

Discourse in the Service of the Nation:  
Religious Nationalism in Contemporary Turkey

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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that the new nation building process in contemporary Turkey focuses on the intertwined relationship between religion and nationalism. It argues that religious nationalism is an important concept to explain the case, as it combines the concepts of religion and nationalism. This case also offers a reinterpretation of the concept of religious nationalism in which more emphasis is given to the nation. This research is based on qualitative discourse analysis, focusing on several political speeches.

Key words: *religious nationalism, discourse, Turkey*

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## Introduction

On Friday, 15 July 2016 at around 10 pm., the residents of Turkey, and especially the people who were in Istanbul that day, were alarmed by a stirring on the Bosphorus Bridge.<sup>1</sup> The first thing that came to people's mind when the soldiers and tanks were deployed on the bridge, that it could be a terrorist attack and the military was taking countermeasures for this possibility. However, people were suspicious about the fact that it was not the police forces, but the military which were operating that night. Not long before, the rumours about a military intervention was spread all over the country through social media. Then, a TRT (state's official TV channel) speaker read a declaration about the military's intervention in government affairs explaining that they were a group of military officials called the 'Peace at Home Council' and were taking over state power in order to repair democracy in Turkey. Erdogan appeared on CNN Turk TV via FaceTime application and called people to the streets to defend their 'nation' and 'democracy' against the 'putschists'.

The coup was organized by a small group inside the army. Therefore, it was not a well-organized military intervention as Turkey experienced earlier. This made it easier for the government and police forces to re-take the control with the help of the rest of the state arm forces who did not participate in the coup attempt and did even try to prevent it from happening. Since then, government officials and Erdogan have been accusing the Gulen Movement<sup>2</sup> or

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<sup>1</sup> After the coup attempt, its name was changed to 'July 15 Martyrs' Bridge'.

<sup>2</sup> Gülen Movement: (Hizmet or Fetullah Terrorist Organization (FETÖ): A religious community that were active in Turkey and other parts of the world. The movement had close relationship with the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government up until they started to actively involve in Turkish politics. For further information about Gulen movement see: Kareem Shaheen, "Erdogan v the Gülenists: From Political Allies to Turkey's Bitter Rivals," *The Guardian*, July 19, 2016, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/19/thousands-detained-as-turkey-vows-to-smoke-out-gulen-supporters>.

recently called ‘Fetullah Terrorist Organization (FETÖ)’ of staging the coup.<sup>3</sup> They state that the coup was organized by a small group of FETÖ members who leaked in the Turkish Armed Forces and aimed to take over the state power.

This study does not go into the details of ‘who’ and ‘what’ was behind the attempt because there are still uncertainties about what really happened. However, the failed coup had major consequences on Turkish politics and society. This thesis, therefore, focusing on the July 15 narratives and Erdogan’s discourses, argues that there is a new nation building process in contemporary Turkey. In this research, I focus on the relationship between religion and nationalism. I argue that, Erdogan’s nationalist project is based on religious nationalism, which is used to bridge religion and nationalism in contemporary Turkey.

The literature on both religious and nationalism studies seldom address the relationship between religion and nationalism, and spend little time explaining religious nationalism. Religious nationalism is mostly understood as distinctive kind of nationalism that is alternative to secular nationalism.<sup>4</sup> Roger Friedland argues that religious nationalists based their legitimacy to a divine source, instead of a worldly constitution or citizens’ consent.<sup>5</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer also argues that, although religious nationalists do not disregard the importance of democracy and citizens’ consent, what ultimately matters is the will of God.<sup>6</sup> According to him, religious nationalists’ understanding of democracy is the simple majority

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<sup>3</sup> The Presidency of the Republic of Turkey’s official website has a special section about the details of the failed coup attempt and the recounts of the events. See: “Presidency Of The Republic Of Turkey : July 15 Coup Attempt and People’s Victory,” accessed May 31, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/activities/15july/>.

<sup>4</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches\*,” *Religion and Nationalism*, *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 1 (2011): 2–20, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2011.00486.x>.

<sup>5</sup> Roger Friedland, “Religious Nationalism and the Problem of Collective Representation,” *Annual Reviews* 27 (2001): 125–52.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (University of California Press, 1994), Introduction.

rule. This implies that, if a society is dominantly Muslim, the state should be an Islamic state too. Yet, the state is not sovereign in the sense of secular nation states. The nation does not hold the sovereignty. In this sense, the basis of politics is not a secular but a divine one, and democracy is only a tool for religious nationalists to achieve their goal. For religious nationalists, the state's political ideology of the state is more important than its political structure. They are more interested in the moral character and the ideological structure than economy and politics. Therefore, religion is an end in itself for this type of nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

Brubaker, on the other hand, argues that the use of 'nationalism' in this sense is overstretched. He argues that nation-state is "the dominant political reality of our time", in the sense that, politicized religions or power-seeking religious movements are aware of the fact that the nation-state is offering a full control over both people's social and political life.<sup>8</sup> According to this argument, even transnational Islamists movements have state-seeking aspirations in contemporary societies.<sup>9</sup>

However, Brubaker points out the fact that if an Islamist movement is only seeking for the state, and not orienting its ideology on the nation, then it is Islamism and not nationalism because there are no reference to the nation. If this state is based on a divine source, therefore, there is "no central role for nation".<sup>10</sup> Religious nationalism is therefore not nationalism, but a state seeking ideology based on a religious constitution or a rule which does not give an important focus on the people and the nation.

Brubaker's explanation of the relationship between religion and nationalism is an important theoretical tool for this study. He suggests that the relationship between religion and nationalism can be studied in four different approaches: first he explains religion and

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<sup>7</sup> Friedland, "Religious Nationalism and the Problem of Collective Representation."

<sup>8</sup> Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism."

<sup>9</sup> Brubaker.

<sup>10</sup> Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism, pg. 19-20"

nationalism as similar phenomena; second studies religion as the explanation of nationalism; third he treats religion as part of nationalism and explains them as intertwined. Finally, he explains this relationship as a distinct kind: religious nationalism.

I focus on the third and fourth approaches while I explain my case. The third approach explains the relationship between religion and nationalism as an intertwined version, that is religion is not an external explanation of nationalism, but it is an internal part of it. There are two versions of this intertwined relationship. In the first one, the boundaries of a state and a religion overlap. The second one, which I use, is this special relationship between religion and nationalism where Brubaker explains it as the “religious inflection of nationalist discourse”. Brubaker argues that if there is no central role for “nation” then Islamists are doing Islamism; not necessarily nationalism. In the fourth approach, he explains the relationship between religion and nationalism as a distinctive kind: religious nationalism.

This approach focuses on not only the discourse, but also the content of the rhetoric used by the nationalist actor and sees religious nationalism as an alternative to secular nationalism.<sup>11</sup>

I argue that religious nationalists and religious nationalism do not operate in Turkey in the same way as Friedland and Juergensmeyer explain. I argue that Erdogan, remaining inside the boundaries of the democratic and secular constitution, is using a religiously tinged rhetoric and employing a religious nationalist project in contemporary Turkey. To overcome destabilizations and crisis threatening his government, he is using religious nationalism as an ideological tool to remain in power. This means that, Erdogan is using religion in order to achieve very secular purposes. In addition to that, Erdogan does not ground his legitimacy to a divine or a sacred power. Since Erdogan and his party garner the majority of votes in almost every election since 2002, representative democracy and the mass support of the people

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<sup>11</sup> Brubaker.



constitute an important part of their rhetoric. This also gives them a considerable confidence in terms of implementing their policies and projects. Erdogan is therefore neither aiming to establish an Islamic state nor is he a religious leader.

The first chapter of this thesis gives a historical background of the fluctuating relationship between religion and nationalism in Turkey. I show the continuations and fractures of earlier streams of nationalism. In the second chapter, I give a more detailed framework of the theoretical background of this thesis, focusing on Brubaker's investigation. In this chapter, I also explain my objection and argument. My objection is that religious nationalism is needed to be reconceptualized in different cases and context, and this research aims to show that religious nationalism occurs in Turkey and nation plays a central role in religious framing of the nation.

In the third chapter, I explain the details of the method of analysis and research design. I use qualitative discourse analysis based on Ruth Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). I focus on Erdogan's discourse to show the rhetorical constructions of the nation building process. I argue that Erdogan's discourses have constituent and justifying power for his nationalist project. In chapter 4, I analyse Erdogan's discourses, focusing on how he reframes national identity with religious nationalism. I create four categories (topoi) to analyse his speeches and explain to what extent they fit in the categories of religious nationalism. At the end of this analysis and research, I share the implications and result of the analysis, and concluding remarks.

## Chapter 1. Historical Background

The relationship between religion and nationalism has fluctuated in Turkey's political history. In this chapter, I briefly explain the evolution this relationship between religion and nationalism starting from the early years of the republic, focusing on continuations and fractures and as well as different understandings of nationalisms. I then explain the first emergence religious nationalists, focusing on the Justice and Development Party (AKP) era and explain Erdogan's vision of religion and nationalism as intertwined concepts.

### 1.1 Understanding of secularism in the Republican era

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Turkey's intellectuals and political elites were heavily influenced by the Enlightenment and modernization movements. The modernization process went hand in hand with secularization. The founding fathers of the country were influenced by the modernization movements in the West, and especially French secularism, *laicite* (*laiklik* in Turkish). Compare to secularism as a political principle, *laiklik* refers to complete state control of religion in public sphere.<sup>12</sup>

Religious civil society was scrutinized by the state. The implementation of *laiklik* resulted in the exclusion of religion from the public sphere. The nation of the new republic was formulated around Turkish nationalism as modern and secular, and religion was placed in the private sphere as an individual practice.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Edgar Şar and Alphan Telek, "Rethinking Secularism as a Political Principle in the Middle East: From Negative to Positive Understanding and Perception of Secularism," in *The Sources of Secularism: Enlightenment and Beyond*, ed. Anna Tomaszewska and Hasse Hämäläinen (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 245–93.

<sup>13</sup> Catharina Raudvere, "Female Dervishes in Contemporary Istanbul: Between Tradition and Modernity," in *Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourse on*

In the beginning of the foundation of modern Turkey, the founding fathers wanted to be sure that religion was completely controlled by the state. The national identity and membership of the nation was based on civic nationalism as Atatürk emphasised “the people of Turkey who established the Turkish state, are called the Turkish nation”.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, religious membership did not constitute a position in society, at least in theory. The new political elite closed down all religious institutions and organizations and founded the Directorate of Religious Affairs under the Prime Minister’s control to make sure that religion was fully controlled and regulated by the nation state.

Although it aimed to build a secular understanding of nationalism, the political elite accepted the fact that religion was constituting an important part of culture for Turks. Sunni Muslims represented the majority of the population and it would not have made sense to force a strict ban on religious practice in the public space. In addition to that, Sunni Islam comprised an important part of shared culture and solidarity between the members of the nation. Religion was therefore seen as an important unifying force.<sup>15</sup>

## 1.2. The emergence of religious nationalists and Islamist politics

The understanding and implementation of secularism in Turkey have caused disagreements and conflicts among different groups and parties. These conflicts were usually between *laikler* (secularists, or sometimes referred as Kemalists<sup>16</sup>) and Islamists. Third parties which involved in the conflict were usually liberals who would take side with Islamists who were occasionally

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*Gendered Relations*, ed. Kari Ask and Marit Tjomsland (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1998), 125–45.

<sup>14</sup> Soner Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who Is a Turk?*, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern History 4 (London: Routledge, 2006), pg. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Çağaptay.

<sup>16</sup> The term Kemalist is used to refer those who are strict supporters of founding father Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s policies and ideology.

suppressed by the strict secularist policies of governments. In the 1950s, Republican People's Party (CHP) was challenged by a more conservative party Adalet Partisi (Justice Party) and it started the multiparty period in Turkey's political history. This caused the rise of political Islam, and led to political Islamist parties being increasingly involved in politics.

Until the beginning of the multiparty period in 1950s, the CHP had the monopoly of the control of religion in the public sphere. After the multiparty period, however, conservative and Islamist parties started to gain more support due to their ideological orientations in political and economic liberalism. They also openly criticized the earlier political elite or 'status quo' for their strict secularist policies. This rhetoric of anti-elitism empowered Islamists in the past, and still empowers them in contemporary Turkey.

The perception of the oppressive and authoritarian secularism and nationalism of the CHP resulted in an alliance between Islamists and liberals. Especially after the 1950s, public and political discourse related to religious freedom and freedom of expression in Turkey became related to the liberal ideology.<sup>17</sup> In addition to that, during this period, conservatives and Islamists started to approach nationalism in a more critical perspective in the sense that, nationalism was not supposed to be necessarily secularist or *laik*.<sup>18</sup>

The adaptation of nationalism by Islamists and conservatives paved the way for a different interpretation of nationalism. This understanding of nationalism was focusing more on the earlier Turkic-Islamic states, using a similar repertoire as the secularists while emphasising the Ottoman past of the nation.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the connection which was cut off in

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<sup>17</sup> Jeremy F. Walton, "Confessional Pluralism and the Civil Society Effect: Liberal Mediations of Islam and Secularism in Contemporary Turkey," *American Ethnologist* 40, no. 1 (February 2013): 182–200, <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12013>.

<sup>18</sup> Umut Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity* (The University of Utah Press, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Uzer; Jenny White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (Princeton University Press, 2013).

the republican times was repaired in the sense that the Ottoman past was glorified and remembered as a part of the national history of the Turkish nation.

When Islamists embraced nationalist discourse, it became much more popular amongst people. Conservative nationalists were focusing on more the religiosity of the nation instead of nationalist politics, and ethnic nationalism was not constituting an important part of their nationalist discourse.<sup>20</sup> They were mostly focusing on the unity of the nation in terms of their commonality in religion, i.e. Sunni Islam.<sup>21</sup>

The military intervention in 1980 was also an important turning point in terms of the nationalization of Islamist politics. Due to escalated violence between the leftists and the rightists in the country, the military intervened. They favoured the rightists in order to combat the communist threat which influenced leftist student movements and caused many violent incidents at universities at the end of 1970s. Although the military preserved the state's nationalist ideology, the national identity was redefined as the synthesis of the Turkish-Islam and religion constituted the moral character of Turkishness.

The 1990s witnessed the rise of political Islam and Islamist parties in politics until another military intervention caused the closure of the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) in 1998. After its closure, a group of politicians from Refah Partisi, including Tayyip Erdogan, established the Justice and Development Party (AKP) which garnered the majority of votes in the 2002 elections.<sup>22</sup> The AKP era has witnessed one of the most intense nation building process after the foundation of the republic.

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<sup>20</sup> Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity*.

<sup>21</sup> White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*.

<sup>22</sup> Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity*.

### 1.3. The AKP and Erdogan in power

Erdogan's political Islamist background and his involvement in the "National Vision (*Milli Görüş*)"<sup>23</sup> movement, has made him able to collect the sympathy of the pious Muslims who were oppressed by the political elite in the early republican era. In the beginning of its rise to power, the AKP's vision of nationalism proposed an alternative to Kemalist nationalism. Erdogan was condemning nationalism based on ethnicity, and was instead emphasising the importance of the unity of millet without making difference based on ethnicities such as Turks, Kurds or Lazs.<sup>24</sup> Jenny White argues that this understanding of nationalism of 'Muslim Turks' is grounded in the Ottoman model of *millet* system.<sup>25</sup>

The *Millet* system incorporated religious groups in the Ottoman Empire, granted them with certain autonomous rights to organize and regulate their affairs related to religion within their own rules and laws. When Erdogan came to power, he promised to solve the Kurdish problem, however, his project for the solution of the conflict did not go further than simply employing a religious nationalist rhetoric. He aimed to incorporate Sunni Muslim Kurds in his religious nationalist project arguing that there are no differences between Kurds and Turks, as they are 'one nation'.<sup>26</sup> His attempts to initiate and continue negotiations with Kurdish parties fluctuated. On the one hand he was trying not to offend Turkish nationalists by compromising

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<sup>23</sup> National Vision was a political Islamist movement in Turkey. Its foundations were laid by politician Necmettin Erbakan and his vision of modernization which is based on Turkish culture and Islam ethics. Therefore, it's understanding of modernization is not based on Western modernism but Islamic civilization. "Jenny White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (Princeton University Press, 2013), pg. 39."

<sup>24</sup> Selçuk ŞENYÜZ / MARDİN, "Erdogan: Milliyetçilik ayak altında," *Hürriyet*, accessed May 19, 2018, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogan-milliyetcilik-ayak-altinda-22621388>.

<sup>25</sup> White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, pg. 12.

<sup>26</sup> White, pg. 14; Cuma Çiçek, "Kurdish Identity and Political Islam under AKP Rule," *Research and Policy on Turkey* 1, no. 2 (2016).

too much with Kurdish parties. And on the other hand, he wanted to make sure that he was still keeping Sunni Kurds' support for his approach to the conflict.

In one of his rallies in south-eastern Turkey, showing the Quran in one his hand, Erdogan claimed that Kurds and Turks are one *millet* and whoever tries to divide them with ethnic nationalism, would fail. This caused major discussions between political parties. Kurdish politicians accused Erdogan of aiming to attract Kurdish votes in the region.<sup>27</sup> The peace process with its ups and downs, continued until the elections in June 2015. During the elections, The Democratic People's Party (HDP)<sup>28</sup> collected more than 10% of the votes and entered the parliament.<sup>29</sup> During the same elections, due to the fact that the seats were divided between more members than earlier elections, the AKP could not form a majority government.

Erdogan's efforts to bring Turks and Kurds together by using religious identity did not work. In addition to that, Erdogan was losing his Turkish and conservative nationalists' votes due to their suspicions about the negotiations between the state and the HDP. For Erdogan, it was easier to make alliance with nationalists instead of secularist and leftist Kurds. The elections in June 2015 were the turning point for Erdogan to shift his alliance with Sunni Kurds to conservative nationalists.<sup>30</sup>

Scholars like Elçin Aktoprak and Alev Çınar explains the AKP's and Erdogan's vision of nationalism as a new nation-building process based on power relations. Aktoprak analyse the AKP's nation building process in the framework of 'post-colonial nationalisms' arguing that the AKP is presenting itself as a constituent power which was able to dismantle the old

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<sup>27</sup> "Erdogan Plays Religion Card in Tight Turkey Polls," accessed May 20, 2018, <http://news.yahoo.com/erdogan-plays-religion-card-tight-turkey-polls-200327683.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Pro-Kurdish party.

<sup>29</sup> 10% is the threshold in Turkey's parliamentary system for political parties to have seats in the parliament. Kurdish party, for the first time in history, was able to enter the parliament without independent votes but as a party.

<sup>30</sup> Elçin Aktoprak, "AKP'nin Çözüm Politikasında Dinin Rolü: Uzlaştırıcı mı? Kurucu mu?," *Birikim Yayınları* 130 (2014): 214–35.

establishment and is building a new one.<sup>31</sup> In that, Erdogan's anti-Kemalist and anti-establishment rhetoric form an important part of his nationalist project due to his differentiation between the 'nation' and the 'elite'.

In a similar way, Alev Çınar in her book *Modernity, Islam and Secularism in Turkey* opposes the AKP's version of nationalism to secular nationalism and shows it as an ideological struggle between the Islamists (the AKP and Erdogan) and the seculars (Kemalists).<sup>32</sup> She argues that after the AKP came to power, the strict secularization of both state and society was replaced by the Islamization of the public sphere in contemporary Turkey. She explains the AKP's Islamism as a modern phenomenon in the sense that it is an "anti-modernist modernism," using similar tools as modernist seculars to build its own understanding of nationalism.<sup>33</sup>

To some extent, it can be argued that Erdogan's new nation building process is similar to the nation building process in the republican years in terms of the tools and repertoires which are used. However, the content of this nationalism is different than what modernists and seculars were proposing for Turkish national identity. According to Umut Uzer, after the Islamists started to embrace nationalism, the understanding of nationalism in Turkey has become a more conservative and cultural ideology with more and more references to religious identity of the people.<sup>34</sup> He claims that the modernist, progressive, secular and mobile features of nationalism were replaced by a more Islamist, statist and stable understanding of nationalism.

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<sup>31</sup> Elçin Aktoprak, "Postkolonyal bir 'dava' olarak 'Yeni Türkiye'nin yeni ulusu,'" *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi* 71, no. 1 (2016): 1–32, [https://doi.org/10.1501/SBFder\\_0000002383](https://doi.org/10.1501/SBFder_0000002383), pg. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Alev Çınar, "The Justice and Development Party: Turkey's Experience with Islam, Democracy, Liberalism and Secularism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 3 (2011), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23017316>.

<sup>33</sup> Çınar.

<sup>34</sup> Uzer, *An Intellectual History of Turkish Nationalism: Between Turkish Ethnicity and Islamic Identity*.



However, when the AKP came to power, they had a different vision of nationalism than other conservative and Islamist nationalists. Their popularity was based on their anti-establishment and anti-statist discourse in the sense that they were promising to dismantle the hegemony of the old status-quo, i.e. the secularist-Kemalist establishment of the state. Therefore, nationalism, or *ulusçuluk*, as state's ideology was their enemy. They argued that *ulusçuluk* was the main source of the decade-long Kurdish conflict. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, gradually Erdogan employed his project of religious nationalism or *milliyetçilik* based on the common religious identity of Turks and Kurds.

With the same political agenda in mind, during Erdogan's era, the education system has gone through a series of reforms during which the government's main focus was the religious education. In addition to compulsory courses in the primary school curricula, the introduction of new religion courses and the increasing number of Imam-Hatips were the manifestations of Erdogan's commitment to raise a religious generation.<sup>35</sup>

Recent developments in Turkey starting from the Gezi Park protests and the Corruption Case against AKP officials in 2013 escalated Erdogan's nationalist turn in 2015. After the elections in June, Erdogan turned to ultra-nationalist party Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) as their main ally and ended the peace process with Kurdish parties. Since then Erdogan have been using a more nationalist rhetoric. Erdogan's nationalist discourse parallels with his increasing authoritarianism and the crisis of modern Turkey. In order to overcome the instabilities and the state of crisis, Erdogan is employing a more nationalist discourse in which *milli irade* (National Will) comprises the most important focus.

The decisions taken by Erdogan and the ruling party are justified on the basis of the support from the *millet*. Winning the majority of votes since they came to power in 2002, is

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<sup>35</sup> Şar and Telek, "Rethinking Secularism as a Political Principle in the Middle East: From Negative to Positive Understanding and Perception of Secularism."

legitimizing the actions of Erdogan and his party in terms of having *millet*'s support behind. When people took the streets after Erdogan's call on July 15 against the coup attempt, the 'special bound' that Erdogan had between himself and *millet* reached to another level. July 15th also paved the way for Erdogan's new nation building process and religious nationalist project where the day became the founding day and the new 'independence war' of the nation.

In the next chapter, I discuss the concept of religious nationalism and explain the theoretical framework of this thesis, focusing on Brubaker's study of religious nationalism. I further give my objection and argument in the second section.

## Chapter 2. Theoretical Background

In this chapter, I outline this thesis' theoretical framework, focusing on the discussions related to the concept of religious nationalism. I also state my objection and argument in the second section of this chapter. I object that in the religious nationalism literature, the central role is given to religion, and put not so much emphasis on the nation, whose religion is at stake. Instead, I argue, following Brubaker's criticism, Turkish case (Erdogan) shows an example of religious nationalism in which 'nation' plays the central role while the religiosity constitutes the identity framing of the nation.

### 2.1. Religious nationalism: Islamism or nationalism?

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while some religious movements and political entities have become more radicalized, some have synchronized themselves with liberal democracies. The AKP and Erdogan's vision of Islamism was considered as one of the most influential examples of this synchronization process when they first came to power in 2002.<sup>36</sup> This interpretation of Islam, usually called as moderate or liberal, was compatible with democratic and secular modern states.

Religious de-radicalization and the adaptation of secular and modern repertoires and tools paved the way for religious groups and organizations to offer an alternative socialization platform and institutionalization in modern state.<sup>37</sup> The increasing individualism also increased the need for more collective spaces for the people in the global age. In this sense, as Friedland

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<sup>36</sup> Büke Koyuncu, "*Benim milletim...*": *AK Parti iktidarı, din ve ulusal kimlik*, 1. baskı, İletişim yayınları Araştırma - inceleme dizisi, 2044 339 (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014), pg. 15.

<sup>37</sup> Koyuncu.

argues, religious nationalism offered individuals an alternative for collective solidarity, that is based on a shared faith.<sup>38</sup>

“Contemporary nationalisms are suffused with the religious”, argues Roger Friedland.<sup>39</sup> He claims that “religious nationalism calls into question the theoretical duality of the social and cultural, a divide variously identified with the material and the symbolic, class status, economy and civil society”.<sup>40</sup> In contrast to secular understanding of nationalism, religious nationalism does not invest in the state’s and society’s political and economic structure. Instead, the ideology of the state is the most important focus.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, religious nationalism is an end itself.<sup>42</sup>

While Friedland is focusing on the alternative collective representation that religious nationalists offer, Juergensmeyer explains the ideological background of religious nationalists.<sup>43</sup> He shows that religious nationalists have no problems with modern nation-states and nationalism. Their main objection is with the hegemony of the secular understanding of nationalism. Religious nationalists believe in the idea of a moral and religious state that is not based on secular contract but drives its legitimacy from a divine power.<sup>44</sup>

According to Friedland and Juergensmeyer, religious nationalists base their power on a sacred source or a divine text.<sup>45</sup> Sovereignty belongs to a divine source, God, and not to the people. According to their definition, religious nationalism is therefore a state seeking ideology

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<sup>38</sup> Friedland, “Religious Nationalism and the Problem of Collective Representation., pg. 125”

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State., Introduction.*

<sup>42</sup> Friedland, “Religious Nationalism and the Problem of Collective Representation., pg. 130”

<sup>43</sup> Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State, Introduction.*

<sup>44</sup> Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State, introduction, pg. 7.*

<sup>45</sup> Juergensmeyer; Friedland, “Religious Nationalism and the Problem of Collective Representation.”

based on the hegemonic religion in a society.<sup>46</sup> Religious nationalists do not disregard democracy or the will of nation. However, their understanding of democracy is simply majority rule. This means that, if a society is dominantly Muslim, then the state should be based on Islamic law.<sup>47</sup>

Friedland claims that if there is a hegemonic religion in a society, it is more likely for religious nationalists to occur.<sup>48</sup> In religious nationalism, the will of the people does not matter since the main reference is the will of God, not the nation.<sup>49</sup> In that sense, democracy and the sovereign people is only a tool, or a temporary phase for religious nationalists to achieve power. Effectively, the religious nationalists see the nation and the nation state in the service of religion.

In 2011, Rogers Brubaker published an article in which he approaches the relationship between religion and nationalism through four different cases. The first case explains religion and nationalism as similar phenomena and treats nationalism as religion because of their similarity in certain aspects.<sup>50</sup> Instead of focusing on the similar formalities and rituals, he emphasises the similarities between religion and nationalism in terms of source and forms of social and cultural identification. He explains how religion operates as nationalism and ethnicity in terms of organizing and mobilizing formal and informal social relations.<sup>51</sup> In the second case, he studies religion as an explanation for nationalism in the sense that nationalism was emerged as a political community by adopting and imitating religious communities.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*; Roger Friedland, "Money, Sex, and God: The Erotic Logic of Religious Nationalism," *American Sociological Association* 20, no. 3 (2002): 381–425.

<sup>47</sup> Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*.

<sup>48</sup> Friedland, "Religious Nationalism and the Problem of Collective Representation."

<sup>49</sup> Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, Introduction.

<sup>50</sup> Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism."

<sup>51</sup> Brubaker, pg. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Brubaker, pg. 11.

The third and the fourth cases of Brubaker's study constitute the theoretical background of this thesis, and he explains the relationship between the religion and nationalism as intertwined and a distinct kind of nationalism. The third case focuses on the intertwined relationship between religion and nationalism and describes religion as an internal part of nationalism. First, it overlaps in the sense that the boundaries of a religious community and the community's political unit are intertwined. Secondly, this overlapping causes the leader to inflect a religious nationalist discourse.

Finally, the fourth case explains the relationship between religion and nationalism as a distinctive kind: religious nationalism. This approach focuses not only the rhetoric itself but also its content.<sup>53</sup> Brubaker criticize Friedland's explanation of religious nationalism as state-centred on the grounds that there is no central role for the nation if the main emphasis is on religion. Therefore, when religious communities take the form of nationalism, the nationalism part of religious nationalism is "overstretched".<sup>54</sup>

The existence of hegemonic religions in societies, as in the case of Sunni Islam in Turkey, makes it possible for religious nationalists to emerge.<sup>55</sup> In Turkey, Erdgan's religious nationalist rhetoric provides an ideological connection between him and the people due to the fact that the majority of the people are Sunni Muslims in Turkey.<sup>56</sup> Erdogan is using people's religious and national identities interchangeably he refers to the nation. For example, there are two words for 'nation' and 'nationalism' in Turkish, *ulus* and *ulusalcılık*, and *millet* and *milliyetçilik*. Etymologically, *ulus* is the old Turkish for 'country' or 'city' but it is also used

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<sup>53</sup> Brubaker.

<sup>54</sup> Brubaker, pg. 20.

<sup>55</sup> Friedland, "Religious Nationalism and the Problem of Collective Representation."

<sup>56</sup> Cenk Saraçoğlu and Özhan Demirkol, "Nationalism and Foreign Policy Discourse in Turkey Under the AKP Rule: Geography, History and National Identity," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 301–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2014.947152>.

colloquially to refer to ‘nation’. *Millet* and *milliyetçilik* are also used with the same meaning but originates in Ottoman times. The word *millet* was used to refer to confessional communities in the empire, which were relatively autonomous in their religious affairs. It is almost overstressing to argue that these two words are distinctly different from each other or used for different groups (seculars and Islamists) and different purposes due to the fact that the two words are used synonymously without paying too much attention of their origin.

However, since this thesis focuses on the rhetoric of the leader, it is important to emphasise that Erdogan never uses the word *ulus* when he addresses or mentions the nation. On one of these occasions, when Erdogan was the Prime Minister, there was a program called ‘*Ulusla Sesleniş*’ (Addressing to the Nation) on the state’s channel TRT where he appeared and talked about politics and other general matters for the country. In 2013, the name of the programme was changed to ‘*Millete Hizmet Yolunda*’ (On the Way to the National Service).<sup>57</sup> Not only the word *ulus* were replaced by the word *millet*, but also the emphasis was changed from addressing to people, to be in the service of the nation.

Going back to Brubaker’s critics of the explanations of religious nationalism as state centred, I argue that Erdogan’s new nation building process in Turkey is a religious nationalist project which does not aim at building an Islamist state with an Islamist constitution, but at reframing national identity as intertwined with religious identity. In that sense, this study opens up another discussion about the role of religion in a secular world. Debates regarding the return of religion in the public sphere (or post-secular societies as Habermas argues<sup>58</sup>), or new nationalisms that occur in the form of religious or ethnic, therefore, require a further investigation of similar cases.<sup>59</sup> In Turkey’s case, while nationalism has always carried both

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<sup>57</sup> “‘Ulusla Sesleniş’in Adı Değişti,” NTV, January 31, 2013, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/ulusa-seslenisin-adi-degisti,Y6JthwpAw0C3SKfi-u6gLg>.

<sup>58</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “A ‘Post-Secular’ Society – What Does That Mean?,” 2008, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Friedland, “Religious Nationalism and the Problem of Collective Representation.”

secular (civic) and ethnic features, religion has always been present as a cultural component of national identity. However, in contemporary Turkey, I argue that nationalism is re-occurring in its religious form in the sense that religion and nationalism have become more intertwined than ever and rhetoric/discourse plays an important role in justifying and legitimizing this occurrence.

## 2.2. Argument

This study, focusing on religion and nationalism, investigates the national identity building process in Turkey. Religious nationalism as a concept bridges the two phenomena, therefore, it is an explanatory concept for this study. I use Roger Brubaker's study of religion and nationalism, arguing that in Turkey, religion and nation is intertwined, and in the contemporary Turkey it poses a distinct form of nationalism in religious form.

Following Brubaker's criticism, I argue that Erdogan is a religious nationalist leader, basing his new nation building process on the religiosity of the nation. This means that, *millet* holds the central role in his nationalism, but his definition of nation and religious community is intertwined. Brubaker explains this intertwined relationship between religion and nationalism in two ways. First, the overlap between the religious community and the national boundaries of a territory, and second, the religiously tinged rhetoric in which the nationalist leader is framing the nation and religion as intertwined.<sup>60</sup> This explanation of intertwined relationship between religion and nationalism is constituting the theoretical framework of this thesis.

First of all, the fact that the majority of the people are Sunni Muslim in Turkey, the line between religious community and national belonging blurs. The hegemonic position of Sunni Islam in the society and the historical relationship between religion and politics are other

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<sup>60</sup> Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism."



reasons for the intertwined relation between the religious and national identity. This situation is also related to the second explanation of the case which is the religiously tinged language and rhetoric of the leader. Due to this blurred line, Erdogan's religious rhetoric corresponds in society. This thesis, therefore, argues that Erdogan's religious rhetoric has a constituent power due to this intertwined relationship between religion and nationalism in Turkey.

Erdogan's religious nationalist discourse and rhetoric provides an ideological connection between him and society.<sup>61</sup> For example, a constant emphasis of the concept of martyrdom, the reformulation of the national curriculum in compliance with the religious-nationalist project overlaps with Erdogan's insistence on "raising religious generations".<sup>62</sup> His discourse is important since they indicate the establishment of a religious nationalism as the state's official ideology on both the social and political level.

Erdogan, as a leader of a secular and democratic state, is using religion in order to achieve very secular purposes. He is overcoming destabilizations of state's neoliberal policies and his authoritarianism by employing a religious rhetoric. Nationalism, therefore, in this sense, is an ideological tool for the actor. Therefore, I argue that Erdogan is neither aiming to establish an Islamic state nor is he a religious leader. Erdogan, remaining inside the boundaries of democratic and secular constitution, is reconstructing Turkish national identity with religious nationalist discourse in order to justify the instabilities and crisis of Turkey and remain in power.

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<sup>61</sup> Saraçoğlu and Demirkol, "Nationalism and Foreign Policy Discourse in Turkey Under the AKP Rule. pg. 305"

<sup>62</sup> "Gov't Determined to Raise Generations Acquainted with Religion: President Erdoğan," *Hürriyet Daily News*, accessed May 20, 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/govt-determined-to-raise-generations-acquainted-with-religion-president-erdogan-116354>.

In the next chapter, I explain the method and the research design, the data collection and the categories for discourse historical analysis.

## Chapter 3. Explanation of the Method and Research Design

This research is a qualitative research based on Ruth Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). DHA is an interdisciplinary method of qualitative discourse analysis, which focuses on written or visual data and it aims at "deconstructing the hegemony of specific discourses by deciphering the ideologies that serve to establish, perpetuate or resist dominance".<sup>63</sup> The reason I chose this method is that Erdogan's nation building process have been escalated especially after July 15 coup attempt and the narratives around this event.

Therefore, I aim to show how the discourse is in the service of nation by reframing and defining nation with religious rhetoric. I use DHA to show that Erdogan's new nation building process makes use of religious nationalism.

### 3.1. Research design

Following Ruth Wodak's method of DHA, I created four *topoi*<sup>64</sup> to analyse the discourse within speeches according to the context. Although these categorizations are useful in order to investigate the discourse within its context, they sometimes overlap in the sense that one speech could fit more than one of these topoi. This is usually caused by Erdogan's rhetoric and the way he defines nation, but it could be the overlapping features of the nation and religion as well.

As a cultural and a political entity, the nation shares common collective and representative features with religion in the sense that a reference to solidarity or heroism can be

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<sup>63</sup> Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, "The Discourse Historical Approach," 2011, 24–61, pg. 25.

<sup>64</sup> "'Topoi' (singular 'topos', the Greek word for 'place') can be understood as parts of argumentation that belong to the required premises. They are formal or content-related warrants or 'conclusion rules'. As such, they connect the argument(s) with the conclusion, the claim. In this way, they justify the transition from the argument(s) to the conclusion (Kienpointner 1992: 194).", "Reisigl and Wodak, "The Discourse Historical Approach."'"

understood both in religious and national terms in this context. This is why I aim to show how religious nationalism occupies this grey area where religion and nationalism are intertwined in discourse (see Table I.)

I analyse Erdogan's discourses to show how he uses it in the service of nation building, in this context, with religious nationalism. I argue that discourse is a manipulative tool here. It does not necessarily in a cause-effect relationship in terms of immediate embracing of the discourse by the people, but it has a justifying power.

Table 1: *Topoi of religious nationalism.*

Topos	Religious nationalism	Examples
Topos of the nation	Discourse of framing the nation, unity, enemy (us vs. them), conspiracies	<p>“Our nation’s unity, peace and togetherness has been targeted by those who take orders from the “<i>master mind</i>” and finally it turned to a violent act on July, 15”. (emphasis added)</p> <p>“From every age and every class of our nation, from 7 to 70, workers to patrons, peasants to urbans, all parts of our nation, without even thinking about our ideological differences; they’ve become <i>one</i> against putschists.” (emphasis added)</p>
Topos of religion	Discourse of scripture, martyrs, heroism	<p>“Putschists’ tanks and weapons could not beat <i>our nation’s</i> will and determination. If the puschists have tanks and weapons, our nation has (iman) the <i>faith</i>”. (emphasis added)</p>
Topos of history	Discourse of the past, framing nation as historical	<p>“We defended our country in the July, 15, following the steps of Suleiman Shah, who founded our very first state (referring to Turkic-Islamic Memluk State here) in these lands (Anatolia). Also, we built our principles on that same night (July, 15) by looking at Osman Gazi, who laid the foundation of a powerful state in 1299 (Ottoman Empire). As our ancestors, who fought against the enemy until the last of their blood in Canakkale, 100 years ago; we pushed back the coup attempters in the same way in July, 15. We had the similar belief and confidence with Mustafa Kemal when he launched the Independence War. We carried the spirit of the Independence War on July 15.”</p>
Topos of democracy	Discourse of “the people”, democracy, sovereignty of the nation	<p>“In July, 15, Turkey came to a fork in the road. On the one hand, we have the reality of FETÖ and their supporters who aim to take over our country, our nation, and our future. On the other hand, there is a nation, who fought at the risk of its life in order to look after its democracy, independence, and future. There is no exception or any other explanations of this, no grey ground. Those who try to create this grey ground are also terrorists by default because there is no such ground, they create this. What happened on July 15 is treason.”</p>

As shown in Table I, I focus on four concepts (topoi) to analyse the speeches. In order to explain religious nationalism in discourse, it is important to focus on not only religiously tinged language, but also how the leader is framing nation with respect to other features of nation. In that sense, I used four categories of religious nationalism, arguing that religiously tinged language or religious rhetoric is not the only indicator of a religious nationalists.

In this study, I argue that, *millet* as a political community is intertwined in Erdogan's rhetoric both as a religious and a national unity. The nation takes the priority and the most important focus on his rhetoric; therefore, nation has a central role in his religious nationalism. In that sense, it is important to investigate how he frames nation not only as religious (topos of religious) but also a historical (topos of history), political and civic (topos of democracy) and as a single (one) unit as opposed to a common enemy or the 'other' (topos of nation).

The discourse of unity, us and them, and the discourse of enemy or conspiracies constitutes the 'topos of nation' due to the fact that in these speeches, Erdogan reconstructs the national identity as opposed to 'other' and mobilizes people in his discourses against an enemy and emphasises the unity of the nation against putschists and terrorists.

The topos of the nation could be an umbrella concept since this analysis aims to show the new nation building process in Erdogan's rhetoric. However, I used the topos of the nation to show Erdogan's framing of nation, within the religious nationalist rhetoric. Therefore, *millet* is not only defined as a religious community in his discourses, but also as opposed to an enemy or simply 'people' who constitutes the Turkish nation as a political community. The unity and togetherness is therefore an important tool for Erdogan to emphasis on 'one' nation.

When Erdogan bridges the past and the present and refers to an ancient past or to a homeland, it is categorized as the 'topos of history' in which he frames the nation as historical, mostly with Islamic past but also giving references to Independence War of Turkey. The main

purpose of historical framing of nation is to show the continuation. However, Erdogan is selective in terms of his references to this ‘national past’. It is important to point out that, up until July 15, it was unlikely to witness wither Erdogan or any other Islamists’ mention of Independence War or any other ‘victories’ that back then were achieved.

The ‘topos of religion’ is the category in which I place the language which is loaded with religious metaphors and symbolism, references to the scriptures, glorifying martyrs and mentions of heroism. As with the topos of nation, this category constitutes a crucial part of this analysis as Erdogan’s religious rhetoric frames the nation as religious. It also shows the intertwined interpretation of religion and nation in his discourse.

Last but not least, the ‘topos of democracy’ constitutes references to the nation’s sovereignty (referring to parliaments representative democracy) or repeated emphasis on democracy and framing it solely as a rule and the sovereignty of the people. Erdogan’s religious nationalism is based on the sovereignty and will of the nation, *millet*. Mentions of democracy and sovereignty constitutes one of the most important part of his rhetoric due to the fact that it differentiates Erdogan from other religious nationalists. It is therefore important to show the central role of ‘the people’ in his discourses.

### 3.2. Data collection

After the July 15 coup attempt, Erdogan gave many speeches in order to make sure that the people were aware of the significance of the day. He gave long, loaded speeches, describing the coup night and emphasising the braveness of *millet* who fought to defend their nation and democracy. I focus on four speeches delivered by Erdogan after the coup attempt and I show four visuals in the analysis which, I argue, are assistive tools of Erdogan’s discursive nation building process.

The first speech was published on Erdogan's presidential website with the title '*Millete Hitap*' (Addressing the Nation). This speech was delivered by Erdogan on July 17, right after the coup attempt on the state's official channel TRT. The second speech is from '*Demokrasi ve Şehitler Mitingi*' (Democracy and Martyr's Rally) which was held on August 7, in Istanbul. The other two speeches were also given within the same context of commemorating the events of July 15. These speeches are similar in the context they were given in terms of references and narratives. They constitute Erdogan's nation building process in a rhetorical manner, i.e. they contribute the religious nationalist project of his through the use of discourse power.

The visuals, on the other hand, are illustrations of the coup night, prepared and serviced by the presidential office after the attempt. They were shown on all billboards in Istanbul and Ankara for almost a whole summer. Although they were not the only memorial materials that were used by the government, I focus on these visuals due to their discursive power. I selected four pictures which shows parallelisms with Erdogan's speeches.

All the images have a similar content and contain the title "July 15 Epic" with the subtitle "with respect for our martyrs and veterans..." and the name of the place (inside the red frame) "..., Istanbul or Ankara". If it is analysed in the context, these visuals depict Erdogan's *millet* who bravely fought against the putschists to protect their nation and democracy. In this sense, they go along with the speeches and rhetoric.

In Chapter 4, I analyse Erdogan's discourses around the July 15 narratives. Following the structure of the categories, I aim to show to what extend Erdogan is reframing nation with religious rhetoric and to what extend nation and religion is intertwined. At the end of this chapter, I share the implications and the result of the analysis.



## Chapter 4. Discourse Analysis: Post-Coup Attempt Narratives and Religious Nationalism in Contemporary Turkey

In Gramscian sense, every nation building process is a process of hegemony construction. In order to establish hegemony, a competent is to be able to claim the constituent power. This is what nationalists do, therefore, it is crucial for Erdogan to build its own founding narratives in society. However, in order to complete the nation-building process, Erdogan needed to build the consent first.<sup>65</sup> According to Aktoprak this consent building was possible with the emphasis of religious symbols and language, in this case that it was Islam. Therefore, AKP needed to reconstruct itself as the constituent power of the new nation. In order to do that, there was a need to redefine and reformulate the nation around the narratives that is particular to the “new” regime.

In this chapter, I analyse Erdogan’s discourses and show how he reconstructs the national identity while framing the nation in religious terms. I show that he uses religion in his rhetoric, substantiating it with symbols and metaphors from the Islamic roots of the Turkish nation. I argue that religion and nation become intertwined and are used for the purpose of a new nation building process. In addition to that, he frames nation as historical, referencing to a past that I analyse the speeches according to the categories of religious nationalist discourse which I devised (see Chapter 3, Table I.).

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<sup>65</sup> Aktoprak, “Postkolonyal bir ‘dava’ olarak ‘Yeni Türkiye’nin yeni ulusu.”

## 4.1. Framing the nation as religious

In these speeches, Erdogan describes the night of July 15 in detail. He also takes advantage of the atmosphere brought by the fact that the intensity of the events made it almost impossible to criticise or question the framing of the events. These speeches are mostly encouraging in essence, explaining why people should side with the state and the government in this time of crisis. They also express how bravely the '*millet*' fought for their 'nation' and 'democracy'. In some parts, the speeches create the us vs. them distinction where the people who took the streets are defined as 'us', and the rest is them who are usually defined as either terrorists or traitors. He further promises that the government will do everything to clean the state branches from these traitors who even leaked to the military. Erdogan invites people to unite, regardless of their ideological background is. He is emphasising that the people are "one nation" against its enemies.

July 15 was not only an opportunity for Erdogan to fight against his enemies, but also to implement his nationalist project. Based on these speeches and the enemy creation processes they show, Erdogan redefines Turkey's national identity intertwined with its religious identity. Although the emphasis is on the 'enemy' of the 'people', he is reconstructing a Turkish national identity in religious terms while employing the us vs. them discourse.

### 4.1.1. *Defining the nation*

In this section, I selected the phrases where Erdogan defines nation as 'one nation', based on a collective solidarity, shared culture and past, and as opposed to an enemy (topos of nation). Although Erdogan is not openly defining nation as religious community, from the way he frames *millet* it can be inferred that in his formulation, Sunni Muslims constitute the nation. When he counts different ethnic groups, who live in Turkey such as 'Turks, Kurds, Lazs,

Circassians, Bosnians...' etc. he avoids mentioning the Christian Armenians and Jews. Therefore, the Sunni Muslims constitute the 'one nation' in his rhetoric.

I analyse the discourse of sovereignty and democracy in this section as well. According to Erdogan, the source of sovereignty is 'the people', or nation or in his words *millet*. He is referring to 79 millions of people as one nation arguing that they are constituting '*milli irade*' (National Will). Therefore, it can be argued that democracy and nation is an important element of Erdogan's nationalist discourse because he basis his legitimate power in representative democracy. From this, it can also be argued that, again, Erdogan's religious nationalism is based on the nation, which is the source of sovereignty. The main emphasis is on the nation, although this nation is attributed or considered to be a religious community (Sunni Muslims), it is intertwined with the political community.

In addition to framing the nation as one, he also defines the nation as opposed to the enemy. Erdogan's use of conspiratorial discourse and creating a world of us vs. them are manifestations of his aim to unite people as one against a common enemy. Erdogan's enemy discourse is important in his nation building process due to the fact that it legitimizes and empowers Erdogan's claims and policies against his enemies.

July 15 narratives and Erdogan's speeches are usually based on the dichotomy between the nation and the enemy. In that sense, the nation is redefined in his discourses as opposed to 'enemy'. The reason for the failure of the attempt coup, according to Erdogan, was the will and the determinant character of the nation. In the coup attempt context, the enemy is the 'putschists' or FETÖ who targeted the nation and democracy on July 15. Erdogan is dividing the people into two camp, on the one hand, there is the nation who participated or not participated but are on the same side with the state in their 'war' against the enemy. On the other, the putschists or the 'others'.

He mobilizes and unites people against an enemy which targets directly will of the nation. On another occasion, one of his press meetings, Erdogan talks about the military attempt as a “gift” from the God continuing that “this attempt was a gift from the God that proved we have to clean our military from those traitors whose aim is take over the state”.<sup>66</sup> His statements are interpreted as he took the advantage of the coup and use it in order to extend his power over the country.

In the following excerpts, this us vs. them discourse could be seen easily. Erdogan is also framing the nation in a more secular sense in this text, claiming that by taking the streets and fighting for their nation, the people actually stood up against hijackers who targeted the nation and democracy (the topos of the nation, the topos of democracy).

“In July, 15, Turkey came to a fork in the road. On the one hand, we have the reality of FETÖ and their supporters who aim to take over our country, our nation, and our future. On the other hand, there is a nation, who fought at the risk of its life in order to look after its democracy, independence, and future. There is no exception or any other explanations of this, no grey ground. Those who try to create this grey ground are also terrorists by default because there is no such ground, they create this. What happened on July 15 is treason.”

In another example,

“Our nation’s unity, peace and togetherness has been targeted by those who take orders from the “*master mind*” and finally it turned to a violent act on July, 15. When it turned to a violent act, we called *our nation* to the streets to defend their country from the enemy; and our glorious nation and citizens took their places in the streets against their arms saying that “if they have guns and tanks, *we have iman (faith)*”. It is not an ordinary act that those people laid down in front of the tanks. We lost 161 people, not by an accident.”<sup>67</sup> (emphasis added). (see Figure 1 and 2).

“Master mind” is a conspiratorial concept used to refer to a superior mind assuming that there is a conspiratorial power that is capable of controlling and manipulating the state and the

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<sup>66</sup> Erdogan 2016, YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrSomYhjtyY>

<sup>67</sup> “Demokrasi Şehitlerini Uğurlayan Erdoğan: Bu Hafta Meydanlardan Ayrılmayacağız,” Haberler.com, July 17, 2016, [https://www.haberler.com/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-silahli-eyleme-donustugu-8618274-haberi/?utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_campaign=tavsiye\\_et&utm\\_medium=detay](https://www.haberler.com/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-silahli-eyleme-donustugu-8618274-haberi/?utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=tavsiye_et&utm_medium=detay).

society. In the political history of Turkey, it is not the first time that a government is using this concept. The term “master mind” is applied to different conspiracy theories in different contexts. Sometimes, instead of “mater mind”, it is referred to as “deep state”. In the case of July 15<sup>th</sup>, the concept was used to define the power behind the failed coup (topos of nation).

In addition to that, Erdogan is creating another dichotomy between the nation with *faith*, and the enemy with arms and guns. He is defining the nation as a group of people which necessarily have ‘*iman*’. The reason I emphasise *iman* here is that, faith is not necessarily referring to a sacred source in English, can be anything, while *iman* refers to the belief/faith in the precepts of Islam. Therefore, Erdogan is referring to a nation which shares similar beliefs and faith. This nation, clashes with ‘tanks’ and armed soldiers with their ‘*iman*’ (the topos of religion, the topos of the nation).



Figure 1: “The Epic of July, 15 in respect to our martyrs and veterans...” prepared and serviced by The Presidency of Republic of Turkey, in 2016 to demonstrate the night of coup attempt.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Editor, “Cumhurbaşkanlığı tarafından paylaşılan 15 Temmuz afişleri,” *İndigo Dergisi* (blog), July 11, 2017, <https://indigodergisi.com/2017/07/cumhurbaskanligi-15-temmuz-afisleri/>.

Figure 1 and 2, illustrate Erdogan's describing of the night and events, draws a considerable parallelism with his speech. It shows the contrast between the nation and the putschists that attacks armless civilians with tanks, bombs, fires; where civilians are wrapped with a flag. It can be argued that these images serve Erdogan's speeches and assists the justification of the discourse.

After these posters took place in different parts of the city, it drew attention and raised criticisms from the public, especially the Kemalists interpreted these posters as derogatory. The criticism was mainly towards the way the soldiers were portrayed. However, for the AKP cadres and the people who were on the streets that night, they were the terrorists and The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) was supposed to be cleaned from them.



Figure 2: "The Epic of July, 15 in respect to our martyrs and veterans..."<sup>69</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Editor.

“From every age and every class of our nation, from 7 to 70, workers to patrons, peasants to urbans, all parts of our nation, without even thinking about their ideological differences; they’ve become *one* against putschists.”<sup>70</sup> (emphasis added). (see Figure 3 and 4.)

In the excerpt above, Erdogan’s constant emphasis on “oneness” and “togetherness” denotes the importance of unity against the enemy (the topos of the nation). He claims that July 15 victory was embraced by every member of the nation. It is important for Erdogan to mention that the coup attempt was not only against the government and state apparatuses, but it targeted the people and the nation. Through targeting the democratically elected government, this attack was actually threatening the people. Therefore, it was important to understand the magnitude of support that people showed that night regardless of their ideological background.

On the other hand, after July 15<sup>th</sup>, a considerable number of surveys and reports were published. One of these reports published by KONDA<sup>71</sup> shows that almost half of the population did not go out that after Erdogan’s calling or did not take part in the gatherings and celebrations for the commemoration of July 15.<sup>72</sup> According to the report, almost more than half of the people who answered the questions as ‘participated’ are either Erdogan’s supporters or vote for Erdogan’s party.

The meaning of democracy and also martyrs is reframed in his speeches; he is calling the people who died in that night as “democracy martyrs” who died while protecting the “state” from an insider enemy (the topos of the nation, the topos of democracy). He re-interprets the concept of martyrdom and martyr’s, that is sacrificing oneself for democracy. Democracy in

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<sup>70</sup> Cumhurbaşkanlığı T.C., “Milletle Hitap,” accessed May 22, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/47677/millete-hitap.html>.

<sup>71</sup> KONDA is a Research and Consultancy service which publishes various surveys as well as reports about social movements and developments in Turkey. <http://konda.com.tr/en/home/>

<sup>72</sup> Evren Balta, Murat Paker, and Ayşe Betül Çelik, “15 Temmuz Darbe Girişimi,” Konda Barometresi, Temalar (Istanbul: KONDA, 2016), <http://konda.com.tr/tr/rapor/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/>.



that sense is defined as the government which was democratically elected by the votes of the nation. Military's attempt to intervene the government means also the intervention in democracy (the topos of democracy).



Figure 3: “The Epic of July, 15 in respect to our martyrs and veterans...”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Editor, “Cumhurbaşkanlığı tarafından paylaşılan 15 Temmuz afişleri.”





Figure 4: “The Epic of July, 15 in respect to our martyrs and veterans...”<sup>74</sup>

In the following excerpt, Erdogan defines his understanding of nationalism that is based on not ‘ethnicity’. His formulation of nationalism is based on ‘one nation, one flag, one homeland and one state’:

“When we started to walk on this road, we said we have a Rabia. What was the first of our Rabia? *One nation*... Here is it, with its Turks, Kurds, Lazs, Circassians, Georgians, Bosniaks, 79 million people one nation. The second is, *elhamdüllillah* (Thank God) *one flag*, where does the colour (red) of flag come from? Our martyr’s, veteran’s blood. *Hilal* (crescent) is the sign of our independence. And the star is our martyr himself... Third, *one homeland*. 780 thousand kilometres of land... It is our homeland... Nobody should even bother to make calculations over our territories. Those terrorist organizations, PKK, YPG, ISIS... They can attack all together with all of their power, but they still cannot success. With the help of our Allah, our nation would overcome any kind of threat. My brothers and sisters, I believe one thing, we die as one, but we come as thousands, terrorists should also know this like that. Fourth is *one state*. We do not have another state but the Republic of Turkey.”<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Editor.

<sup>75</sup> Cumhurbaşkanlığı T.C., “‘Demokrasi Nöbeti’ Tutan Vatandaşlara Hitaben Yaptıkları Konuşma,” accessed May 22, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/49956/demokrasi-nobeti-tutan-vatandaslara-hitaben-yaptiklari-konusma.html>.

The Rabia salute (a four-finger hand gesture, meaning ‘four’ in Arabic), was first introduced by the Muslim Brotherhood, to protest the coup in Egypt. Erdogan and his adherents in Turkey adopted the Rabia sign to show their support of the protests. After July 15, Erdogan modified the meaning of Rabia, referring to his own understanding of nationalism, ‘*tek millet, tek bayrak, tek vatan, tek devlet*’ (one nation, one flag, one homeland, one state).

After the referenda in 2016, the system in Turkey was changed from parliamentary to an ‘executive presidential system’ and Erdogan, securing his position as the president of the country, became the head of the AKP in 2017 again.<sup>76</sup> The first thing his party did was to make sure Erdogan’s vision of ‘one nation, one state, one flag, one homeland’ was in the party constitution, Article named as ‘Rabia’.<sup>77</sup>

As it can be inferred from the paragraph, Erdogan is framing his new regime’s ideological background in this speech. His main references are to the ‘oneness’ of nation that is comprised of different ethnic groups. In this context, it is important to emphasise that the ethnic groups Erdogan mentions in this speech are considered as ‘part of the nation’ in Erdogan’s discourse, as long as they comply with the other standards of his nationalism. In addition to that, not only in this paragraph, but including other four texts, Erdogan does not mention Christian or Jew citizens (topos of religion).

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<sup>76</sup> “Turkey Is at a Turning Point with New Presidential System: Erdoğan,” Hürriyet Daily News, accessed May 30, 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-is-at-a-turning-point-with-new-presidential-system-erdogan-131061>.

<sup>77</sup> “AKP’de Yeniden Erdoğan Dönemi: ‘Rabia’ Tüzüğü Giriyor, Üç Dönem Kuralı Esnetiliyor,” *Diken* (blog), May 20, 2017, <http://www.diken.com.tr/akpde-yeniden-erdogan-donemi-rabia-tuzuge-giriyor-uc-donem-kurali-esnetiliyor/>.

### 4.1.2. Religiously tinged language

“Say Amen all the heroes, *Allahu ekber* (Allah is one),  
martyrs from the sky, Amen Amen”<sup>78</sup>  
(Mehmet Akif Ersoy, 1973-1936)

Religiously tinged language has a certain discursive power, but the main strategy of Erdogan in terms of employing a religious rhetoric is not only linguistic. Erdogan is reframing the concept of martyrdom in a way that it was never done before. While ‘martyrdom’ can be both religious and secular, Erdogan is intertwining them both to define the martyrs of nation. In addition to using both religious and secular (or national) use of the concept, Erdogan also defines the people who die on July 15<sup>th</sup> as Democracy Martyrs. This overlaps not only the topos of the nation and religion, but also democracy because people die not only for their nation, or *millet*, but also for democracy. Erdogan uses democracy here to refer to the elected government, i.e. the AKP.

There is a famous saying in Turkish culture, whenever a martyr’s funeral is held: ‘*Şehitler ölmez, vatan bölünmez*’ (The Martyrs do not die, and homeland will not be divided). In this sense, the concept of martyrdom has always been related to a divine or religious position instead of completely being attached to the ‘nation’ or the ‘homeland’ in Turkey.

Being a martyr or martyrdom as a concept has always been seen as a position in nationalist discourse, religious or not. For Erdogan, however, this is a new turning point in his discourse due to the fact that one his first promise when he came to power was to end the terror and terrorism related violent. In 2015, when he terminated the Peace Process with Kurdish

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<sup>78</sup> Mehmet Akif Ersoy’s verses from the poem: ‘The Army’s Prayer’. Mehmet Akif Ersoy, the author of Turkish National Anthem, was an influential poet in the Ottoman Empire and then in the Republican Turkey. Erdogan, in his speech at the Rally Democracy and Martyrs quoted his verses, in Cumhurbaşkanlığı T.C., “‘Demokrasi Ve Şehitler Mitingi’Nde Yaptıkları Konuşma,” accessed May 22, 2018, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/49925/demokrasi-ve-sehitler-mitinginde-yaptiklari-konusma.html>.

parties, the concept of martyrdom and martyrs began to gain more importance due to the escalated violent and deaths in the south-eastern cities of Turkey.

‘Democracy Martyrs’ are civilians who died in the clashes on July 15. The lines from Mehmet Akif’s famous poem *The Army’s Prayer* above at the beginning of this section, was read by Erdogan during the ‘Democracy and Martyrs’ Rally’. Following the common perception about martyrdom in Turkish culture, it can be argued that Erdogan’s discourse of martyrdom is two folds: both secular and religious. However, in his religious nationalist discourse, both are intertwined as follows:

“*Eyvallah*, martyrs don’t die, and our homeland will not be divided as our Rab heralds: ‘We cannot call them (martyrs) dead, they are alive, but you cannot know.’”<sup>79</sup>

In this excerpt, Erdogan appeals to the authority of the scripture to strengthen his argument that martyrs of nation are not dead. The concept of martyrdom is glorified and presented as a higher position in the presence of Allah. This means that people who die for the nation are also awarded in ‘the other world (the topos of religion).

“May our Rab (God) protect our country, our nation and our homeland from putschists and coup attempts that target our democracy, *inşallah*. As I said earlier, we’ll be one, we’ll be great, and we’ll love each other for the sake of *Allah* (God)”<sup>80</sup>

Another example of his religiously tinged language could be traced in the excerpts above. Erdogan is defining nation as a community that is observed and protected by Allah. This also refers that the religiosity of nation makes them one nation (topos of religion, the topos of the nation). The use of words such as democracy, nation, homeland and love of God shows the

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<sup>79</sup> T.C., “‘Demokrasi Nöbeti’ Tutan Vatandaşlara Hitaben Yaptıkları Konuşma.”

<sup>80</sup> “ibid”

intertwined understanding of his nation and religion. According to him, the nation is bound together by the commonality of their creator, *Allah* (the topos of religion). On the other hand, this unity is not by chance, because the political unit is also based on democracy in which the people are the sovereign power (the topos of democracy, the topos of the nation).

“May our night be lightened, may our future be lightened, may all the darkness’s be cleared off. May you’ll be safe and sound and may Allah’s peace be upon you.”<sup>81</sup>

The religiously tinged language and references to scripture constitute an important part of Erdogan’s discourse (as excerpted above) in order to create the special connection between the people and himself. Erdogan’s Islamist background also makes this connection possible for him to deploy such language. Although it is not necessarily a conscious choice of words in Erdogan’s case, his religious rhetoric corresponds to the colloquial language of the people, especially pious Muslims. This creates an ideological connection between Islamists and Erdogan.

“This crowd shows us that Turkey is going to achieve its 2023 goals. Now Turkey has only one aim and it is to reach the level of contemporary civilizations. Are you ready for that? This scene shows that unity, togetherness and brotherhood is not only a wish, a slogan but it is also a fact: that is, we can make our goals come true with this power we have. We are going to act collectively, and we love each other only for Allah; not for money or position.”<sup>82</sup>

The excerpt above also shows how Erdogan is using Muslim identity as a means of collective representation of the people and religion becomes a way of unifying and connecting people on the basis of faith and love of *Allah*. Here, religion has become one of the distinguishing factor of the culture and is centered in the national identity as one of the most important elements. Therefore, religious rhetoric and symbolism is not only a cultural element;

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<sup>81</sup> “ibid”

<sup>82</sup> T.C.

but also, a moral and spiritual part of the national community. In that sense, nation and religion become intertwined.

#### ***4.1.3. Historical roots of millet***

Erdogan, just as the founders of the modern Turkey, is aiming to build a nation and reconstruct the state and its apparatuses under the control of one hand, which is the leader. It is a different process than reforming the state and its institutions. While it aims to create legitimacy through connecting the past to the future, it is selective in terms of choosing which narratives and which parts of the history is valuable for the construction of the new national narrative.

The historical framing of nation is another important tool for Erdogan to employ religious nationalist discourse. He is explicitly giving references to Turkish-Islamic past of the nation, indicating the continuation of the nation from an ancient past. The emphasis on the historical homeland is another evidence of his religious nationalism. He frames Anatolia as historically belong to the Turkish nation where they first came and settle in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Framing nation as historical is a salient sign of the nationalist discourse. Grounding the existence of nation in the past, therefore, is thought to have a legitimizing power in terms of the nation's long duree.<sup>83</sup> As opposed to Kemalists who grounds Turkish nation's past in the Central Asian Turkic tribes, Erdogan is giving references to Anatolia as a homeland where Muslim Turks' first appearance can be traced.

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<sup>83</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Repr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Introduction: 'Ethno-symbolism' and the study of nationalism.

“We defended our country on July 15, following the steps of Suleiman Shah, who founded our very first state (referring to Turkic-Islamic Memluk State here) in these lands (Anatolia). Also, we built our principles on that same night (July 15) by looking at Osman Gazi, who laid the foundation of a powerful state in 1299 (Ottoman Empire). As our ancestors, who fought against the *enemy* until the last of their blood in Canakkale, 100 years ago; we pushed back the coup attempters in the same way on Jul 15. We had the similar belief and confidence with Mustafa Kemal when he started the Turkish War of Independence. The spirit of the Independence War we carried that night. July 15 showed everyone that, political, economic and diplomatic attacks cannot make us surrender. Also, we do not give in against these military sabotages. Those who waited in excitement to see us yielded and toppled down after this tragic coup attempt; are now disappointed and grieved. They failed. They were devastated when they saw us united as *one nation*, one brotherhood, one Turkey all together.”<sup>84</sup> (emphasis added).

The historical framing of the nation is selective in Erdogan’s discourse. His choice of selection in terms of historical events and the past of history are indicators of his religious nationalism. It can be argued that giving references to earlier Turkish Islamic states implies his interpretation of the national and religious community as intertwined.

In this excerpt, for example, Erdogan is giving references to “the glorious past of the Turkish nation”, including early Turkic-Islamic states such as Memluks, Seljuks, Ottomans. He is building the connection between those states and present Turkey through religion and homeland (topos of religion, topos of history). He is referring to an ancient past and in order to build a connection between the past and present, he is giving examples from history, wars and narratives of heroism (topos of nation, topos of history). In addition to that, through giving examples of these Islamic states and their history in Anatolia, he is building connection between the present and the past; referring to an ancient homeland, he bases upon the Turkish nation’s homeland to Anatolia (topos of history, topos of the nation).

He is comparing 1921 Independence War with coup attempt in 2016 claiming that, 15<sup>th</sup> of July was another Turkish War of Independence nation (topos of history). Muslim Turks, therefore is defined as the Turkish nation who were and are independent and brave enough to

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<sup>84</sup> T.C., “‘Demokrasi Ve Şehitler Mitingi’Nde Yaptıkları Konuşma.”

defeat their external (in the past) and internal enemies (today) (topos of religion, topos of nation, topos of history).

Another example to his framing nation as historical can be traced in the following excerpt:

“Thanks to *Allah* I saw these days, I thank my *Allah* every day that I’m a member of this nation. When our country was occupied in 1920, Mustafa Kemal asked, “*Our nation is great, we do not need to worry. Our nation does not subordinate, our nation does not yield. But once in a while we have to remind them and ask them this question: O, nation! Do you accept captivity? Do you subordinate to your enemies?*” I know how my nation will answer to this question, but still I’d like to ask this question to you now (to the crowd): O nation! Will you accept captivity? Will you subordinate to your enemies?”<sup>85</sup>

Erdogan is not refrained to give examples from “old” Turkey and 1921 War of Independence. He tries to find resemblances and build connections between those years and today’s Turkey. He tries to find parallelism with Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in his leadership to the nation.

Following the Republic’s founding father Ataturk’s rhetoric, Erdogan is trying to show the similarity between the Independence War and July 15 (topos of history). He mobilizes people by giving a motivational speech which is similar to Ataturk’s. However, on the other hand, he attributes his membership in the nation to a divine source (topos of religion). Although it seems inconsistent in terms of giving both worldly and divine references, Erdogan’s religious nationalist discourse is based on this understanding of intertwined relationship of religion and nationalism.

## 4.2. Implications

This analysis aims to show the intertwined relationship between religion and nationalism, focusing on Erdogan’s religious nationalist discourses. I argue that Erdogan is framing nation as religious, using the word *millet* interchangeably to refer nation but at the same

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<sup>85</sup> “ T.C. CUMHURBAŞKANLIĞI: ‘Demokrasi Ve Şehitler Mitingi’nde Yaptıkları Konuşma.”



time framing this nation as religious. This framing is due to his religious nationalist project of nation building. In that, his discourses do not base religion or a sacred power as the source of sovereignty, but the nation is the central point.

First, I focused on the discourse of unity, enemy and how he defines nation as one and opposed to an enemy. Since I base this research on the July 15<sup>th</sup> narratives and discourse, I found out that the enemy creation is an important part of Erdogan's new nation building process. More importantly, it gives him the opportunity to not only fight against his enemies, but also make it possible to define his enemies as the 'nation's enemy'.

In the second part of this analysis, I showed the religiously tinged language and religious references in Erdogan's discourse. It is usually loaded with references to the scripture, constant use of some words in Arabic to indicate his religious background. Some of these words are commonly used in colloquial language, in that sense, it is hard to argue that Erdogan's choice of words has always a discursive side. Nevertheless, Erdogan's use of some particular words and narratives repetitively make him possible to reach a wider audience especially among pious Muslims.

However, Erdogan is not only using religiously tinged language. Therefore, the topos of religion is not only categorizing the rhetoric, but also the content of this rhetoric. Erdogan's use of religious community and nation interchangeably is not exactly far from reality. The overlapping of religious and national community in Turkey creates a situation in which Erdogan's religious rhetoric finds its correspondence in his adherents.

Going back to Brubaker's explanation of the intertwined religious and national community, this overlapping empowers Erdogan's religious rhetoric. Although it is not always employed in an obvious manner, Erdogan is not refrained to define Turkish nation with the religiosity of the people.

Yet, the nation as a political community has a central role in Erdogan's discourse as it can be seen in the topos of religion, the topos of the nation as well as the topos of democracy. Effectively, I analyse the discourse of sovereignty and democracy in the section first with 'defining nation'. Although the discourse of democracy is not necessarily a defining the nation moment for Erdogan, it emphasis the central part of his religious nationalist discourse: the nation. His emphasis on democracy and nation (although used intertwined with religious community) differentiates him from other religious nationalists.

It can be argued that a separate categorization as the topos of democracy is not essential because it can be also analysed in the topos of the nation. Nevertheless, the discourse of democracy and sovereignty constitutes another dimension of the topos of democracy because Erdogan's reference to democracy and sovereignty is also used to deploy a sense of legitimacy. The fact that Erdogan and his party is elected by the people's votes, the topos of democracy shows the legitimate power of the religious nationalist leader.

The framing of nation as historical is a common way of investigating the nationalist rhetoric that give references to ancient past or homeland. However, in this analysis, I aimed to show Erdogan's selectivity of the events occurred in the past. He draws a chronological timeline for Turkish Muslims' appearance in the history which is traced back to the first Turkish-Muslim state Memluks. In addition to references to Islamic past, Erdogan is also using metaphors from Republican years, and he quotes Ataturk's statements.

### **4.3. Results of analysis**

In this analysis, I focused on the context of July 15<sup>th</sup>, instead of variety of speeches that were delivered by Erdogan in different time and space. I argued that the coup attempt and July 15 constitute one of the most important part of Erdogan's nationalist project because of the fact that Erdogan found a chance to not only dismantle an enemy that was threatening his hegemonic

power in the country, but also empowered Erdogan's hand in terms of reconstructing the Turkish national identity. Therefore, the topos of nation which helps to analyse discourse of unity and enemy is a useful categorization in this context.

In order to find the consistencies and inconsistencies and to what extent religious Erdogan's discourse is, I find it useful to analyse his speeches within the category of the topos of religion. The religious rhetoric was not only loaded with discourse of scripture, but also helped to investigate how he frames the nation as religious. For example, through Erdogan's references to martyrs, it can be seen that the concept is used both in its national and religious meaning.

The categories I created for the analysis overlaps due to the intertwined relationship between religion and nation and Erdogan's rhetoric. It is also caused by focusing on not sentences or the way he uses certain words but focusing on the context and the narrative that is expressed in long paragraphs. In that sense, a word by word analysis of Erdogan's rhetoric could be a subject of another study.

After contextualizing this research, I found out that Erdogan's discourses employ a religious nationalist rhetoric in the sense that religious and political community is understood as one nation. However, in order to come to such conclusion, a focus on the categories of religious nationalism is necessary to see the connection he made when he defines nation, frames the nation as historical, using the discourse of democracy and effectively, framing the nation in religious terms.

## Conclusion

This thesis focusing on the intertwined relationship between religion and nationalism aimed to explain Erdogan's new nation building process in Turkey analysing Erdogan's discourse. I argued that Erdogan is redefining the Turkish nation with its Islamic roots and using a religiously tinged language. However, he differs from other religious nationalists whom derive their legitimacy from a divine source: Erdogan's grounds his legitimate power in the 'nation' as a political unity. He is neither aiming to establish an Islamic state nor he is a religious leader. However, Sunni Islam constitutes a central role for the AKP's understanding of nation although they refrain to make it too official. By looking at Erdogan's discourses, symbols he uses one can infer that he is making religious nationalism; redefining the Turkish nation with its Sunni Islamic roots and reinventing an understanding of collectivity based on a common religious identity. This creates a problem in three ways: (i) he is excluding those citizens who are not religious or Sunni Muslims, (ii) he escalates the tension between his supporters and his non-supporters; claiming that those who do not support his policies are non-nationals, (iii) he is making identity politics which poses great threat to democracy and pluralism in society.

Although the modern Turkey is built on secular ideals and values, because of the fact that the majority of the people are Sunni Muslim, religion and nationalism have always seen as contested terms in which the conflict that usually rose from the involvement of religion in the politics. In the historical background, I explained the evolution of this contested relationship and the first emergence of religious nationalists, giving a more focus on the AKP and Erdogan's understanding of nationalism.

I argued that the July 15<sup>th</sup> is one of the turning points for the Erdogan to achieve his religious nationalist nation building. July 15<sup>th</sup> is now celebrated as one of the national days of the Republican Turkey. It has entered school books and it is celebrated in 2017 as a national holiday all over the country. Since 2016, the names of the streets and places are changed, such major

changes are observed mostly in Istanbul and Ankara where the clashes between civilians and the military were felt the most. These concrete changes in the public sphere are important as well as Erdoğan's discursive nation building process.

The Discourse Historical Analysis constituted the method of this research, aiming to deconstruct the speeches and show the consistencies and inconsistencies of Erdoğan's rhetoric. I found out that Erdoğan's religious nationalist language is framing the nation as religious as well as historical. In addition to that, the context of July 15 paves the way for defining nation as opposed to an enemy. Since the central role is given to *millet* (nation) in Erdoğan's discourses, it was a useful tool use the topoi of religious nationalist rhetoric.

The religious rhetoric is important as long as it corresponds to the receiver, argues Brubaker.<sup>86</sup> In Turkey, as a Sunni Muslim majority country, some cultural customs and practices intertwined. The national belonging and religious community sometimes overlaps. The overlapping of the national boundaries and religious community can cause an intertwined understanding of nation and religion which would lead to the interchangeable use of nation and religious community.<sup>87</sup> However, Following Brubaker's criticism of the concept of religious nationalism, I pointed out that religious nationalisms could also occur where the emphasis is on the nation as in the case of Turkey.

In that sense, I argued state-centred explanations of religious nationalism limit the investigation of the relationship between religion and nationalism. Instead, as in the case of Turkey, religious nationalism occurs where the nation could constitute the centrality. This means that religious nationalism is not necessarily based on a state-seeking religious project that disregard citizens' consent. I argued that Erdoğan's religious nationalism and interpretation of religion and nation

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<sup>86</sup> Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism."

<sup>87</sup> Brubaker.

as intertwined phenomena requires a reconceptualization of the concept of religious nationalism in a broader and critical sense.

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