



Humanitarian, hospitable and generous: Turkish Public Diplomacy's 'story' in times of authoritarianism and military interventionism

*Humanitária, hospitaleira e generosa:
a 'história' da diplomacia pública da Turquia em
tempos de autoritarismo e intervenções militares*

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze Turkish Public Diplomacy (PD) since the Justice and Development Party (AKP, in Turkish) came to power in 2002. In particular, it aims to make sense of the plurality of public diplomacy discourses and practices which attempt to enact a particular identity for Turkey and to tell a particular 'story' to foreign and domestic audiences. Based on a post-structuralist theoretical framework, we present the many institutions responsible for Public Diplomacy in Turkey and analyze the 'stories' told by them, arguing that PD is one of the many practices engaged by the AKP government in its attempt to enact a particular identity and in its pursuit of legitimacy and influence. The particular identity the AKP has been trying — and keeps failing — to enact is that of a 'benign', benevolent, humanitarian, hospitable and generous emerging power, a model of a Muslim democracy with a growing economy, heir of a (positive) Ottoman legacy. The article also attempts to understand how

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AKP public diplomacy has been trying to modulate such a ‘story’ in a context marked by Turkish military interventions abroad and growing authoritarianism at home.

Keywords: Turkey; Public Diplomacy; Post-Structuralism.

Resumo

O artigo tem como objetivo analisar a diplomacia pública da Turquia desde que o partido Justiça e Desenvolvimento (AKP, em turco) chegou ao poder em 2002. Em particular, visamos fazer sentido da pluralidade de discursos e práticas de diplomacia pública que tentam construir uma identidade particular para a Turquia e contar uma ‘história’ sobre o país para audiências domésticas e internacionais. Utilizando um arcabouço teórico pós-estruturalista, apresentamos as muitas instituições responsáveis por diplomacia pública na Turquia e analisamos as ‘histórias’ contadas por elas, argumentando que a diplomacia pública é uma dentre as muitas práticas empregadas pelo AKP em seus esforços para construir identidade e obter legitimidade e influência. A identidade particular que o AKP vem tentando — sem sucesso — construir para o país é de uma potência emergente benigna, benevolente, humanitária, hospitaleira e generosa, um modelo de democracia muçulmana com uma economia em crescimento, herdeira de um legado positivo do Império Otomano. O artigo também tenta entender como a diplomacia pública do AKP vem tentando modular tal ‘história’ em um contexto marcado por autoritarismo na esfera doméstica e intervenções militares no exterior.

Palavras-chave: Turquia, Diplomacia Pública, Pós-Estruturalismo.

Introduction³

This article aims to analyze Turkish Public Diplomacy (PD) since the Justice and Development Party (AKP, in Turkish) came to power in 2002. In particular, it aims to make sense of the plurality of public diplomatic discourses and practices which attempt to enact a particular identity for Turkey and to tell a particular ‘story’ to foreign and domestic audiences. Based on a post-structuralist theoretical framework, we argue that AKP’s PD slogan — “Turkey has an image and a story to share” — is doubly misleading. First, by using definite articles — an and a —

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it implies that its story is cohesive and consensual; there's only one story to be told. As we attempt to demonstrate, Turkey, through its multiple public diplomacy institutions and disconnected voices, has many stories to share. Second, the 'stories' themselves constitute part of an effort to enact a particular identity for Turkey, which is not prior to the actions that try to enact it.

The article will, first, provide a review of the literature on Public Diplomacy, discussing how it is based on a set of assumptions which tend to point towards a constructivist, if not outright essentialist, understanding of foreign policy. We, argue that, instead of a reflection of an actor's given identity, as stated by this literature, public diplomacy is one of the practices an actor engages in its attempt to enact its own, though precarious and unstable, identity. Turkey, as any other entity, can never have a unitary and cohesive identity. Instead, its identity will be fragmented, multiple and contradictory. After all, Turkey is composed of a multiplicity of institutions, agencies, organizations and peoples⁴, and, as such, will have multiple voices, all of which work to enact identities. Such complexities, we believe, are better dealt with a poststructuralist analysis, which is the focus of our second section. Third, we present the many institutions responsible for Public Diplomacy in Turkey and analyze the 'stories' told by them, arguing that PD is one of the many practices engaged by the AKP government in its attempt to enact a particular identity and in its pursuit of legitimacy and influence. The particular identity the AKP has been trying — and keeps failing— to enact is that of a 'benign', benevolent, humanitarian, hospitable and generous emerging power, a model of a Muslim democracy with a growing economy, heir of a (positive) Ottoman legacy. The article will finally try to understand how AKP's public diplomacy efforts have been trying to modulate such a "story" in a context marked by Turkish military interventions abroad and growing authoritarianism at home.

4 In an article entitled "Who are the Turks?" Mustafa Akyol (2011) argued that Turkey is composed of "several nations under the Star and Crescent" (p. 17): the conservatives (*muhafazakarlar*), whose main source of values is Sunni Islam and are currently represented by the Justice and Development Party (AKP); the secularists (*laikler*) or Kemalists, represented by the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Military, and other state institutions; the Kurds, who constitute about 15% of the population; and the religious minorities, including Muslims of the Alevi sect and non-Muslims such as Armenians, Greeks and Jews. These categories overlap in many instances: some who identify as Kemalists can side with some self-identified conservatives when it comes to the Kurdish issue; conservatives and Kemalists serve in the military; some Kurds might vote for the AKP, whereas some are staunch secularists, like Kemalists.





What is public diplomacy? A literature review

The concepts of public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and soft power usually overlap. The three terms evoke the ideas of a power of attraction (actually possessed or desired) by a given nation-state, and the perceptions and preferences of a foreign public. It is impossible to determine the exact boundaries of each concept, as each one is also subjected to contestation and all of them are also related in different ways to a country's foreign policy. After reviewing the literature that deals with the subject of what public diplomacy *is* or *should be*, it becomes clear that the definition of the concept varies slightly: PD can be seen as “a method by which an international actor can conduct foreign policy by engaging a foreign public” (Cull 2013, vii); “an instrument used [...] to understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior ; build and manage relations; and influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values” (Gregory quoted in Melissen 2011, 2); “how a nation's government and society engage with external audiences, typically with the aim of improving these foreign publics' perception of that nation” (Cross 2013, 4); a way to project an actor's “self-image, or the image that a given actor intends to project to a third party” (Duke 2013a, 114; Duke 2013b, 2); or “a country's effort to share a coherent and convincing account of its own story with the rest of the world” (Kalin 2011, 8). According to Çevik (2016), in Turkey, Public Diplomacy is “narration and publicity, geared towards a duality of audiences, both domestic and international” (p. 56).

Regardless of conceptual variations, it is astounding how widespread are constructivist understandings about identity in PD literature. It is widely assumed that the relationship between identity and PD is one in which identity precedes (or should precede) the practices of public diplomacy. Cross (2013), for example, argues that PD “narratives gain legitimacy when they derive from the *real identity* of the people involved” (p. 5; emphasis added), that “a legitimate and credible PD strategy is only possible if it directly *reflects the identity* of the people it represents” (p. 6; emphasis added), and also that “PD must [...] *reflect real identity* otherwise it will not be persuasive” (p. 9; emphasis added). Çevik (2016) says that “countries turn to a rather traditional public diplomacy that rests on *image projection* [...] expecting to share a more desirable image” (p. 57; emphasis added). Huijgh and Warlick (2016) speak of a Turkish “democratic identity” (p. 10) and say that PD is comprised of “master narratives”, which are “stories that *reflect*





a community's identity and help community members to understand *who they are* and what they stand for, and make sense of the developments around them" (p. 15; emphasis added). Ibrahim Kalin, special adviser to the President of Turkey and the presidential spokesperson, says that PD "*reflects the new identity* which the country wants to embrace" (2011, 12) and that "Turkish public diplomacy must take into consideration [...] particular realities born out of its own story" (p. 16). Kalin also tries to explain the concept of "identity" directly: "what really matters is not image but identity. The determinant of a community's *true qualities* is not its appearance" (Kalin 2011, 17, emphasis added).

It can thus be noted that the literature sees PD as a reflection or projection of a given, pre-existent, and "real" identity, image or narrative. Public diplomacy, in such perspectives, is seen as reflecting how a society "really" *is*. We, in contrast, argue that public diplomacy is one of the practices through which the identity of an international actor is enacted. This dimension of identity enacting is rarely, if ever, explored in PD literature — particularly Turkey's — which tends to essentialize identity as preceding political action, not as relating to it in a simultaneous and mutually constitutive way. In short, public diplomacy's relation to identity can be summed up by a neat sentence used by Willard (2012): "The question of Turkey's identity is core to Turkish public diplomacy". The biggest point of contention between us and the reviewed authors is how public diplomacy and identity actually relate to each other.

Public diplomacy and identity — a poststructuralist take

Poststructuralism's main insight on states and their identities is that "states are never finished as entities" (Campbell 1992, 11), with "ahistorical, frozen and pre-given boundaries" (Ibid., 69). Instead, they are "unavoidably paradoxical entities which do not possess pre-discursive, stable identities" (Ibid., 11), being "devoid of ontological being apart from the many and varied practices which constitute their reality" (Ibid., 105).

Therefore,

all states are marked by an inherent tension between the various domains that need to be aligned for an 'imagined political community' to come into being — such as territoriality and the many axes of identity — and the





demand that such an alignment is a response to (rather than constitutive of) a prior and stable identity (Ibid., 11).

This tension demands of states that they rely on “the regulated and stylized repetition of practices like Foreign Policy” — such as the practices that fall under the Public Diplomacy umbrella — “to contain contingency and secure the self” (Ibid., 251), a struggle that is poised to fail, since the “performative nature of identity can never be fully revealed” which means that the state is rendered “in permanent need of reproduction [...] always in a process of becoming” (Ibid., 11). In other words, “contemporary states are multiple acephalous federations which exist as states only by virtue of their ability to constitute themselves as imagined communities” (Ibid., 195), borrowing from Benedict Anderson’s famous conceptualization of nations (Anderson 2006).

Considering that states are never finished as entities, being always in a process of becoming, Foreign Policy practices, including those of PD, cannot be understood as practices that act as a bridge between pre-existing states, since such an understanding implies that the state is previous to said practices (Campbell 1992, 44), and that states’ identities are secured before their interactions (Ibid., 56). Departing from a poststructuralist understanding, Foreign Policy, instead of being the outward orientation of practices of a pre-existing state with a stable identity, is in fact the very act by which the states give rise to their boundaries (Ibid., 56), in a process that enacts both the state and the international system, part and parcel of the same process (Ibid., 68). This process is inherently tensioned by the various domains that constitute the reality of the state and this complexity has to be disciplined by Foreign Policy practices. In other words, to secure legitimacy and avoid contestations, the alternatives to the intended identity must be suppressed so that such identity appears as natural, integral, cohesive and homogenous, conditions that are inexorably unachievable. It is not without reason that Richard Ashley and R.B.J. Walker argue that any identity is

recognized as one among many arbitrary interpretations; it is seen as a knowledgeable practice of power, itself arbitrarily constructed, that is put to work to tame ambiguities, control meaning, and impose limitations on what people can do and say (1990, 262).





Identities are enacted⁵ by linguistic resources and by “repertoires of action” (Aradau et al 2015, 4), or practices: “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding” (Schatzki in Aradau et al. 2015a, 3). Meanings do not emerge from an inherent relationship between an object and the word used to make reference to it, or between the signified and signifier, “but from a contingent relationship between the signifiers” (Epstein 2008, 7). Signifiers form linguistic chains, which refer to other signifying chains (Stavrakakis 1999, 57). The infinite possible combinations of signifiers mean that, in principle, an infinite number of significations can be produced. However, political and societal actors attempt to fix the meaning of signifying chains through nodal points: words, terms or phrases that attempt to fasten groups of words together into meaningful narratives (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 112). The potential never-ending flow of signification can, thus, be arrested and partial fixity and stability of meanings can be achieved through nodal points.

The linguistic and the material are mutually constituted: materiality acquires meaning through language; language has material effects, since “what is said about [objects] is intimately tied to what is done with them” (Epstein 2008, 5); and material practices are also “loci where meanings are produced” (Epstein 2008, 5). Through linguistic and non-linguistic practices “meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established, and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible” (Campbell 2013, 234, 235). In other words, these practices, both linguistic and non-linguistic, define and constitute subjects, objects and the relations between them; and normalize certain ways of being and certain courses of action (Epstein 2008; Milliken 1999).

In the next section, we will provide an overview of the many institutions engaged in public diplomatic activities in Turkey, in order to identify the material

5 In this article we prefer to say that identities are “enacted”, instead of “constructed” or “performed”, following the suggestion of authors working on Actor-Network Theory. The term has the double connotation of both putting something into action, as in “enacting a law”, and of performing something, as in a play or story. This suggestion is offered as an alternative to both “construction” and “performance”, two of the most widely used terms for implying that the entity being constructed or performed is contingent and not natural (Magalhães 2018). One of the criticisms to which “construction” is subjected is that, while the term tries to convey such contingency, its use risks implying that the “construction” is supervised by an “architect”, whose existence is previous to the construction actively acting for its concretization (Ibid., 114). “Construction” also implies that there is a process that by its end the entity being constructed “becomes”. If states and other entities are always in a process of “becoming” (Campbell 1992, 56), identities can never be finished. If such process actually had an end, if constructions actually reached a conclusion, such that no more enacting was necessary, it would mean the existence of a pre-discursive realm. However, the lack of pre-discursive foundations is precisely the reason why states need to — and do — constantly and infinitely enact their identities (Ibid., 11).





apparatus involved in telling Turkey's 'story'. In the following sections, we will analyze the many stories that are being told, including their contradictions, transformations and continuities.

Turkey's Public Diplomacy institutional structure

The AKP government began to build the country's public diplomacy institutional structure in 2009/2010, with the creation of new institutions such as the Yunus Emre Institute (YEI), the Office of Public Diplomacy (KDK, in Turkish) and Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB, in Turkish), and the repurposing of older institutions such as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), a development agency, which was folded into the public diplomacy structure and expanded its activities from the Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia to the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Latin America and now works in more than 150 countries. TIKA began to serve as a public diplomacy institution by pinning Turkey as a donor country (Huijgh and Warlick 2016, 25).

As we shall see in more detail below, the impetus for the institutional build-up was to send a more 'coherent' message about the AKP's different understanding of the role Turkey should play in its surrounding regions, particularly those that used to be part of the Ottoman Empire, such as the Balkans and the Middle East. The message stressed two main points: that this government was different from previous administrations, which favored either a hands-off approach or securitized and militarized policies towards these regions; and that Turkey, due to a positive Ottoman legacy, and its successful combination of Islam and democracy, should play the role of a benevolent regional leader.

The Office of Public Diplomacy (KDK)'s primary task, as stated in the publication of decree 27478 of January 30th 2010, was to provide "a more efficient coordination, cooperation, and decision-making mechanism" as "necessary among public policy institutions". It was intended to coordinate the activities of several institutions directly or indirectly dealing with public/cultural diplomacy, such as the aforementioned YEI, YTB and TIKA and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, although it also established its own programs (Kalin 2011, 8; Huijgh & Warlick 2016). Since the transition to a presidential system in 2018, KDK has been replaced by the Directorate of Communications of the Turkish Presidency.





The Yunus Emre Institute was modelled after cultural diplomacy institutions of Western countries, such as Alliance Française, the British Council and Goethe Institute, and, accordingly, aims to promote Turkish culture, language, art and history abroad (YEI n/d). More than 58 cultural centers have been established around the world, and among their many activities are included film, food and art festivals; poem, song, painting and drama competitions; scientific and academic conferences and workshops; and different courses (from Turkish hand crafts to folk dance) (Eski and Erol 2018, 32). The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, as the name implies, has as its main target Turkish diaspora communities, but also coordinates the Turkey Scholarship Program, which provides higher education scholarships to international students.

It is interesting to note that many intercultural dialogue activities preceded the creation of the Yunus Emre Institute and were already carried out by the Gülenist Hizmet movement, a faith-based international network of organizations and individuals named after the Turkish preacher Fethullah Gulen. The movement operates in more than 180 countries, having established schools and cultural centers, including in Brazil (“Centro Cultural Brasil-Turquia”, launched in 2011). The movement and the AKP government worked in close cooperation inside and outside Turkey until their relationship began to sour in 2013. The government accused the movement of plotting the coup attempt of July 15th 2016, labelled it “Fethullah Terrorist Organization” and closed many of its institutions involved in public and cultural diplomacy, such as Kimse Yok Mu, one of Turkey’s largest charitable organizations, which operated predominantly within Muslim countries (Çevik, Sevin and Baybars-Hawks 2018).

In addition to the institutions mentioned above, Kalin (2011) adds others, such as “Kizilay (The Turkish Red Crescent), [...] TRT (The Turkish National TV)”, “aid organizations, foundations, civilian platforms, and other civil society actors” that “have become indispensable to public diplomacy efforts” and are all active in it “through political, diplomatic, economic and cultural activities” (p. 21). In conjunction, these institutions make up Turkey’s multiple and fragmented public diplomacy network and work to enact Turkey’s identity, as envisioned by the government and other constituents. Such a vast array of agents, as we shall see, leads to dispersion and contradiction in discourses, all of which undermine the literature’s claim to public diplomacy as a cohesive practice that reflects a pre-given stable identity. On the other hand, we can discern attempts by Turkish political actors to sediment and fix particular configurations of meaning about





Turkey, and its relations with the West and neighboring regions, through privileged discursive tropes.

Analyzing primary and secondary sources on Turkish PD, we have discerned the prominence of two themes: a (positive) Ottoman legacy and Turkey as a ‘benign’ emerging power. As we shall see, these two discursive tropes are interrelated: the latter is a consequence of the former. In the following, we argue that AKP PD efforts constitute attempts to demarcate and stabilize a particular conception of Turkish identity, one which is portrayed as different and better than the one articulated by Kemalist elites. This designation of a particular “Turkey’s story and image” has both domestic and international publics as intended audiences. These attempts to seal in, contain and stabilize particular meanings about Turkey’s image and story are doomed to fail, since, as we have seen, it is impossible to contain systems of signification — “they always retain paradoxes, open ends, and impossibilities” (Wæver 2009, 173). Multiple meanings, both dissonant and consonant, insist on flowing, in spite of the partial fixity attempted through the frequent repetition of two themes.

In order to understand PD efforts under the AKP government, we must understand the context within which they acquire meaning. AKP PD narratives acquire meaning in a context populated by several other narratives (about Turkey’s image and Turkey’s story) which attempt to contain and stabilize particular configurations of meaning about Turkey and its relations with other countries. Turkey’s story(ies) and Turkey’s image(s) have been told and described many times and in many ways. Sometimes, some of those stories and images are significantly different from each other; sometimes, they bear striking similarities. As we explore these two prominent themes, we will emphasize how Turkey’s relations with the West/Europe and with the Muslim Middle East have been framed and narrated in AKP PD discourses, in order to identify ruptures and continuities with regard to previous narratives.

Telling Turkey’s ‘story’ through public diplomacy: what is being told? A positive Ottoman legacy

Former members of the Ottoman Empire, in particular Arabs, were frequently depicted by Kemalist leaders, military officers, school textbooks and everyday chatter as traitors who stabbed Turkey in the back during World War I. As a





consequence, Turkey was presented as a lone country, situated in an unfortunate geographical location, encircled by unfriendly countries devising schemes to weaken or even disintegrate Turkey with the help of enemies within (Altınay 2004; Bilgin 2007). In contrast, AKP narratives frequently portray the Ottoman past as the basis for the establishment of closer relations with former members of the Empire. According to President Erdogan: “We have grown up with the motto that Turkey is surrounded by three seas and neighboring enemy countries [...] ‘Arabs stabbed us in the back during the First World War’ was the common saying until very recently. You know what? I even feel ashamed when I recall it, but the word ‘Arab’ was the common way of calling a stray dog on the street [...] Our policy is not to create enemies but to establish stable ties with all countries. Turkey’s relations with Middle Eastern countries are only natural as is the case with Balkan or Caucasus countries” (quoted in Demirtas 2010).

The idea that a shared Ottoman past naturally creates bonds between its former members and that Ottoman heritage provides a basis for Turkey’s leadership in the region had one of its clearest formulations in the book *Strategic Depth*, authored by former Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoglu. According to this idea, the end of the Cold War “defrosted” some of the deep connections between Turkey and its neighborhood. As a result, Turkey has the possibility to become once again a central country (Davutoglu 2010), providing security and stability to areas where it has historical responsibilities, namely the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Gulf and the Caspian, Black and Mediterranean Seas (Davutoglu 2008, 79). The aim to achieve peace between Turkey and its neighbors was encapsulated in the “zero-problem policy” formulated by Davutoglu. According to the former Prime Minister, the zero-problem policy was “the fundamental principle we have applied in foreign policy [...], deepening friendships, intensifying and growing fraternity [...] This is why we said [...] we will open doors of friendship and fraternity [...] let siblings meet, mingle with each other; and let the fraternity which comes from the depths of history be transferred to the future generations” (quoted in Today’s Zaman 2011, 04). By enhancing socio-cultural and trade relations between Turkey and its neighbors, the “security-based and hard-power-based politics of the former governments” were left behind (Eksi and Erol 2018, 40).

In PD efforts, the idea that Ottoman heritage and legacy allows Turkey to be a regional leader is frequently expressed. According to Ibrahim Kalin, the purpose of Turkish public diplomacy is to tell the new Turkish ‘story’, which “reflects the





new identity which the country wants to embrace” (2011, 12, emphasis added). According to Kalin (2011), the content of the new Turkish ‘story’ told by PD activities springs from a new political, social and geographic imagination, which enables Turkey to overcome “its old fears” (p. 5) and “Eurocentric notions of history and society” (p. 6); and to “reconnect with its history and geography” (p. 5). A reevaluation of the Ottoman past and signifiers associated with it and, consequently, a more positive reading of Turkish history and geography, have been regular features of AKP leaders’ statements. In fact, Kalin (2011) recognizes Davutoglu’s *Strategic Depth* vanguard position when it comes to the “effort to see the world in a non-Eurocentric perspective” (Kalin 2011, 7).

The narrative establishes that “Turkey’s descent from the Ottoman experience results in genuine familiarity with a large geographic area extending from the Balkans to the Middle East (Kalin, 2011, 20). Now, after overcoming “past mistakes” and “misguided government policies” of the past (Kalin 2011, 12) — presumably during Kemalist governments — “the emotional and political distance between Turkey and the Arab world is diminishing, and those relations are normalizing after a long hiatus” (Kalin 2011, 20). Diverse groups, such as “Turks, Kurds, Bosnians, Albanians, Circassians, Abkhazians, Arabs, Azeris, Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs, Uzbeks, Turkmens [...], Armenian, Greek, Jewish and Assyrian communities” are brought together and reconciled due to “the Ottoman experience they have shared and built together”. Turkey, as “the pivotal point of this heritage” can extend its soft power “from the Balkans and the Middle East to inner parts of Central Asia” (Kalin 2011, 10). References to the positive Ottoman legacy are widespread. In The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ website, a section entitled “Brief History of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey” (Turkey 2011a) it is written that “The Foreign Service of the Republic of Turkey is founded on the well-established traditions and legacy of Ottoman diplomacy with a long history”. It claims that this “commanding diplomatic tradition [...] was one of the leading factors which enabled the Ottoman Empire to reign over a vast geography for several centuries”.

If AKP narratives about the Ottoman legacy serve as an attempt to clearly distinguish the party and its followers from Kemalist elites, when it comes to Europe/EU, on the other hand, AKP narratives reveal that differences between the two groups, so frequently represented as the antithesis of each other, are not so clear cut. In fact, since the early Republican years, a deep ambiguity in Turkish elites’ discourses about Europe and the West, be they left-wing, right-wing or Islamist, can be discerned (Bilgiç 2016; Bilgin 2009, 2017; Bilgin and Bilgiç 2012;





Zarakol 2010, 2011; and Gülsah Çapan and Zarakol 2017). Desire, admiration, suspicion, anxiety, anger, frustration and resentment all coexist in Turkish political leaders' views of Europe/EU.

On one hand, suspicions and anger about continuous European/Western hypocrisy, double standards, aggression and intrusiveness in Turkish domestic affairs, manifested in the Ottoman Empire system of capitulations, the Treaty of Sevres, EU conditionality, criticism of Turkey's democratic and human rights standards, and other instances, are frequently voiced by AKP leaders today as they were by Kemalist leaders in the past.

On the other hand, the West/Europe have functioned as nodal points in Turkish discourses for more than a century, binding together signifiers such as civilization, modernization, secularism, industrialization, rationality and science. Turkey's socialization in a hierarchical international order meant that signifiers associated with the Ottoman Empire were devalued whereas signifiers associated with West/Europe were valued. As a result, Turkish political leaders have been attempting to identify with signifiers associated with the West/Europe ever since. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's reforms, conducted in the early Republican period, for example, were attempts to replace Ottoman-Islamic ways of thinking with 'modern' modes of thought and epistemologies based on rationality and science. More recently, the signifiers democracy, rule of law, human rights, (economic) development and prosperity have been bound by the nodal point "European Union". Example of this is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website explaining that Turkey "cherish[es] and defend[s] the same values and norms the EU is built on, such as democracy and respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law" and that Turkey's "ongoing reforms, especially in the areas of democracy, human rights and rule of law, constitute a significant aspect of our efforts towards EU accession and show [Turkey's] willingness to contribute to the global role of the EU" (Turkey 2011b). Although AKP leaders have recast the Ottoman Empire in a new light, and in several instances appear resistant to the EU, they also have inherited the desire for recognition and validation from Europe/EU; the resentment towards it; and the attachment to certain signifiers associated with it.

In spite of PD claims about a new non-Eurocentric imagination, the persistent attachment to certain signifiers associated with the West/Europe/EU becomes visible when the same "Brief History of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs" (Turkey 2011a), which spoke about a commanding Ottoman diplomatic tradition, mentions,





without a hint of protest or grief, that “Ambassadors of the Ottoman Empire appointed to European capitals [...] served as pioneers of modernization by accelerating the process of westernization and reform within the Empire”. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’s own Directorate for EU Affairs also states that “Turkey began ‘westernising’ its economic, political and social structures in the 19th century [...] it chose Western Europe as the model for its new secular structure”, continuing on to say that “Turkey has ever since closely aligned itself with the West [...]” (Turkey 2017).

Turkey as a benevolent emerging power

Another prevalent theme in PD discourses is the image of Turkey, under the AKP government, as a generous, humanitarian, hospitable, benevolent and/or benign emerging power in the world stage, usually citing the hosting of millions of Syrian refugees in its own territory or its provision of humanitarian aid and development cooperation activities abroad (Tolay 2016, 135; Çevik 2016, 55; Huijgh and Warlick 2016, 26, Kalin 2011). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, in an entry entitled “Turkey’s Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy” (Turkey 2019), stresses that “Turkey hosts the largest number of externally displaced people in the world [...] accommodating around 4.9 million externally displaced people, 3.7 million of whom are Syrians, who have had to flee destruction in their home country. Turkey has spent around 40 billion USD to deliver aid and services to the Syrians”. This claim is followed by the assertion that “With 8.6 billion USD of humanitarian assistance in 2018, Turkey is the largest humanitarian donor in the world, and the most generous country on the basis of per capita humanitarian spending” (Turkey 2019).

In fact, the AKP government places its open-door policy for refugees at the center of its public diplomacy efforts (Özdora Aksak 2019, 2). Almost half of the news stories run between 2011 and 2018 by Anadolu Agency, the country’s official news outlet, under the control of the Directorate of Communications, about Syrian refugees in Turkey, presented Turkey as a good host (Özdora Aksak 2019, 8). Besides mentioning the funds, services, projects and programs provided to refugees, many of the news articles cited international actors’ praises for Turkish hospitality, including praises by the President of the European Parliament, the





European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This generosity and hospitality are also framed as enduring legacies of the Ottoman Empire, which had “the tradition of being a safe haven for battered and persecuted people” (Eski 2019). Furthermore, until recently, the AKP government had been one of the most outspoken critics of China’s policies towards the Uighur minority, who is ethnically Turkic and religiously Muslim, in Xinjiang province. In 2009, then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan used the term “near-genocide” to describe the Chinese crackdown in the region⁶. These vocal criticisms could be interpreted as part of a strategy to present AKP’s Turkey as a leader of oppressed Turkic peoples⁷ and Muslims around the world.

This ‘new’ benevolent Turkey, which confidently embraces Ottoman heritage, is positively compared with Turkish image in the 1990s, when the country was described as a “post-Cold War warrior” (Kirisci 2006, 8), a “coercive regional power” (Onis 2003, 84) and a “regional bully” (Kramer, 2000, 212) for constantly threatening the use of force against its neighbors. It is also contrasted with the international community, particularly Western powers, lack of support for refugees. The EU, in particular, was frequently criticized for delaying the transfer of funds promised in the context of the 2016 Turkey-EU migrant deal (Özdora Aksak 2019, 11). “Such discursive strategies in news stories reposition Turkey as an ally of those in need and a good neighbor, while positioning the West as an uncaring antagonist that has failed to fulfill its promises” (Özdora Aksak 2019, 17).

In addition to its altruistic actions towards foreigners abroad and at home, Turkey’s democracy and economic prosperity have been described in PD texts as sources of the country’s influence. According to Kalin (2011, 9), two of the main

6 In recent years, due to China’s increasing economic influence in Turkey, particularly through infrastructure investment projects, and the deterioration of Turkey-United States ties, the AKP’s policy towards China’s crackdown of Uighurs shifted from strong condemnation to relative silence. In October 2019, the Turkish government refused to join other countries in joint a statement to call on China to end violations against Uighur Muslims (Kashgarian 2020).

7 The emergence of new Turkic Republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus with the dissolution of the Soviet Union had already provided, pre-AKP years, an opportunity for Turkey to devote its energies to regions sharing linguistic and cultural ties with the country. The “discovery” of these regions in the 1990s seemed to abate to a certain degree the feeling of isolation characteristic of Kemalist government’s discourses. Former President Süleyman Demirel (1993-2000) went so far as to say that Turkey should assume the leadership of a giant “Turkic world stretching from the Adriatic Sea to China” (quoted on Bozdaglioglu 2003, 96).





pillars of Turkey's soft power are its democratic experience and its successful economic development, which render the country a model to Arab countries. In this narrative, the image of Turkey is of "an island of stability [which] has become a sanctuary for people escaping from terrorism and violence in the region" (Davutoglu in Tolay 2016, 142). Huijgh and Warlick (2016) also note that a prominent narrative of Turkish PD is "its economic prosperity and commitment to democracy" (p. 14), although the authors acknowledge that there is an "ever-growing discord between the government's democratic rhetoric and some autocratic tendencies" (p. 29), manifested in "the violation of democratic rights, media censorship, police brutality (p. 30). This narrative, despite its contradictions, is neatly summed up in Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs's website: it states that Turkey's "policies adapt to constant changes and strive to shape the dynamics around us towards *peace, prosperity and stability*" (Turkey 2019, emphasis added) — which is eerily close to the EU's own trope of itself as a "zone of peace, prosperity and democracy" (European Union Global Strategy 2016; European Commission 2010; European Security Strategy 2003).

The EU has been described, or describes itself, as "a positive global force" (European Commission 2017); a 'civilian power' (Duchêne 1973), 'normative power' (Manners 2002; Manners and Whitman 2013), 'ethical power' (Aggestam 2008), 'a model' (European Commission 2007a and 2007b). It is in this context that we can understand the constant reference to a generous, benevolent, democratic, prosperous and stable Turkey which serves (or served) as a model to neighboring countries. Such terms attempted to place Turkey alongside the EU in the hall of foreign policy and domestic virtuosity. Turkey's parameters continue to be the West/Europe/EU, even though the rift between the two continue to grow in other spheres.

The fact that Western frames of reference lap at the shore of the new (presumably non-Eurocentric) Turkish 'story' is a reminder that material and symbolic hierarchies have deep psychic effects and, thus, are not easily dismantled. It is also a reminder that attempts to seal in particular configurations of meanings are doomed to fail, since meanings are unstable and impossible to contain. Finally, it reminds us that borders (such as those between conservative and Kemalists) must be kept through many practices, linguistic and non-linguistic, including PD, lest they expose their absence of ontological status and porosity.





Modulating Turkey's 'story' in times of domestic authoritarianism and foreign military interventions

The 'story' of AKP's Turkey as a model of a Muslim democracy with a thriving economy, a regional leader which combines entrepreneurship with humanitarianism, generosity and hospitality, had to be modulated as domestic and foreign policies began to take on more authoritarian and militaristic tones .

Domestically, the government increasingly adopted a more authoritarian behavior, supporting a purge of (secular) opposition forces via the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer court cases and later, after the failed coup attempt of July 15th 2016, of members of the Hizmet movement and anyone accused of having ties with them. Hundreds of thousands of people were investigated, dismissed or arrested, including civil servants, judges, prosecutors, military officials, academics, teachers and journalists (Turkey Purge 2020).

Internationally, Turkey carried out three military operations in Northern Syria (Euphrates Shield in 2016/2017; Olive Branch in 2018 and Peace Spring in 2019) against Kurdish forces of the People's Protection Units (YPG), which Turkey considers a terrorist organization due to its links to Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Operation Peace Spring, carried out after the withdrawal of American troops from northeastern Syria in October 2019, received widespread condemnation. As a result of the operation, hundreds of thousand people were displaced and Turkey was accused of committing war crimes and several human rights violations (Amnesty International 2019). European countries imposed an arms embargo and the United States established sanctions against senior government officials.

Given these domestic and international developments, the story of Turkey as a model of how to reconcile Islam and democracy, and of a benevolent regional leader who deploys a zero-problem policy towards its neighbors, became harder to sustain. After a 'golden period', Turkey's soft power and global image were severely affected (Eski and Erol 2018; Uysal and Schroeder 2019).

In this final section, we aim to analyze the stories that are being told in this changing context by Turkish PD apparatus. Given that material practices (such as purges of dissenters and military interventions) also produce meanings — in these cases, possible meanings produced could be that Turkey is neither a model of democracy nor a humanitarian and benevolent neighbor —, how has Turkish public diplomacy been trying to seal in, contain and stabilize particular meanings about Turkey's story?





We have identified the deployment of four discursive strategies: 1) a renewed emphasis on Turkish cultural products and on its humanitarian, hospitable and generous actions towards Syrian refugees; 2) a growing cult of personality around President Erdogan; 3) an effort to tell Turkey's 'story' right, in order to avoid misinterpretation and negative 'propaganda'; and 4) the mobilization of 'old' discursive tropes of Turkey as a lone country, located in a unfortunate region, subjected to foreign powers' scheming. The stories being told combine narratives associated with AKP's 'new' Turkey with narratives associated with Kemalists' 'old' Turkey, in an attempt to produce particular meanings, enact a particular identity and make particular courses of action seem natural and 'normal'.

Turkish public diplomacy shifted the emphasis of its message: from the country's *political* and *economic* success (as a country that managed to successfully combine Islam, democracy and capitalism) to its *cultural* products, in particular TV dramas broadcasted throughout the world. Investments in cultural diplomacy attempt to counter the negative repercussions of unpopular actions (Donelli 2019, 128 and 129). In addition, the humanitarian dimension of Turkey's open-door policy to Syrian refugees continued to have prominence. According to Director of Communications Fahrettin Altun, "As the country that hosts the world's largest number of refugees, we put this issue on the agenda of all internationally respected organizations. We are informing the world public opinion in order for Turkey to receive the respect it deserves in humanitarian aid policy" (Altun 2020). The frequent depiction of Turkey as a good host to Syrian refugees in government leaders' discourses and media outlets, and the characterization of Turkish foreign policy as 'humanitarian', represent a continuity of the discursive trope of Turkey as a benign and benevolent regional leader. Missing from these discourses are references to Turkey being a model. "Turkey's [...] policy of becoming a model country for the Middle East with its Muslim democracy identity, which was interrupted by the Arab Spring, has transformed into this new foreign policy and public diplomacy over the Syrian refugees" (Eski 2019).

The three other discursive strategies — a cult of President Erdogan, 'telling Turkey's story right', and the mobilization of narratives associated with former Kemalist governments — are deeply entwined. An analysis of more than 2500 Twitter posts by Turkish government's most influential PD accounts have shown that President Erdogan is presented as a charismatic, strong and heroic political leader, possessor of superior qualities⁸: a savior and a champion of the Muslim

⁸ In an interview, Director of Communications Fahrettin Altun claimed that "our President's supplement and food only consist of his dedication and faith" (Altun 2020).





world, a fatherly figure who stands up for and protects Muslims who are persecuted around the world, be they Palestinians or Rohingya people (Uysal and Schroeder 2019, 6).

The need to accurately frame and tell Turkey's 'story' to the world, in order to counter "unfair allegations" and "black propaganda" targeting Turkey, constitutes one of the reasons for the creation of the Directorate of Communications (Altun 2020). According to Director of this institution, Fahrettin Altun, the unity of state institutions' discourses is deemed important because "if different actors in the State put forward different discourses on an issue, it delivers a negative message to foreign countries. This does not only portray an image of chaos but makes the state vulnerable to foreign interventions" (Altun 2020) These foreign interventions, black propaganda and unfair allegations are made by "almost all of the great powers", "who are disturbed by Turkey's growth rate" (Altun 2020).

In a sentence that weaves together the threads of 'cult of personality' and 'telling Turkey's story right', Director Altun claims that "Our President has been thinking for a long time that foreign actors have been unfair towards Turkey [...] Our President is striving to increase Turkey's regional power and make Turkey stronger while also exerting efforts to avoid threats emanating from the region. Every step he takes for our country's good causes a chain of black propaganda" (Altun 2020).

The mentions of foreign powers being unfair towards Turkey, and of threats emanating from the region, reverberates previous discourses about Turkey's unfortunate predicament in the world stage. As we have seen, Turkey was frequently presented as a lone country, situated in an unfortunate geographical location, encircled by unfriendly countries devising schemes to weaken or even disintegrate Turkey. The current endeavor to "accurately" frame and tell Turkey's story entails the unearthing of old 'Kemalist' tropes of Turkey being the victim of foreign powers' meddling and encircled by unfriendly countries. Director Altun succinctly revives this narrative by saying that "This is an element of the siege and the war of attrition against Turkey. We have to struggle constantly and strongly" (Altun 2020).

How can we account for the presence of a narrative mostly associated with Kemalist groups, from whom AKP leaders wanted to distance themselves, among PD discourses entailed with the task of telling a new Turkey's story? First of all, as we have seen, the suspicions of foreign powers meddling in Turkey's internal affairs is shared among AKP and Kemalist elites, demonstrating the frontiers





between them are porous in some respects. Furthermore, by bringing to the fore a narrative of regional threats and instabilities so ingrained in people's imaginaries, this discourse resonates among many sectors of the population, thereby helping legitimate foreign policy actions as necessary and unavoidable. In fact, in spite of widespread international condemnation, Operation Peace Spring was supported by all political parties in parliament, except for the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), and by 79% of Turkish population (Duvar 2019).

The issues which, according to the government, are subjected to black propaganda and unfair allegations, and hence have to be 'accurately' told by Turkish public diplomacy institutions, concern mainly the military interventions in Syria and the post-attempted coup of July 15 crackdown. The post-coup measures, usually referred to by international press as "purges" or "crackdown", are referred to by PD discourses as July 15 'resistance': "We are coordinating the works in our country and abroad to ensure that our July 15 resistance remains where it deserves in our collective memory" (Altun 2020). The military interventions in Syria are framed as a logical and existential necessity to protect Turkey's "national interests" against the threat of (Kurdish) terrorism: "We try to use every traditional and innovative method of communication in order to explain our country's fight against terrorism in the most accurate way [...] With regard to all operations that we undertake to protect our national interests, such as the Peace Spring Operation, we provide the world press with the necessary accurate information and technical infrastructure needed to ensure fair coverage".

The framing of an issue as a threat to the "national interest", or to "national security", results from political processes, not from any intrinsic characteristics of the issue at hand. When an issue is successfully framed as a threat to the "national interest", or to "national security", certain courses of action are authorized, while others are foreclosed. In addition, the process framing an issue as a threat to the "national interest", or to "national security" in itself contributes to bring into existence the "national" that is being referred to as if it was pre-existent. In this particular case, the "national" seems to exclude not only some segments of the Kurdish population, but government opponents in general.

In the following quote, we can discern the strands of 'encirclement', 'telling the right message' and 'cult of personality' being woven together, culminating in the conjuring of a country that needs to be defended: "If Turkey had not had a strong leader like Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the turbulence that began in 2010 [the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil war] would have swallowed us up. Despite all





these storms, we were able to tip the scales in Turkey's favor, and it has happened thanks to our President's leadership [...] The Operation Peace Spring has been ordered by this strong leadership. It was possible to take a step, which has been opposed by the whole world [...] our President [...] destroyed that terror corridor. What I'm trying to learn from our President is the following: [...] no concessions should be made in a situation that would be against our country" (Altun 2020).

Conclusion

Departing from a poststructuralist understanding, this article made the argument that Turkish PD, instead of reflecting or projecting a pre-existent Turkish story, image or identity, is one of the many practices through which political and societal actors attempt to fix the meaning of Turkey's many stories, images and (precarious and fragmented) identities. Throughout the article, we attempted to show that AKP PD's privileged discursive tropes — the (positive) Ottoman legacy and Turkey as a 'benign' emerging power — had to be modulated in a context of domestic authoritarianism and military interventions abroad. As the security and hard-power-based politics of the former governments came to the fore, a stress on AKP's difference became harder to sustain. In an effort to legitimize militarized and anti-democratic actions, 'old' Kemalist discourses of encirclement were recycled, the positive Ottoman legacy lost prominence and Turkey as a 'benign' emerging power attempted to survive via threads of hospitality to Syrian refugees and President Erdogan as a savior and champion of Muslims around the world.

Through all these processes, it becomes clear that Turkey is composed of a multiplicity of institutions and peoples, and, as such, will have multiple voices which produce multiple meanings, in spite of the partial fixity attempted through the frequent repetition of privileged themes. Although such attempts are never fully successful, they are not inconsequential: through them, boundaries are enacted; subjects, objects and the relations between them are constituted; and certain ways of being and acting are authorized, while others are foreclosed. In particular, we showed how the mobilization of discourses associated with 'old' Kemalist elites helped legitimize militarized foreign policy actions which the AKP had claimed had been left behind.





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