationist populism. Indeed, for all their nativist and xenophobic tendencies, many populist nationalist parties and movements also build transnational solidarities, though in different ways and degrees. For example, the right-wing populist Law and Justice Party government in Poland has openly welcomed a limited

number of Christian refugees from Syria, while its overall response to the refugee crisis has been strongly xenophobic (Narkowicz 2018). Likewise, Victor Orbán's right-wing populist FIDESZ government in Hungary, while notorious for its exclusionary nationalism, has initiated a "Hungary Helps" program that seeks to assist persecuted Christian communities across the world, especially in Africa and the Middle East.[43] Turning to the Muslim world, Pakistan's populist leader Imran Khan, like Turkey's Erdoğan, has positioned himself as a guardian of oppressed Muslims, urging Western leaders to tackle Islamophobia and anti-Muslim violence in their countries (Shakil and Yilmaz 2021).

Future research should explore such selective forms of transnationalism on the populist right more closely, trying to identify the factors that explain their growing prevalence in global politics as well as their political utility for right-wing populist actors. Researchers should also investigate the affective resonance of civilizationist appeals among constituents and probe the conditions under which efforts to establish transnational solidarities are more likely to be politically successful. Finally, scholars should also address how rival civilizationist populisms shape and potentially reinforce one another.

[43] For the official website of the program, go to https://hungaryhelps.gov.hu/en/.

# APPENDIX

## A.1 Focus Group Discussion Guide

### I. Introduction

- Briefly introduce the research to participants.
- Go over the consent form and ask if participants have any questions.
- Get verbal consent from each member for participating in the study.
- Get verbal consent from each member for audio-recording the discussion.
- State that differences of opinion are normal and expected, stressing that participants should feel free to express their genuine ideas and feelings.
- Ask each participant to briefly introduce themselves to the group, including their age, occupation, marital status, and hobbies.

### II. Implementation of the Collage Technique

- Divide participants into two subgroups.
- Give each subgroup the same set of magazines and distribute the tools needed for implementing the collage technique: scissors, adhesives, pens, and white canvases.
- Write the theme of the discussion on the blackboard: “Living together with Syrian refugees.”
- Explain the theme and the task: Please imagine a scenario in which Syrian refugees will stay in Turkey permanently and continue their lives among native-born Turkish citizens. What are the thoughts and feelings, whether positive or negative, that this scenario elicits

in you? We would like you to tell us your emotions and ideas using images from the magazines in front of you. These images may be a literal or symbolic representation of your emotions and ideas. Since we will later ask why you have picked those images, please feel free to use any image that you find meaningful. We encourage each of you to first go over the magazines and cut the images that stand out for you. You can then work with your group members to prepare a common visual presentation. We will give you about 20 minutes to complete this task.

- Invite the groups one by one to present their collages.
    - Remind participants that the audio-recording will begin.
    - Make sure every visual on the canvases is explained.
    - Allow participants to ask questions or give feedback to each other.

III. Discussion about the Impact of Syrian Refugees on Turkey

*Economic impact*

- What do you think about the economic impact of Syrian refugees in Turkey? Do you think hosting the refugees has any positive or negative effects on the Turkish economy?
- Probe if not brough up by participants:
    - It is said that Syrians are working for low wages. Do you know anything about this? If it is true, what do you thinks the consequences are?
    - Some claim that Syrian entrepreneurs and shopkeepers are contributing to the economy by creating jobs. Others claim that they have an unfair advantage over

their Turkish counterparts because they aren't paying taxes. What is your position in this debate?

- Do you think that the arrival of Syrian refugees has led to a noticeable increase in the housing rents in your neighborhood?
- Some claim that Syrian refugees overcrowd public services such as healthcare and education. What is your experience in this area? Have there been any changes in the quality of the public services you receive over the past few years?

*Religious-political impact*

- What do you know about the religious beliefs and practices of Syrian refugees? Do they have any impact on the religious and cultural life in Turkey?
- Probe if not brought up:
  - According to one viewpoint, Syrians' interpretation of Islam is stricter and more conservative than the dominant interpretation of Islam in Turkey, which may have a negative impact on the religious and cultural life in our country. According to another viewpoint, there are significant differences among Syrians in terms of their religious beliefs and practices, which should be seen as enriching Turkish society. Which of these two positions is closer to your view? Why?
  - Some people believe that Turkish society has become more conservative over the past decade. Do you agree with this assessment? If so, do you think Syrians have anything to do with it?
  - Some citizens fear that Syrians will become a voting base for conservative parties, thus disturbing the exiting political balance against secular and Alevi citizens. Do

you think Syrian refugees will play any significant role in Turkish politics? If so, how?

*Ethnic-demographic impact*

- What do you know about the ethnic identity of Syrian refugees? Do you think hosting the refugees has any positive or negative effect on the demographic composition of Turkey?
- Probe if not brought up:
    - Turkey is hosting more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees today, the largest refugee population in the world. Moreover, fertility rates are higher among Syrian refugees than among native-born Turkish citizens. For this reason, some argue that Turkey is facing a risk of Arabization, even claiming that in the future the Turks will become a minority in Turkey. Others, however, stress that Turkey already has many citizens of Arab background. They argue that Syrians, too, can integrate into society and contribute to Turkey's cultural diversity. What do you think?

*Impact on national security and public safety*

- What do you think about the impact of Syrian refugees in matters concerning national security and public safety?
- Probe if not brought up:
    - According to national surveys, many Turkish citizens believe that Syrian refugees have increased crime levels in cities across Turkey. Official crime statistics, however, indicate that the proportion of Syrians involved in crime is lower than

the proportion of native-born citizens involved in crime. Do Syrian refugees make you feel less safe? If so, why?

- There are many claims in the social media about young male Syrian refugees sexually assaulting women or children. What have you read, heard, or witnessed about this topic? What do you think about those claims?
- Some fear that Syrian refugees increase the risk of terrorism in Turkey. Do you share this concern? Do Syrian refugees pose a national security risk for Turkey?

IV. Discussion about Public Discourses on Syrian Refugees

*Discourse of religious brotherhood*

- According to one viewpoint, Syrians are our religious brothers and sisters; therefore, it is not only a humanitarian but also a religious responsibility to help them. Have you heard about this view before? What do you think about it?

*Discourse of historical ties*

- Some argue that Turkey has deep-rooted bonds with Syria, dating back to the Ottoman era. They say that Syrians fought in the Ottoman army for centuries, and that many of them shed their blood to protect our shared lands. Given this history, they hold, it would be unacceptable for us to turn a blind eye to the human suffering in Syria and leave Syrians on their own. Have you heard about this view before? Do you agree or disagree with it? Please explain.

*Discourse of humanitarian responsibility*

- According to many civil society organizations, it is a humanitarian responsibility to help those fleeing violence regardless of their religion, race, and ethnicity, even if that involves real challenges or difficulties for host communities. What do you think about this perspective?

*Discourse of national interests*

- Some political scientists maintain that sheltering a large refugee population has increased Turkey's international prestige. Moreover, they argue that this provides Turkey with a bargaining chip in its relationships with the United States, Russia, and Europe. What is your take on this argument?

V. Concluding Remarks

- If you had a minute to talk with policymakers about Syrian refugees, what would you tell them? What would be the most important thing to convey to them from our discussion today.

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