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Traumas and Glories: Politics, Narratives and Memory Under the Rule of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey

STRESZCZENIE

Traumy i chwały: polityka, narracje i pamięć pod rządami Partii Sprawiedliwości i Rozwoju w Turcji

W artykule zbadano wykorzystanie pamięci jako narzędzia politycznego przez rząd Partii Sprawiedliwości i Rozwoju (AKP), podkreślając wpływ oficjalnej narracji historycznej na upamiętnienie konkretnych klęsk i zwycięstw, a także jej wpływ na zbiorową tożsamość. W ciągu ostatnich dwóch dekad pod rządami AKP Turcja przeszła transformację kulturową. Transformacja ta nastąpiła poprzez ponowną ocenę islamsko-ottomańskiej przeszłości przy jednoczesnym dystansowaniu się od kemalistycznego sekularyzmu. Przestrzegająca zasad islamu AKP wyartykułowała swój program polityki historycznej poprzez inicjatywę kulturalną inspirowaną neoosmanizmem Turguta Özala. W tym celu w ramach programu kulturalnego opracowano szereg historycznych narracji bazujących na nostalgii za Osmanami, jednocześnie analizując różne aspekty świeckiego paradygmatu kraju. Program ten był realizowany poprzez upamiętnienie narodowej tożsamości, takich jak zdobycie Konstantynopola w 1453 r., a także tworzenie miejsc pamięci, takich jak muzea, parki tematyczne czy meczety. Tworzenie miejsc pamięci wokół wybranych narracji historycznych umożliwia szczegółowe zbadanie, w jaki sposób ideologia polityczna krzyżuje się z pamięcią, przyczyniając się do ciągłej transformacji krajobrazu kulturowego i politycznego Turcji.

Słowa kluczowe: Turcja, neoosmanizm, pamięć, tożsamość, polityka religijna

Abstract

This paper examines the use of memory as a political tool by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, emphasising the impact of the official historical narrative on commemoration of selected historical traumas and glories, in addition to its influence on collective identity. Over the last two decades, Turkey has undergone a cultural transformation under the rule of the AKP. This transformation has taken place through reevaluation of the Islamic-Ottoman past while distancing itself from Kemalist secularism. Adhering to the principles of Islam, the AKP has articulated its political agenda through a cultural initiative inspired by Turgut Özal's Neo-Ottomanism. To this end, a series of narratives was developed under a cultural programme based on nostalgia for the Ottoman while scrutinising different aspects of the country's secular paradigm. The programme was carried out through the commemoration of identity, including the Conquest of Constantinople in 1453 as well as the construction of 'sites of memory', such as museums, theme parks or mosques. The establishment of 'sites of memory' around these selected narratives allows for an in-depth exploration of how political ideology intersects with memory, contributing to the ongoing transformation of Turkey's cultural and political landscape.

Keywords: Turkey, Neo-Ottomanism, memory, identity, religious politics

Introduction

During the 1980s, a paradigm shift took place in Turkey, initiating a change from a military state to a secular state. For this, in addition to a series of political measures, an ideological programme was carried out by the government of Turgut Özal that included what would be referred to in the following decade as 'Neo-Ottomanism'. This term defines an integrative cultural movement that sought to link the homogenising policies implemented by the state since 1923 and up to that time with a new integrative perspective of the various state minorities inspired by a re-reading of Ottoman society and culture. In the 1990s, these ideas became part of a cultural agenda of Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist parties, the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, 1983–1998) and the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*, 1997–2001), adding to the idea of cultural pluralism a feeling of nostalgia for the development of a state that, being secular, could be read from the perspective of political Islam. The rise of the AKP government at the beginning of the 21st century resulted in the acceleration of nostalgia for the Ottoman, with a strong influence on both internal and external politics as well as on popular culture disseminated through the media, political speeches, or architecture.

The rise of Islamic Neo-Ottomanism is the product of a cultural programme based on the pursuit of 'memory policies' dedicated to constructing a narrative around the Ottoman past, a narrative on which a new identity can be built. This narrative is understood as 'restorative nostalgia' based on identifying the Ottoman with beauty, good and truth, which is accompanied by a series of moral and aesthetic values. The 'politics of memory' aim, on the one hand, to rewrite history and construct the project of a 'New Turkey' based on the perception of the Ottoman 'historical legacy' through the reconstruction of collective memory. On the other hand, these policies seek to reconstruct a new identity based on new old values through which the society will be able to unite as a nation concerned about the future of the state.

Through reflecting on the political uses of memory, this paper aims to examine the phenomenon of Neo-Ottomanism as a political mechanism based on (1) the selection of certain historical traumas and glories on which to reconstruct collective identity and (2) the creation of 'sites of memory' around them, such as museums, theme parks or mosques.

I. Theoretical framework

Halbwachs defines collective memory as a process of remembering through which the society reconstructs the past lived at the group or community level. The past of collective memory differs, however, from history, since the latter refers to dates and events, while collective memory speaks of changes in the society and its experiences over time. Individual and group experience forms the basis on which collective memory is built. It is history that provides time frames and milestones on which memories are built and collective memory is constituted or re-constituted. One of the author's objectives is to discover history as the end of memory since it introduces limits and 'objective' data to the set of individual and collective experiences of individuals in a society. The production of history implies the objectification of memory and, therefore, its loss[1], which brings us to Pierre Nora's differentiation between 'memory' and 'history'. Memory is always linked to 'places' (*lieux de mémoire*), is selective and highlights some events, figures and symbols while forgetting others. History, in turn, is

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[1] M. Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, New York 1980.

a comprehensive understanding of the past. Both concepts interplay: memory and the 'sites of memory' are key for the construction of collective identities and the formation of a shared historical consciousness[2]. In addition to this, Ricoeur discusses the concept of forgetting as an inherent condition of memory. Thus, history is not an objective reconstruction of the past, but a narrative reconstruction involving selective interpretation of past events. This ultimately has ethical and political implications[3].

This is the reason for the emergence of the 'politics of memory', i.e., past policies implemented by a government, whose objectives may be, in E. Meyer's words, 'amnesty, integration and demarcation'[4], i.e. policies dedicated to forgiveness, relating to a certain episode or historical stage or differentiating oneself from it. These policies imply, in any case, an instrumentalisation of history, legitimising new stages and political projects. Collective memory is a social construction, so remembering the past is impossible without interest in the present[5]. The ultimate goal of these policies is to legitimise the actions of various actors, easily identifiable, and with this legitimacy, it is possible to find the search for hegemony in the public sphere by these actors.

When it comes to understanding the functioning of the politics of memory, it is worth paying attention to two fundamental aspects: the revision of history based on the selection of certain traumas and glories and the reconstruction of collective identity based on this. Through his study of the formation of the role of identity, the psychologist Vamik D. Volkan[6], created the theory of "chosen traumas and glories". Chosen trauma implies that the experience of a catastrophe by a social group is followed by mourning, which is perpetuated over time by collective memory. At certain moments, political leaders may initiate the reactivation of chosen traumas in the interest of reconstructing group ideologies, using these historical events as common identity symbols to pursue a political agenda.

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[2] P. Nora, *Los Lugares de la Memoria*, Montevideo 2008.

[3] P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Chicago 2004.

[4] E. Meyer, *Memory and Politics*, [in:] *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. A. Erll, A. Nünning, New York–Berlin 2008, pp. 174.

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 180.

[6] V.D. Volkan, *Large-Group Identity: Border Psychology and Related Societal Processes*, "Mind and Human Interaction" 2013, vol. III, pp. 10–11.

The perpetuation of such traumas and glories performs the social task of reencountering and reconciling with the present. In this effort, favoured by the authorities or what Volkan calls "identity makers"[7], memory-related organisations are created. These organisations and institutions, founded by social actors and elites, energise identities to produce and reproduce them continuously through memory[8]. In other words, both traumas and selected glories serve as a basis of a political programme based on their institutionalisation and, with it, the reformation of collective identities through the re-articulation of collective memory.

The State and the actors as well as the elites present in it are in a constant search for collective identity, which implies the creation of a discourse supported by history, the narration – or narrativisation – of memory, and, returning to Halbwachs, the loss of it. The use of this reconstruction of identity always implies the differentiation of 'one's own' from 'the others' and grants a positioning in the national and international. Traumas and selected glories have both a destructive and formative character for collective identity. Collective memory about formative events – the Conquest of Constantinople in 1453 or the emergence of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 – can be both challenged and reappropriated or reshaped, especially in the times of ontological or identity insecurity, something accentuated with the fall of the USSR and the rise of the 'global village'[9].

The need of the elites to reconstruct and reassure identity comes hand in hand with a series of national and international policies and what Schmidt determines as a cultural programme[10]. National policies will be based on the transfer of the reconstructed identity, together with its values, attitudes, perceptions, etc., to, for instance, the relations between majorities and minorities. In the international arena, they will be inspired by the transmission of certain identity

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[7] *Ibidem*, p. 8.

[8] E. Langenbacher, Y. Shain, *Collective Memory as a Factor in Political Culture and International Relations*, [in:] *Power and the Past: Collective Memory and International Relations*, ed. E. Langenbacher, Washington, D.C. 2010, p. 22.

[9] A.J. Innes, B.J. Steele, *Memory, Trauma and Ontological Security*, [in:] *Memory and Trauma in International Relations: Theories, Cases and Debates*, eds. E. Resende, D. Budryte, London–New York 2014, p. 18.

[10] S.J. Schmidt, *Memory and Remembrance: A Constructivist Approach*, [in:] *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. A. Erll, A. Nünning, New York–Berlin 2008, p. 199.

values and the restructuring of relations with other states based on these values and experiences. As for the cultural programme, the politics of memory are used bythe elites to direct emotions and emotional values. This will be done on the basis of a set of communication instruments that offer representations of 'the past', elaborating memories and favouring the reconstruction of identity.

Finally, within the identity agenda, it is worth addressing Pierre Nora's classic concept of 'places of memory', which represent the blurred link between the present and the past. National history is reconstructed from these places, which supposedly 'guard' memory. They are symbolic places that leave aside affective or subjective memory and replace it with the homogeneity of history. They are places that block time, materialise the immaterial, and bring the past into the present. The construction of these places – not necessarily tangible, as they can also be symbols, hymns, etc. – implies the reconstruction of identity based on the politics of memory and the modification of collective memory by the elites.

II. The reconstruction of memory: from Ottomanism to oblivion and from oblivion to neo-Ottomanism

With the birth of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the government headed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk implemented a series of reforms aimed at building from scratch a new political system based on a completely new identity. To this end, he introduced a series of policies based on the exclusion of the religion from the public sphere and the banishment of the Ottoman from history. During the 1920s, the Turkish government abolished any trace of symbolic memory of the Islamic nature of the Ottoman Empire, and this narrative was transmitted into the Constitution. In doing so, any effort to make Islam a public religion was securitised, and the guarantor of it would be the army[11]. However, it is necessary to stress that Turkish *laiklik* (laicism) did not represent a sharp division or a state 'neutrality' towards religion, but an absorption of religion by the state through the creation of the Directory of Religious Affairs in 1923[12]. Through the reform of the alphabet, for example, it was not only sought to modernise the country but

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[11] B.E. Sasley, *Remembering and forgetting in Turkish identity and policymaking*, [in:] *Memory and Trauma...*, p. 147.

[12] I. Gözaydın, *Management of Religion in Turkey: The Diyanet and Beyond*, [in:] *Freedom of Religion and Belief in Turkey*, eds. Ö. Heval Çınar, M. Yıldırım, Newcastle upon Tyne 2014, pp. 10–35.

also to establish a historical barrier through which new genera-
tions would find it difficult to access the Ottoman. Thus, the new
regime presented the Ottoman Empire as the dark age of the Turks
and the Republic as a glorious era that was yet to be written. This
is because one of the fundamental objectives for the revolution's
leaders was to transform the religious identity into a national iden-
tity, for which only the path of secularity was viable[13].

Sasley determines the effort by which the republican govern-
ment changed Turkey's orientation towards the West as a 'mne-
monic reconstruction', understanding this reorientation as an
antithesis to the Islamic East[14]. Establishing secularism in the new
system implied that the Ottoman and the Islamic were banished.
In addition to norms such as the call to prayer in Turkish intro-
duced in 1932, changes in clothing such as the ban on the *fez* im-
plemented in 1925, or the alphabet revolution of 1928, the army
was given the role of guardian of such secular values. For this
reason, throughout the 20th century, any attempt to make Islam
public would be intervened by military authorities. This resulted
in coups such as the one in 1960, when one of the causes was the
political use of Islam by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, or ban-
ning Islamist political movements and parties[15].

Thus, except on specific occasions, it was not until the 1980s
that Turkey saw reflections on the Ottoman past or Islam in the
public sphere. From this moment on, a political change started
based on the beginning of the transfer from the military to the
civilian sphere, and, with this, new perspectives of understanding
history were established.

The term Neo-Ottomanism, coined by David Barchard in 1985,
emerged to define the popular awareness of the Ottoman past used
as a political tool to give new perspectives to Turkish contempora-
neity[16]. This definition, however, has to be understood within the
context of the paradigm shift initiated by Turgut Özal's govern-
ment. During the following decades and up to the present day,
the transfer would culminate and the advent of the 21st century
witnessed the construction of a new identity increasingly distant
from Kemalist values[17].

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[13] Y. Çolak, *Ottomanism vs. Kemalist: Collective Memory and Cultural Plural-
ism in 1990's Turkey*, "Middle Eastern Studies" 2006, vol. XLII, no. 4, pp. 590–591.

[14] B.E. Sasley, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

[15] K. Öktem, *Turkey since 1989: Angry Nation*, London 2011, pp. 44–47.

[16] H.M. Yavuz, *Social and Intellectual Origins of Neo-Ottomanism: Searching
for a Post-National Vision*, "Die Welt Des Islams" 2016, vol. LXI, p. 443.

[17] K. Öktem, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–13.

1. Historical revisionism: Turgut Özal and Necmettin Erbakan

The governments of Turgut Özal (1983–1989 as Prime Minister, 1989–1993 as President) implied the inclusion of a series of policies that approached the Turkish social reality from a new perspective, such as presenting the Republic of Turkey as the heir to the Ottoman Empire. Özal aimed to reconstruct the Ottoman identity as a heterogeneous system through which to reorganise the state in the international context and, at the same time to define the concept of citizenship through a more Ottoman way, based on a supposedly 'supra-ethnic' identity shared in a pluralistic manner[18]. These ideas originate from the Turkish-Islamic synthesis thought developed in the *Aydınlar Ocağı* movement in the 1970s and the 1980s, to which Özal was linked and which promoted a nationalist vision of Turkish history while bringing forward a political role of Islam. Prompted by İbrahim Kafesoğlu and linked to several other right-wing politicians, this movement became the base for top-down state identity policies that reached all levels of state structures, ranging from the educational system to the army[19].

One example of this policy is the incorporation of the Ottoman imagery into Turkish daily life through the banknotes issued after the 1980 coup d'état. In his analysis of the political significance of banknotes during the Republican period, Erdoğan Altun presents the coup as a breaking point: prominent figures from before the republican era began to be included, such as Mevlana Rumi, Yunus Emre and the architect Sinan with the Selimiye Mosque behind him[20].

In addition, since the beginning of Özal's movement, Neo-Ottomanism has emerged as a re-articulation of Turkish nationalism based on increasing tolerance for diversity and establishing ties with former Ottoman territories, such as the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Middle East, following the idea of Ottoman cosmopolitism[21].

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[18] Y. Çolak, *op. cit.*, pp. 592–595.

[19] Y. Taşkın, *Muhafazakar Bir Proje Olarak Türk-İslam Sentezi*, [in:] *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce*, vol. V (*Muhafazakarlık*), ed. A. Çiğdem, İstanbul 2003, pp. 381–402; C. Pallard, *Shaping Turkish Conservatism: Aydınlar Ocağı and the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis*, "EURAS Journal of Social Sciences" 2022, vol. II, pp. 97–132.

[20] E. Altun, *Bankotlardan politikayı okumak: Cumhuriyet dönemi banknotlarına dair bir değelendirme*, "Eğitimi Bilim Toplum Dergisi" 2019, vol. XVII, issue 68, pp. 65–68.

[21] Neo-Ottomanism has also a clear expression in foreign policy. During Turgut Özal's era, it was expressed through the creation of new ties with the former

After 1983, with the first post-coup elections, the presence of the civilian in the government increased, and with it, from 1995 onwards, the Islamist ideology party of Necmettin Erbakan, *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party), carried out a programme in the cities where it governed based on the promotion of the Ottoman-Islamic culture, which was evoked in opposition to the secular and republican[22]. Various Islamist parties, such as the aforementioned *Refah Partisi* or the *Fazilet Partisi* (Virtue Party), which marked the Islamist political ideology of the decade, promoted, in addition to the beginning of the recovery and revision of the Ottoman-Islamic culture, a perspective based on 'religious federalism', the 'millet' system[23], through which pluralism is defined by the self-determination of ethnoreligious communities[24].

Maintaining Özal's ideas of plurality and foreign policy, Neo-Ottomanism was established with the creation of a narrative that reconstructed memory to fulfil the national and international agenda of Necmettin Erbakan's parties first, ideas that would be later taken over by the AKP. The factors describing the new term defend the ideas of Islamist parties based on Islamic cosmopolitanism, the use of the symbols of Islam, the selection of traumas and glories that identified the collective, the revisionism of Westernising policies and the demarcation of the Kemalist secular project[25] much criticised by ideologues of the term such as Necip Fazıl Kısakürek[26].

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regions of the Ottoman Empire. However, with the AKP's rise to power, Neo-Ottomanism became a source of soft power through the emergence of multiple institutions and policies (Yunus Emre Institute, the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency-TIKA, Red Cross-Kızılay or Turkish National TV-TRT) that, by instrumentalising the Ottoman Empire's common imperial past with other territories such as the Balkans, the Middle East or the Caucasus, promoted the strengthening of diplomatic, cultural and economic ties.

[22] Y. Ç o l a k, *op. cit.*, p. 597.

[23] In contemporary Turkish, the term 'millet' refers to 'nation'. However, both *Refah Partisi* and *Fazilet Partisi* approach the term from an Ottoman perspective, in which the different independent religious groups (i.e. Armenians, Orthodox Christians, etc.) are governed by their own legal codes.

[24] G. S e u f e r t, *Islamist Discourse and Society Memory in Turkey*, [in:] *Crisis and Memory in Islamic Societies*, eds. A. Newwirth, A. Pflitsch, Würzburg 2001, pp. 306–307.

[25] H.M. Y a v u z, *op. cit.*, pp. 445–446.

[26] Ahmet Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904–1983) was an Islamist writer and ideologue of anti-Semitic, anti-Marxist, and anti-capitalist ideology. During his life, he defied Kemalist ideology by inciting several revolts and maintained good relations with Islamist politicians such as Necmettin Erbakan or Alpaslan Türkes, of whose

The main objective, therefore, of the Neo-Ottomanist project is to deconstruct republican Kemalism and its concept of identity and society, promoting a pluralistic society instead of the conceptualisation of a homogeneous society and a recovery of relations with the former territories of the empire in the face of Westernism.

With Erbakan and the Islamist parties during the 1990s, it implied a progressive Islamisation of politics and, consequently, of the concep of history. The decade of the 2000s came with the nationalisation of Islamic Neo-Ottomanism. Before it had been perceived from Özal's pluralistic point of view, and with Erbakan, it was understood within the Islamic. Now, the Islamic-Ottoman memory would begin to be studied as a joint entity, applying to internal and external state policies.

2. The AKP and the statehood of the Islamic-Ottoman memory

The coming to power of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, AKP), defining itself as a conservative and democratic party, was marked by the beginning of a series of memory politics based on restorative nostalgia about the Ottoman. This nostalgia was based on integrating the new government into the historical line of the Ottoman Empire, identifying it with a golden era for Turks and Islam, and demarcating itself from the secular and national republican project. The AKP government implied the establishment of neo-Ottomanism as an ideological programme structured to fulfil a certain social, political, and economic agenda.

In the 21st century, the military tutelage of Kemalism saw its end, and with it, economic and social control was replaced by the beginning of a neoliberal economy and a pluralistic vision of society. This was accompanied by the emergence of a new bourgeoisie from Anatolia. This new bourgeoisie, self-styled as the Anatolian Tigers, identified ideologically with the AKP government and opposed the old bourgeoisie of the cities of secular ideology. As Mardin explains[27], during the Ottoman Empire, religious institutions found themselves between the edge and the periphery, but

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parties he was partially an ideologue. *Necip Fazıl Kısakürek*, *biyografi*, http://www.biyografi.net/kisiayrinti.asp?kisiid=249 (accessed: 10 I 2024).

[27] I. Parlak, O. Aycan, *Turkey's Memory Politics In Transformation: Akp's New and Old Turkey*, [in:] *Political Culture of Turkey in the Rule of the AKP: Change and Continuity*, eds. A. Bilgin, A. Öztürk, Munich 2016, p. 79.

modernisation, through secularity, brought the religious to the periphery. Thus, this bourgeoisie brought religion back to the centre of political struggle. The new bourgeoisie and the new political perspective of the government brought with it a dichotomy based on New Turkey versus Old Turkey.

The New Turkey project has three targets: the 100th anniversary of the Republic of Turkey in 2023, the 600th anniversary of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 2053, and the 1000th anniversary of the arrival of the Turks in Anatolia in 2071. The mission and objectives were developed in the document *Vision 2023: Great Nation, Great Power, Target 2023*[28]. With these objectives, a reform of the collective memory was carried out based on the introduction of various historical commemorations related to the Ottoman, such as the anniversary of the Conquest of Constantinople, the transformation of the Hagia Sophia Museum into a mosque or the erection of new mosques such as Çamlıca or Taksim. Nostalgia was added to the formulas of Özal and Erbakan, conceptualising the Ottoman Empire as an era of prosperity in which diverse communities lived under the rule of the Turks and Islam. Foreign and economic policies were reinforced in the former territories and this was accompanied by the construction of museums related to the Islamic-Ottoman as well as the rise of what Ergin and Karakaya refer to as the 'Ottomania', the outburst of production of audio-visual content related to the Ottoman[29].

III. AKP's memory politics

In June 2018, the Turkish government released an animated film titled *TR2071*[30]. This short sci-fi film is set in Turkey in the year 2071, a prosperous Turkey with full education and a world leader in technological development. The plot revolves around presenting the AKP government's goals for the coming decades through the life of a Turkish astronaut heading for the colonisation of Mars. The AKP's vision of the Turkish government is explained on the basis of this plot, weaving threads from the Ottoman past to the present

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[28] *Ibidem*, p. 68.
[29] M. E r g i n, Y. K a r a k a y a, *Between neo-Ottomanism and Ottomanism: Navigation State-led and Popular Cultural Representations of the Past*, "New Perspectives on Turkey" 2017, vol. XLVI, pp. 33–51.
[30] *TR2071*, https://www.tr2071.com (accessed: 10 I 2024).

and to a future in which Turkey becomes a world power thanks to the maintenance of Islamic-Ottoman values. It is noteworthy, among other things, how Atatürk is barely mentioned in this short film, yet references to the Ottoman are constant.

Although it is little known, *TR2071* clearly demonstrates the government's perspective not only of the future but also of the past, as well as its role in Turkey's history. This need to draw a line between the past and the future in order to position itself as a bridge between a glorious past and a prosperous future is legitimised through a series of memory politics. First, following Volkan's theories, a series of traumas and glories are chosen on which to build the collective identity. This identity, united by a set of values, is translated into new internal and external reforming policies inspired by this reformed identity. Finally, a series of 'sites of memory' is constructed and dedicated to sustaining these lines drawn between the Ottoman past and the present through the reconstruction of collective memory.

1. Glories and traumas: choosing the past

In Volkan's theory of traumas and glories, the author speaks of these two elements as nothing more than mental representations shared by a collective around a historical event as well as the different figures who participated in it. When recovering from a trauma, individuals undergo a process of 'identification' through which the individual assimilates the experience of other members of the group as his or her own, building a collective identity. In addition, there is a reservoir of representation, based on the role of objects that unconsciously become part of the self-representation of the individual and the collective[31].

In the case of Turkey, the government's ideological project was based on the selection of two glorious historical episodes and one traumatic experience for the Islamic community and developed its policies around them intending to reconstruct the collective identity. Since the AKP came to power in 2003, such an ideological project of the government has been developed around the construction of the New Turkey based on the aforementioned *Vision 2023* plan, as the initial part of the three stages. This project has a double reading of the 'commemoration' of the 100th anniversary of the

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[31] V.D. Volkan, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

birth of the Republic of Turkey. On the one hand, this plan follows a series of objectives in various matters of economy, foreign policy, communications, tourism, etc., but on the other hand, it implies a historical review and the culmination of the demarcation of the Republican project. To a certain extent, the year 1923 implied, as we have seen it in the previous point, a traumatic moment in the history of Turkish political Islam since Islam went from being a central element of public life in the Ottoman Empire to being situated during the Republic in the peripheral and private sphere. Likewise, this year marked the beginning of the military presidencies and the army's control of politics, tutelage, and guardianship of secular values. This materialised in various historical 'traumas' anchored in the memories of a part of the population, based on the coup d'état against the government of Adnan Menderes in 1960 or the banning of Islamist parties such as *Refah Partisi* or *Fazilet Partisi* in the 1990s. The goal of 2023, therefore, would not only imply the celebration of the Republic but also can be interpreted as the triumph of a long-lived civilian government with an Islamic slant[32].

Vision 2023 carries with it the celebration of two past glories: the arrival of the Turks in Anatolia in 1071 with the Battle of Malazgirt, and the Conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Concerning the former, in addition to the ultimate goal of *Vision 2071*, the celebration of the battle of Malazgirt has also undergone a revision in recent decades. The celebration of this event saw a notable increase in 1960 when it began to be appreciated as a victory of Islam, and from 1971 it became a nationalist celebration. It gained popularity again in the 1990s when the celebrations were not so much Turkish as they were Islamic. In recent years, there have been festivals of the battle of Malazgirt accompanied by *mehter* concerts (Ottoman orchestra), traditional dances and costumes, and archery and horseback riding workshops[33]. Not only is the battle commemorated, but it is also an event celebrating the triumph of Islam and Turks[34].

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[32] D a i l y S a b a h, *AK Party to Carry Turkey Toward 2023 Targets, 2053 Vision: Erdoğan*, 24 III 2021, https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/legislation/ak-party-to-carry-turkey-toward-2023-targets-2053-vision-erdogan (accessed: 17 VI 2021).

[33] TRT World, *Battle of Manzikert: Turks' First Step into Anatolia*, 1 IX 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHwoD5Q_1SY (accessed: 10 I 2024).

[34] H. K a l a f a t, *Doç. Dr. Mehmet Ö. Alkan Yanıtladı "Malazgirt'in Asıl Keşfi 1960 Darbesi Sonrası Oldu"*, Bianet, Bağımsız İletişim Ağı, 26 VIII 2017, https://

As for *Vision 2053*, the commemoration of the Ottoman conquest was effectively started when Reyep Tayip Erdoğan was mayor of Istanbul. Over the past two decades, an entire infrastructure dedicated to commemorating the conquest has been developed. As with the celebrations of the Battle of Malazgirt, the 1990s saw an increase in celebrations of this event, and while it previously had a primarily nationalistic significance, this was relegated to a second level, with the Islamic value of the conquest once again taking precedence. This served as a key to the development of multiple strategies to reinforce the image of Istanbul as the cultural, historical, and economic capital of Turkey *vis-à-vis* Ankara[35]. In 2012, the film *Fetih 1453* was released, a blockbuster narrating the conquest of Constantinople and depicting the Byzantines as decadent and the Ottomans as brave men bearing magnanimous values. In addition to the annual celebration of the Conquest, the Panorama 1453 museum was built, commemorating the event and promoting the date as the beginning of a glorious era[36]. Also, in 2018, the Panorama 1326 museum[37] opened to the public in the city of Bursa to commemorate the Ottoman conquest of the city and the establishment of Bursa as the capital of the Ottoman dynasty.

Through the celebration of these three events with the use of anniversaries and historical review, the Turkish collective memory began to acquire greater awareness of the Ottoman past, a glorious past that represents the good and the right. Therefore, celebrating the past and projecting the anniversaries into the future implies opening a path that places today's Turkish society as a political protagonist[38].

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m.bianet.org/bianet/toplum/189425-malazgirt-in-asil-kesfi-1960-darbesi-sonra-si-oldu (accessed: 10 I 2024).

[35] M. Bölükbaşı, *Bir 'genele icadı' olarak İstanbul'un fethi*, "Sosyoloji Dergisi" 2013, vol. XXVIII, pp. 81–82.

[36] H.M. Yavuz, *op. cit.*, p. 458; M. Ergin, Y. Karakaya, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

[37] *Panorama 1453*, Tarih Müzesi, https://www.panoramikmuze.com (accessed: 10 I 2024).

[38] During the early days of the Republic there were indeed Ottoman celebrations, for instance in the town of Söğüt in the Bilecik region during the 1940s, commemorating the founder of the Ottoman dynasty, Ertuğrul Gazi. They were initially met with suspicion by therepublican authorities, but were eventually approved because they featured a content and language closely related to the republican imaginary, rhetoric and poetics. H. Yılmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey, 1923–1945*, New York 2013, pp. 213–219.

2. Identity and collective memory: sites of memory for the anchoring of a new ideology

The celebration of three anniversaries has served as a tool to reconstruct the collective identity based on an ideological project. However, in addition to these anniversaries, the memory policies of the AKP government have been based on the construction of sites of memory, a set of representations on which the new identity is deposited. These places involve a physical journey from the present to the past, blurring both and linking individuals to a constructed perception of history. As Pierre Nora explains, these places are museums, monuments, and commemorations – including those seen previously – and constitute the mythification of history.

Thus, AKP memory policies, with the construction of memory sites, have had an impact on cities. This influence is perceived in multiple ways, such as the construction of museums like Miniatürk or Panorama 1453 Museum of History, the construction of mosques in symbolic places of Istanbul including Çamlıca or Taksim[39], and the reconversion of Hagia Sofia into a mosque.

Linking individuals with the past has become a fundamental objective in memory policies, as through this, citizens create an emotional and subjective link with the past and gain awareness of it. Again, they create a thread between the Ottoman past, with the individuals of the present, and prepare for the future.

a) The museumisation of memory

Jeremy W. Walton conducted an analysis of the Miniatürk Museum in Istanbul, a theme park with miniatures of Turkey's main architectural structures, mainly of Ottoman origin. The author defines this theme park as a politicisation of memory by showing a sanitised, flat, and frozen aesthetic of the Ottoman past. Thanks to this place, a rejuvenated and embraceable memory of the Ottoman is offered, as sifted through the lenses of neo-Ottomanism[40]. In her analysis of the same site, İpek Türeli describes how the museum presents the greatness of the Ottoman Empire geography by displaying places such as the Mostar Bridge in Bosnia and the

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[39] M. Ergin, Y. Karakaya, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
[40] J.F. Walton, *Geographies of Revival and Erasur: Neo-Ottoman Sites of Memory in Istanbul, Thessaloniki, and Budapest*, "Die Welt Des Islams" 2016, vol. LVI, pp. 516–519.

Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, among others[41]. Placing the Ottoman and the Republican on the same plane creates a pluralistic space that equalises both eras and, at the same time, brings forward the relevance of religion in the country's history and presents a general feeling of nostalgia towards the Ottoman cosmopolitanism[42]. Both look at heritage, thus implying the imposition of a new national discourse under the interest of actors who seek, above all, to abstract the individual from the geographical and historical and to present a political aesthetic associated with the values of the new ideological programme.

As mentioned previously, the Panorama 1453 and the Panorama 1326 museums establish a link between individual and historical facts of the country's past through a 360-degree immersion in the battle for the captures of Constantinople and Bursa. Surrounded by cannons, visitors can find themselves in the battles and walk around observing the characters, experiencing the glorious and emotional atmosphere of the moment. In the same way that Walton analyses Miniatürk, visitors can approach this new space in which the same geographical and historical abstraction is followed by enclosing the individual within a place. While Miniatürk depicts several places in one, exercising a geographical simplification, Panorama 1453 offers a single place and a single perspective, as the point of view is that of a Turkish soldier in front of the walls of Constantinople surrounded by the army, the sultan and the cannons opening fire on the city[43]. Moreover, as Tokdoğan implies, this museum is also a space for meeting people fascinated by 'the dream of conquest', where young and old alike can be found participating in the new Neo-Ottoman national identity[44].

In addition to these particularly representative spaces, one can find several places that are representative of this Neo-Ottoman Islamic ideology although they follow a more traditional idea of a museum. Both museums present collections of objects and have a purely didactic purpose, and they are aimed at both Turkish citizens and foreign visitors with their location, content and layout.

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[41] I. T ü r e l i, *Modelling Citizenship in Turkey's Miniature Park*, [in:] *Orienting Istanbul. Capital of Europe?*, eds. D. Gökturk, L. Soysal, I. Türeli, London 2010, p. 111.

[42] *Ibidem*, p. 123.

[43] *Panorama 1453...*

[44] N. T o k d o ğ a n, *Yeni Osmanlıcılık: Hınç, Nostalji, Narsisizm*, İstanbul 2018, p. 212.

The best example is that of the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts[45], which, although it has its origin in 1914, was reopened and reformed in 2014 as a new exhibition with new objects and a more didactic perspective, namely that of teaching the visitor the history of Islam as well as preserving various relics belonging to the prophets. Another museum is the History of Science and Technology in Islam[46], which opened in 2008 to show different scientific gadgets developed by Muslim scientists of the Middle Ages. This museum's exhibits range from astronomy instruments to war machines, the main links between them being Islam and technology, thus covering the entire Muslim World in a global perspective appropriate to the 'Islamic internationalism' that characterised Turkish foreign policy of the last decade.

b) New mosques, old mosques, and the conquest of space

The three great symbols of the success of the memory policy programme conducted by the AKP government include the Çamlıca and Taksim mosques, together with the reconversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque. The Çamlıca Mosque is the largest in Turkey and one of the largest mosques in the world. It is made in imitation of the great Ottoman mosques, following the style and showing a clear imperial character, while being built attached to a commercial centre, it evokes a new stage of economic prosperity[47]. In its surroundings, it also has spaces dedicated to the promotion of Islamic arts, such as calligraphy. Being located on the highest hill in Istanbul, the Çamlıca Mosque transforms its skyline, reinforcing the Islamic-Ottoman identity of the city and, at the same time, reshaping its 'historical identity' around AKP's perspective, which seeks to present Istanbul as 'the Islamic city' par excellence, using the image of the mosque as an aesthetic counterbalance to the Westernisation of the city visible in its skyscrapers[48]. The aesthetics presented with this mosque expresses an insistence on deconstructing Kemalist Western-oriented policies and,

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[45] Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, https://muze.gen.tr/muze-detay/tiem (accessed: 10 I 2024).

[46] Museum of the History of Science and Technology in Islam, https://muze.gen.tr/muze-detay/islam-bilim (accessed: 10 I 2024).

[47] I. Parlak, O. Aycan, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

[48] E. Maessen, *Reassesing Turkish National Memory: the AKP and the Nation*, Utretch 2012, pp. 46–47.

at the same time, presenting a historical continuity. Also, the government, with this mosque, created another aesthetic balance between the European side with the Sultanahmet or Süleymaniye historical mosques and the Asian side with the Çamlıca Mosque[49].

Another example is the Taksim Mosque. The plan for the mosque dates back to 1952. However, various attempts to construct it were stopped by the military authorities on several occasions. Under the governments of Turgut Özal and Necmettin Erbakan, further unsuccessful attempts were made, the last of which took place in 2013 when the construction of the mosque, and a shopping mall that would have the aesthetics of Ottoman barracks, was prevented due to popular protests in Gezi. The failed attempts to build the mosque were accompanied by bans by the Islamist parties themselves, constituting elements of the Islamist collective memory as part of the rejection and trauma. This is why the construction of the mosque has implications that not only link the AKP government to the Ottoman but also present a historical triumph over secularism and a recent demonstration of the government's interest in integrating with the Islamic-Ottoman and demarcating itself from the secular-Kemalist[50].

However, the greatest symbolic triumph of the AKP government was the conversion of the former Hagia Sophia Museum into a mosque in 2020. The today's mosque, built as a basilica in the 6th century, turned into a mosque by Sultan Fatih the Conqueror in 1453 and made a museum under Atatürk in 1935, once again became a temple for Islam.

Hagia Sophia has historically been the symbol of power for Byzantines, Kemalists and, today, Turkish Islamists. Especially during the 1950s and 1960s, it occupied a central place in the agendas of conservative nationalists, passing into the Islamo--nationalist imagination as a prisoner to be rescued. Under this metaphor, the kidnappers would be Freemasons, Communists, Christians, Zionists, etc., politicising the building and mobilising the masses through a growing sense of historical revanchism and

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[49] R. Ünal Çınar, 'Yeni Türkiye' Söyleminde Bellek-İktidar Mücadelesi, Doctoral thesis, Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Gazetecilik Anabilim Dali 2019, p. 124.

[50] BirGün, Taksim Meydanı'ndaki cami açıldı, 28 V 2021, https://www.bir-gun.net/haber/taksim-meydani-ndaki-cami-acildi-346332 (accessed: 17 VI 2021).

the need for a 'second conquest'[51] that remained alive until today. In Tokdoğan's words, "Hagia Sophia is essentially the nostalgic fantasy of the glorious times of the Ottoman Empire, its imperial power and world domination". For this reason, "Hagia Sophia has become one of the symbolic spaces of the narrative of Neo-Ottoman national identity during the AKP period"[52].

With the conversion into a mosque, the government culminated the line that traces the continuity of the current government with the Ottoman Empire, presenting itself as an overcoming power that put the years of secularism behind while sending a strong message of the triumph of Islamic Turkishness. The symbolism of the event involved a cathartic process in which 350,000 Muslims[53] gathered for prayer led by the President of the Turkish Religious Affairs Directorate, Ali Erbaş. During the prayer, he carried a sword, a symbol of the reconquest of a space previously symbolic of Kemalist secularism. Since then, Hagia Sophia has become the great symbol of the triumph of the 20-year rule of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan[54], who has led prayers at the mosque several times and presented the conversion of the monument as the end of injustice – as a historical victory.

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[51] M.İ. Özekmekçi, *Türk Sağında Ayasofya İmgesi, [in:] Türk Sağı: Mitler, Fetişler, Düşman İmgeleri*, eds. İ.O. Kerestecioğlu, G. Gürkan Öztan, İstanbul 2014, pp. 293, 304.

[52] N. Tokdoğan, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

[53] Daily Sabah, *op. cit.*

[54] An advertisement for the AKP's campaign during the May 2023 presidential elections. The advertisement, entitled "The Right Time to Reclaim Our History", is divided into four scenes. In the first one, set in 1981, a father, a grandfather, and a son go to pray, and the grandfather looks longingly at Hagia Sophia and says *nasip et, ya Rabbi* [grant it, oh Lord]. In the second part, set in 1994, the aged father, on his way to pray, whispers the same words as the grandfather did. In the third part, in 2002, the son, now old and with his own son, looks at the mosque again, whispering the words of the grandfather and his father. The last part is in 2022 when the boy of 1981 is now an old man, and he enters Hagia Sophia with his son and grandson to pray and whispers *şükürler olsun* [thanks be to You].

The advertisement shows the conversion of Hagia Sophia as an intergenerational triumph, a historical justice brought about by the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan through the conquest of the collectively longed-for space, a space that was once inaccessible for the Muslims to pray at. Finally, it makes the voter a participant in history itself who must 'seize history' once again. AK Parti, *Tarihimize Sahip Çıkmak İçin Doğru Zaman*, 27 IV 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osnnxXtuawE (accessed: 17 VI 2021).

Conclusion

This paper aims to present the politicisation of memory in the last decades of Turkish *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*'s rule through the use of Ottoman symbols and heritage to affect collective memory and develop a new identity. The historical use of the Ottoman for contemporary purposes, understood as Neo-Ottomanism, has functioned as a response to the various traumas suffered by Islamists during the 20th century. From the birth of the Republic in 1923 to the coup d'état against the Erbakan government and the *Refah Partisi* of 1997 to the banning of the *fez*, the hijab or the call to prayer in Arabic, Islamists suffered diverse traumas that formed a sour memory of Kemalism and a resentment against the secular.

Neo-Ottomanism originated in the government of Turgut Özal, who re-read Ottoman history to apply it to the Turkish reality of the 1980s, as he considered the Kemalist perspective of a homogenised society to be obsolete. During the 1990s, the term was adopted by different Islamist parties, which Islamised it, emphasising not only the pluralistic character of Ottoman society but also the value of Islam as the central element of the rule of the empire. With the AKP in power, this ideology became part of the state, taking shape in government policies and serving as a response to the traumas suffered by the Islamists since 1923. Since then, plans were established based on *Vision 2023*, *Vision 2053*, and *Vision 2071*, through which Turkey would implement a political, economic, and social project. Alongside these plans, the government promoted festivities and celebrations such as the Battle of Malazgirt or the Conquest of Constantinople as well as created museums where visitors can interact with the Ottoman in immersive experiences. Finally, the AKP government conquered symbolic Kemalist spaces, modifying the city's skyline with the construction of the Çamlıca Mosque, building the long-awaited mosque in the heart of the city, Taksim, and converting Hagia Sophia into a mosque after decades of Islamist activism.

This ideological project is based on the construction of a collective identity based on the commemoration of the Islamic-Ottoman memory, creating distance from the secular, and the construction of 'places of memory' where individuals can be participants of the past, understand the present and face the future with a new identity.

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