Communicating Turkish-Islamic identity in the aftermath of the Gaza flotilla raid: Who is the "us" in "us" versus "them"?

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Abstract

On May 31, 2010, Israeli Defense Forces raided the ship Mavi Marmara, part of a six-vessel flotilla aiming to break the Israeli naval blockade of the Gaza Strip and to deliver supplies to Gaza. Using comments posted on Turkish online discussion forums in the aftermath of the raid that resulted in the death of nine passengers, this article analyzes how the incident was appropriated to negotiate between Turkishness and Islam as two alternative, yet coinciding forms of collective identity. Particularly, the article will compare different discursive strategies that were utilized in "general-interest" and "Islamic-leaning" online discussion groups. A deductive thematic analysis of 585 posts in general-interest and Islamic-leaning forums found significant differences in how metaphors of the body—blood, sacrifice, and martyrdom—as well as in-group/out-group comparisons were used in order to support a territorial-based nationalism versus a religion-based identity. The analysis also discusses the rhetoric that enabled discussants in general-interest forums to negotiate the tensions between the two collective identities.

Keywords: *Mavi Marmara, collective identity, identity and belonging, Turkish-Islamic identity, nationalism*

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Introduction

In May 2010, the Free Gaza Movement, a California-based group of pro-Palestinian activists and the Islamic Turkish NGO called Endowment for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Help (*İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı*, İHH) launched a six-vessel aid flotilla to Gaza in direct confrontation to Israeli's naval blockade of the Gaza Strip. On May 31, 2010, after multiple warnings, the Israeli Defense Forces confronted the convoy and commandeered several ships. During the conflict on board of the Turkish ship MV Mavi Marmara, nine Turkish activists were killed.

Voted by the *Jerusalem Post* the biggest Israeli news story of 2010,[1] the incident became a crucial breaking point in an already deteriorating Turkish-Israeli relations, leading to a diplomatic stalemate over whether Israel should apologize for the deaths of the activists and to Turkey's eventual decision to expel the Israeli ambassador and suspend military contracts with Israel in early September 2011. Against the backdrop of Israeli's official portrayal of the incident as legitimate self-defense, Itmamar Rabinovich, former Israeli ambassador to Washington, called the Mavi Marmara passengers "a front for a radical Islamist organization, probably with links to the ruling party in Turkey";[2] a June 2010 *Washington Post* editorial called for international investigations into the relationship between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's (the Prime Minister) government and the Islamist İHH, an alleged member of a pro-Hamas coalition designated as "terrorist entity" by the United States in 2008. Conversely, Bülent Yıldırım, the head of the NGO, described the dead activists as "martyrs" in an illegal and morally unjustified Israeli massacre, while Arab foreign ministers condemned Israeli's "state piracy." Most interesting, for some the Mavi Marmara incident became emblematic of a deeper Western crisis of identity, with Israel as the last defender of Western values against a violent Islamist jihad. Former Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar claimed in a *London Times* editorial:

> The West is going through a period of confusion over the shape of the world's future. To a great extent, this confusion is caused by a kind of masochistic self-doubt over our own identity; by the rule of political correctness; by a multiculturalism that forces us to our knees before others; and by a secularism which, irony of ironies, blinds us even when we are confronted by jihadis promoting the most fanati-

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1   See the January 3, 2011 issue.
2   Scott Wilson, "Israel Says Free Gaza Movement Poses Threat to Jewish State; Aid Flotilla Was Run by Member Charity with Alleged Ties to Islamists," *Washington Post*, June 1, 2010.

cal incarnation of their faith. To abandon Israel to its fate, at this moment of all moments, would merely serve to illustrate how far we have sunk and how inexorable our decline now appears.[3]

As this brief review of its echo in the international press indicated, the Mavi Marmara incident, in all its symbolic complexity, was a "hot moment," to use Claude Lévi-Strauss's apt expression,[4] used by various discursive communities to reassess deeper cultural and geo-political tensions confronting the modern world. Such critical events are significant events in the life of individuals or collectives, acting as discursive points of rupture that reconfigure or crystallize identity through the reinterpretation of history. At an individual level, Flanagan has first identified critical events - which he has called critical incidents - as those important events in the life of a person that could act as behavioral triggers, "turning points" influencing a person's future performance.[5] However, as has been noted by qualitative research in the narrative tradition,[6] critical incidents or "key events" have more than predictive behavioral value; they have both performative and phenomenological potential[7] to organize an individual's personal narrative into meaning-endowed structures articulating individual identity.[8] As a meaning-producing event, the notion of critical incident can be extended to include critical incidents on a social scale—that is, incidents that "have the potential to change public opinions, policies, and even social values, and hence provide a convenient, practical, and dramatic metaphor."[9] As Barbie Zelizer observed, critical incidents significantly brace the articulation of collective memories.[10] In the narrative tradition, then, we look at critical events as instances of legitimizing public discourse in which claims about the history of the

3   José María Aznar, "Support Israel: If It Goes Down, We All Go Down; Anger over Gaza Is a Distraction. We Cannot Forget That Israel is the West's Best Ally in a Turbulent Region," *The Times*, June 17, 2010.
4   Cited in Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 4.
5   John C. Flanagan, "The Critical Incident Technique," *Psychological Bulletin* 51, no. 4 (1954).
6   See, for example, Harry F. Wolcott, *Transforming Qualitative Data: Description, Analysis, and Interpretation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994); Peter Woods, *Critical Events in Teaching and Learning* (Washington D.C.: Falmer Press, 1993).
7   Mark P. Orbe, *Constructing Co-Cultural Theory: An Explication of Culture, Power, and Communication* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 41-43.
8   Leonard Webster and Patricie Mertova, *Using Narrative Inquiry as a Research Method: An Introduction to Using Critical Event Narrative Analysis in Research on Learning and Teaching* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 71-88.
9   Sue Carter et al., "An Interdisciplinary Approach to a Critical Incident Course," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 54, no. 2 (1999): 6.
10 Zelizer, *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory*, 4-5.

collective and the collective's social identity become the basis for social activism.[11] In this paper, we restrict the discussion to the various percep-tions of the Mavi Marmara incident in Turkey, and use them to study two alternative rhetorical constructions of Turkish collective identity: a territorial nationalism rooted in the civic values of the nation-state, and a religion-based Islamic belonging claiming a collective identity that transcends geo-political borders. To understand how the Mavi Mar-mara incident was appropriated in discourse to construct Turkish na-tional identity, this study conducts a thematic analysis of a large sample of post-incident online posts.

The assumptions guiding the analysis borrow from a constructivist perspective of nationalism.[12] A central tenet of such perspectives is to reject the idea that the nationalist culture is a continuation of a pre-modern mass culture, but rather to consider nationalism as the outcome of a modern, deliberate, state-sponsored "invention" of traditions, rituals and myths.[13] According to Benedict Anderson, for example, national-ism is "a means of combining naturalization with retention of dynastic power... stretching the short, tight skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire."[14] The article will first offer a summary of perspec-tives pertaining to the rise of Turkish nationalism as a modernist project and its relation to Islamic identity. Then, it will focus on the current po-litical landscape in Turkey in order to identify points of convergence and divergence between Islamic identity and Turkish nationalism in contem-porary Turkey. Finally, we will report on the findings from a study of online discussions, which has analyzed how the Mavi Marmara raid was articulated differently by general-interest and Islamic-leaning forums to communicate alternative forms of collective identities.

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11 Richard A. Pride, "How Activists and Media Frame Social Problems: Critical Events versus Perfor-mance Trends for Schools," *Political Communication* 12, no. 1 (1995); Suzanne Staggenborg, "Critical Events and the Mobilization of the Pro-Choice Movement," *Research in Political Sociology* 6 (1993).

12 See, for example, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended ed. (London: Verso, 1991); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism, New Perspectives on the Past* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Carlton Hayes and Joseph Hunt-ley, *Nationalism: A Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1960).

13 David Cannidine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition'," in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cam-bridge: 1983); Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cam-bridge University Press, 1983); George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Invention of Tradition: The Highlander Tradition of Scotland," in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: 1983).

14 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

The Turkish-Islamic synthesis and republican nationalism in Turkey

Despite the criticism that the constructivist approach to nationalism ignores how nationalism might emerge from natural ties, whether language, race or religion,[15] the constructivist perspective has been successfully used to study territorial nationalism and Islamism as sometimes conflicting and sometimes overlapping bases of political unity in the Middle East and Turkey. Particularly illuminating is the key distinction between the symbolic "center," from which the new, state-invented traditions, state myths and mainstream constructions of nationalism diffuse,[16] and the "periphery," whose narratives and alternative constructions of nationalism are being replaced.[17] Second, and perhaps more controversially, the same center-periphery dichotomy is also arguably implicated in the conflict between nationalism as a civic religion of modernity and alternative forms of belonging, particularly religion,[18] insofar as territorial nationalism constructs its own icons and places of worship (e.g., the Arc de Triophe in Paris, or Anıtkabir in Ankara), the tombs of the *Unknown Soldier*, martyrs, and heroic figures (or saints).[19] Consequently, so argue constructivist commentators, the idea of a community based on religious unity is both incompatible and often at odds with territorial nation-states and nationalism.[20] For example, according to Sami Zubaida, in the Middle East traces of this uneasy relationship between national and religious belonging emerge

15   Joshua Fishman, "Social Theory and Ethnogarphy: Neglected Perspectives on Language and Ethnicity in Eastern Europe," in *Ethnic Diversity and Conflict in Eastern Europe*, ed. P. F. Sugar (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1980); Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in *Old Societies and New States*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Free Press, 1963); Edward Shils, "Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties: Some Particular Observations on the Relationships of Sociological Research and Theory," *British Journal of Sociology* 8, no. 2 (1957).

16   Cannidine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition'"; Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*; Bruce Kapferer, "Legends of People, Myths of State Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia," Smithsonian Series in Ethnographic Inquiry, no. 7 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988); Anthony D. Smith, "National Identity and Myths of Ethnic Descent," in *Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, eds. John Hutchison and Anthony D. Smith (New York: Routledge, 2000); Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

17   Many modernist accounts of nationalism also note the important role played by the masses in the development of national identity. For example, Eley and Suny (1996) define national identification as "clearly a matter of sensibility" that is "reproduced in myriad imperceptible ways, grounded in everydayness and mundane experience" of collective belonging. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, "Introduction: From the Moment of Social History to the Work of Cultural Representation," in *Becoming National: A Reader*, eds. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (Oxford: 1996), 22.

18   Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Hayes and Huntley, *Nationalism: A Religion*, 164.

19   Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Hayes and Huntley, *Nationalism: A Religion*; Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*.

20   Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*; Hayes and Huntley, *Nationalism: A Religion*.

in the discourse of a fraction of Muslim commentators, and especially radical Islamists who reject nationalism as a western import, similar in its effects to secularism's division of the *umma* and its weakening of the Muslim resistance.[21]

That, indeed, may have been the case in Turkey until the 1950s, although recent studies would seem to indicate a more complex articulation between territorial nationalism and religion. True enough, historical accounts of Turkish nationalism show the tendency to consider the Republican-era Turkish nationalism, and particularly Kemalism, as an elitist Westernization project contradicting with, and at times hostile to, Islamic identity. Although considered to be a variant of earlier nationalism during the Ottoman Empire,[22] the Kemalist revolution, which emerged during the Turkish Independence War (1918-1922), was an attempt to defeat Western imperialism through Westernization;[23] like other Third-World nation-building projects during the period, the secular westernization project of Kemalism had a central and etatist nature. Also part of the Kemalist westernization project were the Republican regime's efforts to rid the new Republic of counter-entropic elements through an uncompromising program of secularism that banished Ottoman royalty from Turkey, changed the official alphabet to Latin, prohibited Muslim seminary as well as religious institutions, and ended the institution of the Caliphate.[24] According to many commentators, these were important sources of the cleavage between the Republican polity and the society.[25] The secularist thrust of the state-led modernization project failed to resonate with large segments of the population,[26] whose devotion to Islam, in Şerif Mardin's words, "was tolerated but not secure."[27] As such, the secular nationalism supported by the state and a highly "influential Westernist

21   Sami Zubaida, "Islam and Nationalism: Continuities and Contradictions," *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. 4 (2004).

22   Haldun Gülalp, "The Crisis of Westernization in Turkey: Islamism versus Nationalism," *The European Journal of Social Sciences* 8, no. 2 (1995); Metin Heper, "Turkey: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 1, no. 3 (2001); Zubaida, "Islam and Nationalism."

23   Gülalp, "The Crisis of Westernization in Turkey"; Heper, "Turkey."

24   Gülalp, "The Crisis of Westernization in Turkey"; Elizabeth Özdalga, "The Hidden Arab: A Critical Reading of the Notion of 'Turkish Islam'," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 4 (2006).

25   Heper, "Turkey"; Şerif Mardin, "Centre-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics," *Daedalus* 102, no. 1 (1973).

26   Jeffrey Haynes, "Politics, Identity and Religious Nationalism in Turkey: From Ataturk to the AKP," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 64, no. 3 (2010); David Kushner, "Self-Perception and Identity in Contemporary Turkey," *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 2 (1997); Özdalga, "The Hidden Arab."

27   Şerif Mardin, "Ideology and Religion in the Turkish Revolution," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 2, no. 3 (1971): 209.

minority"[28] was a source of resentment that would play a critical role in the resurgence of Islamism in Turkey.[29]

However, especially since the 1950s, nationalism and Islamism in Turkey have also increasingly cross-fertilized each other and, perhaps more importantly, have started to co-occupy mainstream politics, as reflected in the coming to power of the Islamic-leaning Justice and Development Party (JDP) in 2002 and the consolidation of identity politics during the JDP's continuous stay in power.

Despite its strictly secular characteristic, since the 1950s, when Turkey transitioned to a multi-party system with populist governments, the Turkish state has become a major stake-holder in religious (particularly Sunni Islamic) affairs. By enlisting the education system, particularly the İmam-Hatip Schools and official Quran courses, these new state-sponsored religious apparatuses have become critical components in the diffusion of Islamist movements.[30] Starting with Necmettin Erbakan's National Salvation Party (NSP) in the 1970s, Islamist parties have been playing an important role both in parliamentary and local politics,[31] which prompted scholars to note the increasing politicization of Islam.[32] It has been suggested that, with the exception of a number of Islamic fundamentalist groups, Islamic movements in Turkey have generally aimed to produce a uniquely Turkish interpretation of Islamic identity.[33] This unique interpretation saw Turkish Islam as a more liberal, tolerant and pragmatic, yet still devout form of Islam. More importantly, among Turkish-Islamists from different persuasions, a widely accepted assertion of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (TIS) is that not only was Islam historically the right choice for Turks (and a prerequisite of Turks' abili-

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28 Yüksel Taşkın, "Upsurge of the Extreme Right in Turkey: The Intra-Right Struggle to Redefine True Nationalism and Islam," *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 1 (2008): 134.

29 Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London: Routledge, 1991); Menderes Çınar, "Turkey's Transformation under the AKP Rule," *The Muslim World* 96, no. 3 (2006); Ümit Cizre and Menderes Çınar, "Turkey 2002: Kemalism, Islamism and Politics in the Light of the February 28 Process," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2-3 (2003); Taşkın, "Upsurge of the Extreme Right"; Bassam Tibi, "The Renewed Role of Islam in the Political and Social Development of the Middle East," *Middle East Journal* 37, no. 1 (1983).

30 Mustafa Şen, "Transformation of Turkish Islamism and the Rise of the Justice and Development Party," *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 1 (2010).

31 Kushner, "Self-Perception and Identity"; Şen, "Transformation of Turkish Islamism."

32 See, for example, Ateş Altınordu, "The Politicization of Religion: Political Catholicism and Political Islam in Comparative Perspective," *Politics & Society* 38, no. 4 (2010).

33 Özdalga, "The Hidden Arab." Here, Aras and Çaha's (2000) description of the Gülen movement is particularly illustrative. According to them, values advocated by the Gülen movement, such as tolerance to non-Islamic lifestyles and inter-faith dialogue, are partly the result of an understanding of Islam that is unique to the social and historical dynamics associated with Turkish and Anatolian culture and lifestyle. They go on to argue that the Gülen movement sought not only to imprint Islam on Turkish nationalism, but also to "Turkify" Islam.

ty to protect their national culture), but also that Turks, whose adoption of Islam set the stage for Islam's growth and expansion, are the leaders of the Islamic world.[34]

Yüksel Taşkın has argued that, despite an oft-repeated synthesis label, an implicit hierarchy that prioritized "Turkishness" over "Muslimness" was intact until the 1980s when political Islam became increasingly autonomous from mainstream nationalism and the center-right.[35] With both centrist governments and the military emphasizing Islam as a unifying factor to counter ethnic nationalism,[36] the political environment that followed the 1980 military coup was particularly conducive to this transition.[37] After more-than-a-decade-long rule of centrist governments involving coalitions between centrist right and social democratic parties, in 1995 political Islam achieved one of its landmark victories, followed by an antagonistic relationship with the military establishment, which resulted in a "soft coup" that removed the Welfare Party (WP) from the political scene in 1997.

Following the "soft coup" that removed Necmettin Erbakan's WP from power in 1997,[38] the WP split into two factions, one espousing a radical Islamic agenda, and the other eventually becoming the Justice and Development Party, portraying itself as a coalition of center-right, moderate Islamists, and moderate nationalists. In 2002, when the JDP won the national elections by securing more than 30 percent of the popular vote to form a single-party majority government, the election results were framed by many to be a revolution of the authentic Anatolian people who had long been oppressed by the secular centrist elites.[39] The newly elected JDP went to great lengths to distance itself from a radical Islamic rhetoric.[40] Unlike *Milli Görüş*'s staunch anti-Westernism, for example, the JDP displayed an initial desire to be integrated into the

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34 Çiler Dursun, "Türk-İslâm Sentezi İdeolojisi ve Öznesi," *Doğu-Batı* 7, no. 25 (2003); Şen, "Transformation of Turkish Islamism"; Binnaz Toprak, "Religion as State Ideology in a Secular Setting: The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis," in *Aspects of Religion in Secular Turkey*, ed. Malcolm Wagstaff, The University of Durham Occasional Paper Series, no. 40 (1990).

35 Taşkın, "Upsurge of the Extreme Right."

36 Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, "Islam and Democratization in Turkey: Secularism and Trust in a Divided Society," *Democratization* 16, no. 6 (2009); Şen, "Transformation of Turkish Islamism."

37 Şen, "Transformation of Turkish Islamism"; Sami Zubaida, "Turkish Islam and National Identity," *Middle East Report*, no. 199 (1996).

38 Rabia Karakaya-Polat, "The 2007 Parliamentary Elections in Turkey: Between Securitisation and Desecuritisation," *Parliamentary Affairs* 62, no. 1 (2008).

39 For a summary, see Şen, "Transformation of Turkish Islamism."

40 For a summary, see Grigoriadis, "Islam and Democratization"; Zeyneb Çağliyan-İçener, "The Justice and Development Party's Conception of "Conservative Democracy": Invention or Reinterpretation?," *Turkish Studies* 10, no. 4 (2009).

EU.[41] Also, unlike the WP, the JDP seemed willing to maintain some, albeit limited, form of interaction with the secularist center.[42]

However, several incidents since 2002 crystallized the cleavage between the secular-nationalist "center" and the JPD, such as Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's proposal in 2005 that *Türkiyelilik* (being from Turkey, rather than Turkishness) be the supra-identity for all ethnic identities (including being Turkish),[43] as well as other continuing debates about the Kurdish problem, Turkish identity, unity, and security.[44] In 2007, the crisis between the JDP and the Republican faction resulted in an early parliamentary election; during the campaign, the JDP successfully utilized the frame that the secular-nationalist establishment was preventing the population from electing a religious president.[45]

In short, the last two decades in the Turkish Republic have been characterized by both an uneasy fusion of Islamic and territorial nationalist symbols of belonging and by a continuing struggle between the secularist-nationalist and Islamic factions. It was within such a context that in 2010 an Islamic-leaning Turkish charity organization, *İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı*, organized a six-vessel "Gaza Freedom Flotilla" to bypass the Israeli naval blockade of the Gaza Strip and deliver supplies to Gaza. On May 31, 2010, after a stand-off between one of the ships of the flotilla (Mavi Marmara) and the Israeli Military, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) raided the ship, killing nine people on board. The immediate response in Turkey was, as could be predicted, large masses protesting the Israeli raids. At the same time, however, both the "Gaza Freedom Flotilla" and the Mavi Marmara raid were also quick to become the new front for political and cultural skirmishes over where "our" loyalties are supposed lie (as Turks to "ourselves," as Turks to other Turks who need to be defended, as Muslim Turks who have a responsibility to lead the Muslim world, and as Muslims whose loyalties lie with the Muslim *umma*), who the real "enemy" is, whom (and whose interests) the aid ship represented, and consequently who "we" are.

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41 Grigoriadis, "Islam and Democratization."
42 Ali Çarkoğlu, "A New Electoral Victory for the 'Pro-Islamists' or the 'New Centre-Right'? The Justice and Development Party Phenomenon in the July 2007 Parliamentary Elections in Turkey," *South European Society and Politics* 12, no. 4 (2007).
43 Karakaya-Polat, "The 2007 Parliamentary Elections"; M. Hakan Yavuz and Nihat Ali Özcan, "The Kurdish Question and Turkey's Justice and Development Party," *Middle East Policy* 13, no. 1 (2006).
44 The prime minister argued that the Kurdish problem was not about nationalism, but secularist nationalism of the type imposed by the Kemalist ideology, which divided Muslim Kurds and Turks. This declaration of the prime minister was a precursor to a still ongoing political rivalry pertaining to the definition of "true nationalism." Taşkın, "Upsurge of the Extreme Right," 138.
45 Karakaya-Polat, "The 2007 Parliamentary Elections."

Description of the study

Against the backdrop of the late modern tensions between secularist-nationalist and Islamic factions in Turkey, the Mavi Marmara incident was bound to generate considerable debate over what constitutes its "legitimate" interpretation. To capture those alternative constructions of the event, we conducted a thematic analysis on a sample of 585 comments posted on five Turkish online discussion forums between May 31, 2010 (the date of the Mavi Marmara raid) and June 15, 2010. Since our purpose was to observe a large range of opinions on the Mavi Marmara incident, the selection principle for our forums was variety.

First, we performed keyword searches on Google and Bing, using search strings such as "Türkiye AND Forum AND Mavi Marmara" or "Türkiye AND İslam AND Mavi Marmara." Second, we studied posts in the resulting lists of forums in order to determine the forum type. Although we did not have any systematic data to determine the political preferences of the forum users, we selected forums to represent diverse political and religious allegiances. Third, from the resulting list of forums, we eliminated posts predating May 31, 2010 and discussion threads with one entry only. The resulting list included five discussion forums: Two discussion forums—WOW Turkey (http://wowturkey.com/forum/index.php) and Yeni Forumuz Biz (henceforth Yeni Forum, www.yeniforumuz.biz/index.php)—were general-interest groups; three discussion forums—Rahmet Forum (www.rahmetforum.com), Milli Görüş Forum (www.milligorusforum.biz), and Islami Forum (www.islamiforum.com)—were forums for Turkish users with an interest in Islam and Islamic political groups. Although we would have liked to include forums exhibiting strictly secular interpretations of nationalism, we were unable to identify such forums with a sufficient number of posts on the subject.[46] However, we expected sufficiently diverse interpretations of the incident when comparing postings in general-interest forums—that is, forums with no dominant political allegiance—and forums where users specifically identified themselves as Islamic-leaning.

Our observations suggested that posts on WOWTurkey.com and Yeniforumuz.biz tended to exhibit political identifications ranging from center-left to center-right, as well as supporters of the ruling JDP. On the other hand, a large proportion of the discussion threads on Rahmetforum.com and Islamiforum.com were largely about prayers and other

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46　Rather than being indicative of a lack of such forums, this may be a consequence of the specific search syntax utilized.

forms of religious exercises. Milligorusforum.biz is a political forum associated with the Islamic movement of the late Necmettin Erbakan.

All five forums require users to sign up in order to post comments. In all five forums, moderators exist and can remove content that is unsuitable (*i.e.*, posts that are illegal, posts that contain personal attacks etc.); however, the forum policies seem to suggest that removal typically occurs only after complaints are received. The membership size of the forums varies greatly: WOWTurkey.com (>300,000); Islamiforum.com (>50,000), Yeniforumuz.biz (>20,000), Milligorusforum.biz (>9,000), and Rahmetforum.com (<1,000).

Finally, from the resulting 1,341 posts, we eliminated all posts that did not contain personal opinions of the discussants, but rather news updates, descriptive details about the raid, and debates about international law not directly related to the research question. We retained 585 posts (484 from general-interest discussion forms, and 101 from Islamic-leaning forums).

The analysis used codes developed and validated in our previous work on Turkish nationalism.[47] For that reason, only the Turkish-speaking researcher did the coding for the entire sample, but we compared codes for a small sub-sample translated into English in order to confirm coding reliability. Previously, we had looked at how the 2004 negative Greek-Cypriot referendum against uniting the Greek and Turkish parts of the island and the subsequent Greek-Cypriot (but not Turkish-Cypriot) accession to the European Union were constructed in Turkish nationalist rhetoric in online posts. We found that nationalist discourse around those incidents articulated three major metaphors of belonging: nation as blood and sacrifice, nation as team play, and nation as family. Here, we use deductive thematic analysis,[48] so as to extend our previous conclusions by understanding whether and how these metaphors of belonging contributed to the construction of a Turkish collective identity, as territorial nationalism legitimized by the nation-state, or as Islamic nationalism legitimized through religion. We used QSR N6 software to code each discussion post in terms of the previously developed codes, which we subsequently related to the identity themes suggested by the research question.

The analysis makes no normative assertions about the respective value of territorial-national versus religious claims of belonging in con-

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47 Lemi Baruh and Mihaela Popescu, "Guiding Metaphors of Nationalism: The Cyprus Issue and the Construction of Turkish National Identity in Online Discussions," *Discourse and Communication* 2, no. 1 (2008).
48 Richard E. Boyatzis, *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998).

structing collective identities. We recognize that the discussion in this limited number of online discussion forums may not be representative of the views of the entire population in Turkey. Nor do we claim that the identified discussion groups constitute a representative breakdown of two polarities in identity politics in Turkey. However, we believe that the differences and similarities we have observed between these two independent groups, within the specific time-frame we studied, are highly indicative of the conflicting and sometimes overlapping nature of religious and territorial-nationalist belonging as dimensions of collective identity in Turkey. At the same time, in line with the assumptions of the Hyperpersonal Communication Model,[49] we believe that the relative anonymity of online forums is particularly conducive to the communication—even if often polarizing and "uncivil"—of deep-seated beliefs and emotions about one's personal and collective identity.

The construction of collective identity after the Mavi Marmara incident

The following analysis identifies the main themes articulated by the nationalist discourses prompted by the Mavi Marmara incident and discusses the extent to which these themes are differentially treated in general-interest and Islamic-leaning forums. We focus on the treatment of the (gendered) nation, as well as the theme of willing and redemptive sacrifice and its associated signifiers, such as blood, martyrdom, and emblematic historical figures. Finally, we interpret these themes in the context of a theory of collective identity.

The flag as the body of the Turkish nation

It has often been suggested that the "love" of a nation entails both identification with a common polity and willingness to sacrifice for its sake.[50] Indeed, it may well be this unquestioning willingness to sacrifice for the nation that gives contemporary nationalism its religious character.[51] The willing sacrifice of loyal children plays both a prescriptive role, in that it outlines the price to be paid for the eternal glory of the nation, and an ascriptive function, by legitimizing the rightful entitlements that come with membership in the polity. In commenting on the relationship between nation and willing sacrifice, Marvin and Ingle have identified a

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49 Joseph B. Walther, "Computer-Mediated Communication: Impersonal, Interpersonal, and Hyperpersonal Interaction," *Communication Research* 23, no. 1 (1996).

50 Charles Taylor, "Nationalism and Modernity," in *The state of the nation: Ernest Gellner and the theory of nationalism*, ed. John A. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

51 Hayes and Huntley, *Nationalism: A Religion*.

symbolic link between the fallen bodies of the members of the community and the flag of a nation—both equally powerful, equally vulnerable.[52] The flag, a stand-in for the sacrificial bodies, becomes a mobile symbol of national strength, yet uniquely open to attacks. For about 10 percent of the discussants in general-interest online forums, the raid on the Mavi Marmara constituted precisely such an attack on the flag, hence the body of the nation it represented. In stark contrast, the discussants in Islamic-leaning forums did not mention the Turkish flag (except for one reference), let alone use it as a synecdoche to refer to the Turkish nation. A related point pertains to the use of flag imagery. Whereas in both types of forum the Palestinian flag was quite frequently displayed (81 percent of the 21 flag visuals displayed in general-interest forums, and 82 percent of the 28 flag visuals displayed in Islamic-leaning forums), the Turkish flag was a lot more prevalent visually in general-interest forums. In contrast, Islamic-leaning forum discussants displayed the Saudi Arabian flag a lot more often than their counterparts in the general-interest forums. This difference suggests a more forceful identification with the Turkish nation-state in general-interest forums, as compared to Islamic-leaning forums.

Indeed, for the former, the Mavi Marmara was not an incidental transport vehicle for Turkish citizens, but rather the extension of the Turkish land described with the gendered metaphor of a pure female body in need of protection. We thus recover empirically the idea that gendered discourse about nationhood is an integral part of nationalistic discourse.[53] In the context of Turkish nationalism, while the nation is often gendered as female (*anavatan*, or mother nation) pure and needing protection, the state is often gendered as male (*devlet baba*, or father state) endowed with the traditionally masculine power to protect her from external threats.[54]

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52 Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation*.
53 Gisela Bock and Pat Thane, *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s-1950s* (London: Routledge, 1991); Rebecca Bryant, "The Purity of Spirit and the Power of Blood: A Comparitive Perspective on Nation, Gender and Kinship," Royal Anthropological Institute, no. 8 (2002); Eley and Suny, "Introduction"; Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1993).
54 Baruh and Popescu, "Guiding Metaphors of Nationalism"; Deniz Kandiyoti, "Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation," *Millenium Journal of International Studies* 20, no. 3 (1991); Glenda Sluga, "Identity, Gender and the History of European Nations and Nationalisms," *Nations and Nationalism* 4, no. 1 (1998); Fiona Williams, "Racism and the Discipline of Social Policy: A Critique of Welfare Theory," *Critical Social Policy* 7, no. 20 (1987); Nira Yuval-Davies, "Women Ethnicity and Empowerment," *Feminism and Psychology* 4, no. 1 (1994); Nira Yuval-Davies and Floya Anthias, *Woman-Nation-State* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

For online discussants in general-interest forums, the gendering of the Turkish nation is accomplished by symbolically relating the Turkish flag with the moral qualities of chastity and honor: "Anything that needs to be done to protect our honor should be done. As they say, if the issue is our nation, chastity, flag, or our call to prayers, the rest are superfluous details." (WOW Turkey Forum, May 31, 2010) Conversely, a threat to the flag becomes a threat to the deep moral core that, once lost, paves the way for utter moral ruin. For example, several discussants saw in the attack the reminder that the state of grace granted by collective belonging is fundamentally ephemeral: "It is such a strange day. I am looking around me and realizing with heartbreak how precious these lands, the motherland and the nation are." (WOW Turkey Forum, June 1, 2010)

An additional discursive strategy of gendering occurred when general-interest forum discussants referred to their rightful expectations from the state to act as protecting, uncompromising masculine force:

> With us, the state is the father, and just like a father protects its sons and daughters, the state should protect us. And just like a father cannot reach a compromise with the person who has murdered his son... the government should be able to avenge the lives lost without engaging in any negotiation. (WOW Turkey Forum, May 31, 2010)

For those discussants, the number of lives lost is less relevant than the Turkish state's moral failure to immediately retaliate:

> It's been hours since the raid and the government is still on hold... Remember what Israel did when two of their soldiers got killed? You are the grand Turkish Republic. You have the iron fist of the region in Turkish military, and if you are still refraining from taking action against a nation whose population is less than half of Istanbul, where is our grandeur! Aahhh, my father [referring to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk], we miss you so much. (WOW Turkey Forum, May 31, 2010)

Belonging through blood and sacrifice

Consonant with the symbolic physical connotations of the nation-body, shedding one's blood while fighting for one's country is one of the most powerful metaphors of belonging and patriotism.[55] Blood and sacrifice act both as signifiers for future retaliation (as in the observation that

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55 Baruh and Popescu, "Guiding Metaphors of Nationalism."

now there is "blood" between Turks and Israeli), but also as a powerful redemptive medium by means of which individual sacrifices may rescue the whole:

> Allah has given me one life, and I am and we are more than willing to give it up for our nation against the infidels. I am up for any war against these infidels who have attacked the nine people, my nationals and compatriots whose veins are filled with noble Turkish blood. (WOW Turkey Forum, May 31, 2010)

As this example suggests, for many discussants in the general-interest forums, patriotic duties also meant a sacred responsibility to fight against "infidels." In many respects, the fusion of Islamic notions of belonging and patriotism is an essential component of how general-interest forums communicated the complementary nature of their identity as Muslims and Turks. This tendency becomes all the more evident when we consider the contexts within which the participants discussed martyrdom in relation to the raids and the PKK (*Partiya Karkarên Kurdistan*, Kurdistan Worker's Party) attacks on the military (which also happened on the same day). Here, we coded mentions of martyrdom into three categories. The first category was martyrdom strictly defined in terms of civil casualties of war (Martyr-Turkish; for example, "my deepest condolences to the relatives of the soldiers and *citizens* who became a martyr today"). The second category referred to martyrdom as a divine status bestowed on people fighting in the name of Islam (Martyr-Islam). The third category mentioned martyrdom without a reference to being Turkish or to Islamic norms (Martyr-Neutral). On the general-interest forums, about a quarter of the mentions of martyrdom made a reference to Islamic norms, and about two-thirds of all references to martyrdom made explicit references to being Turkish.

It needs to be noted that references to Turkish martyrdom were not uniform in nature. For example, close to half of these references to Turkish martyrdom related to the soldiers killed on the same day by PKK attacks in İskenderun, with some of the comments even questioning the martyrdom rhetoric seemingly exclusively assigned to the dead on the Mavi Marmara:

> Now, as Turkey, we are with our Muslim brothers [probably referring to both Palestinians and people on the Mavi Marmara], as we are supposed to be. However, neither the popular reaction nor the media attention to whatever Israel did should conceal the fact that

we had six martyrs in İskenderun today [the location of the PKK attack]. Everybody was outraged by the Israeli attack; but was there any such outrage for our martyrs [in İskenderun]? (WOW Turkey Forum, May 31, 2010)

Generally, however, for most, the two distinct events, the Israeli raid of the Mavi Marmara and the İskenderun attacks, represented symptoms of the same cycle of threats against the nation: "It is as if the PKK, who has martyred our soldiers in İskenderun, and Israel, who has martyred our nationals in international waters, are part of the same game." (WOW Turkey Forum, June 1, 2010) On the other hand, in Islamic-leaning forums, although a large number of posts mentioned retaliation against the raid and a few pointed to the need for jihad, the posts rarely discussed civil casualties of war—that is, the victims of a conflict between states—but rather the martyrdom of Muslim believers irrespective of their nationality. For example, in discussing whether a German national who died during the raids should also be considered a martyr, one post indicated: "Even if, due to potential public pressure, they have not openly declared that they have converted to Islam [during the trip to Gaza], if they have converted to Islam, they are martyrs (Milli Görüş Forum, June 5, 2010). Another post made it clear that, although all deaths for the Gaza cause were righteous, only killed Muslims were martyrs: "People went there to die (and to become martyrs if they were Muslim), the rest don't see the value in those deaths (and martyrdom)" (Rahmet Forum, June 8, 2010).

It has often been suggested that nationalism, just like any traditional religion, is intolerant to dissent,[56] and that it considers blasphemous any challenge to the demand for unquestioning sacrifice.[57] In that regard, an additional difference between general-interest and Islamic-leaning forums pertained to the construction of betrayal. As expected, in both types of forums a traitor was generally anybody questioning or criticizing the motives and sacrifice of the Mavi Marmara passengers. However, the two types of forums differed in terms of constructing the exact nature of the betrayal. For example, on Islamic-leaning discussion boards, the act of criticizing was equated with religious infidelity:

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56 Jean Bethe Elshtain, "Sovereignty, Identity, Sacrifice," *Journal of International Studies* 20, no. 3 (1991); Hayes and Huntley, *Nationalism: A Religion*; Ceaser V. Mavratsas, "The Ideological Contest between Greek-Cypriot Nationalism and Cypriotism 1974-1995: Politics, Social Memory, and Identity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20, no. 4 (1997).

57 Hayes and Huntley, *Nationalism: A Religion*; Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation*.

Are we believers of Islam or double-dealing infidels? With all the nit-picking and the supposedly "constructive" criticism, are we revealing the symptoms of our hearts' sickness [probably referring to a lack of faith], or are we to recite *bismillah* and join the believers of Islam on this path? (Islami Forum, May 31, 2010)

On the other hand, in general-interest forums, a critical attitude revealed rather betrayal of the nation and lack of civic virtue against the backdrop of ambiguous allegiances: "[Sarcastically] So, the victims [on the ship] killed each other? You are truly a Zionist ... you are a liar, a person with no identity or no sense of humanity, who backstabs the nation that has provided for you" (WOW Turkey Forum, May 31, 2010).

A second discursive strategy to highlight the symbolic connection between blood sacrifice and belonging was the invocation of emblematic figures acting as exemplary heroes. Invoking historical figures such as Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror (during whose reign in the fifteenth century the Ottomans conquered İstanbul) was common in both types of forums. However, the two types of forums showed important differences in terms of the historical periods that were appropriated. A large proportion of historic figures referenced in Islamic-leaning forums were from Islamic history (e.g., the Prophet Muhammad, Ali, Hüseyin). Conversely, general-interest forums split references between heroic Islamic figures and Turkish figures. For example, in addition to the frequently and often longingly mentioned Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, discussants in general-interest forums made frequent references to the heroic decisions of Bülent Ecevit, who was the prime minister in 1974 when Turkey intervened in Cyprus. At the same time, unlike in Islamic-leaning forums, Islamic figures referenced in general-interest forums combined figures from early Islam (e.g., the Prophet Muhammad) and prominent figures from recent Turkish (and Islamic) history (e.g., Mehmet Akif Ersoy, a famous poet who is also the writer of the lyrics of the Turkish national anthem).

Who are we? Who are we not?

The final stage in deductive thematic analysis is to interpret the themes in the context of a theory of collective identity.[58] Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory provides a useful conceptual framework.[59] According to these authors, individuals have multiple social identities that are defined via their membership in particular social groups, and it is pre-

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58 Boyatzis, *Transforming Qualitative Information.*
59 Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. W. G. Austin and S. Worchel (Brooks-Cole: Monterey, CA, 1979).

cisely that varied self-identification (e.g., primary or secondary group belonging) which constitutes the basis for individual social action. Each internalized group membership helps us define who we are and the "vocabularies of motives" for our actions.[60] Social identity theory also predicts that the internalization of group membership corresponds to a simultaneous distancing from out-groups. Consequently, we investigated how the construction of various social identities was articulated with the different rhetorics of belonging discussed above.

First, we coded posts in terms of whether they prioritized group identity as Turks or as Muslims. Unsurprisingly, the two types of forums prioritized different identities: Turkish for general discussion forums, and Islamic for in Islamic-leaning forums. In particular, in the latter, unity of the Islamic *umma* transcending borders was a crucial discursive component:

> The Gaza issue is about whether you are conscious of your *ummet* [*umma*] or not. If, today, your conscience is silent… and if misgivings like "who cares about Palestine" repress what is on your conscience, shame on you! Here is an opportunity for you. Take a deep breath and think, and you shall overcome the "nationalistic" obstacles that prevent you from reaching the gates of heaven. Gaza is Gaza today, Beirut tomorrow, and İstanbul the other day. Forget about all the borders dividing us… Achieve this consciousness, the consciousness of your *ummet*. (Islami Forum, May 31, 2010)

In contrast, for members of the general discussion groups, the Mavi Marmara controversy offered the opportunity to balance being Muslim with being Turkish citizens. A great proportion of posts emphasized the need to remember that "we are first Turks," and questions whether "meddling" with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict did justice to Turkish "martyr-soldiers" at home (during the fight against the PKK) and abroad (e.g., Azerbaijanis in the Caucasus, Turkmens in Northern Iraq): "Why do we need to organize such large protests for victims in Gaza raid when we have so many martyred soldiers every day?" (Yeni Forum, June 15, 2010). However, such comments were often accompanied by responses that, while not directly challenging the assertions, also suggested that it is Turkish nationals' historical duty to always stand for the oppressed. For example:

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60   Wright C. Mills, "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motives," *American Sociological Review* 5, no. 6 (1940).

> We are not an enemy to anyone but those who are enemies of humanity... we stood against those [Nazis] who indiscriminately gassed women and children… and today we will stand against those terrorizing the Middle East. (WOW Turkey Forum, May 31, 2010)

A related construction of Turkish identity was the emphasis on Turks and Muslims leading by example in the fight against the "oppressor" and for the unity of a long-divided *umma*:

> [Summarizing a video he watched during the protests in Middle East] The Arab who is proud of Turks' standing against Israel makes his son kiss the Turkish flag and tells him: Because they are brave! Because they fear nothing but Allah!... In our Holy Book, Allah wants all Muslims to unite. In this respect, these protest videos [the discussant actually calls them celebrations] are a sign of the imminent Islamic Union. (WOW Turkey Forum, May 31, 2010)

In this particular example, not only are the Turkish and Muslim identities intertwined, but being Turkish is also seen as a necessary precondition of leadership in a divided Muslim world.

Importantly, the balance reached by discussants in general-interest forums between being Turkish and being Muslim is not without snags. For example, a sensitive issue pertained to which collective identity, Turkish or Muslim, warranted credit for the heroic sacrifice of the Mavi Marmara activists. While accepting that being Muslim is a key component of their Turkish identity, some discussants required Islamic-leaning participants to acknowledge that it was the Turkish nation, not some other nation with Islamic ties that could legitimately claim the status of an anti-Israeli protestant:

> And how about those Saudi Arabian flags that the protestors in Taksim were waving? I don't think you can claim that this is because Saudi Arabia is an anti-Zionist country. I don't see any goodwill in waving the flags of a nation who has not even lifted a finger for Gaza. (WOW Turkey Forum, June 1, 2010)

In the comment above, the post identified the dichotomy between "us" and "others" as the dichotomy between the Turkish nation-state and other nation-states with stakes in, but perhaps less demonstrated commitment to, anti-Israeli protests. The nature of the identified "others" distinguished between general-interest and Islamic-leaning forums.

Granted, discussants in both types of forums engaged in some form of downward comparison to Israel and other Jewish supporters. Frequently, posts across the boards characterized Israelis as "savages," "rabid dogs or monkeys," "infidels," "pirates," and "terrorists." However, general-interest forums also singled out Palestinians and Arab populations in general for downward comparison, which hardly happened, if at all, in Islamic-leaning forums.

In general-interest forums, the downward comparison with Palestinians and Arabs used the theme of "Palestinians as traitors," but appropriated history differently to support the theme. A first discursive strategy used the history of World War I to claim that Palestinians and other Arabs who had sided with the British against the Ottomans deserved their oppression by the Israelis. For example, to refute the argument that the history of Arab betrayal during World War I was simply British divisive propaganda, a discussant responded:

> Should I believe you, or what my great-grandfather told me as a Turk who fought in the Yemen? These arabs [sic] begrudged them even a few kilograms of wheat. My great-grandfather had to fight the Arabs instead of fighting the enemy. (WOW Turkey Forum, June 1, 2010)

A second discursive strategy appropriated recent controversies regarding Turkish Northern Cyprus, for example, by asking why "these rotten wretches [probably referring to Arabs in general] still do not recognize Northern Cyprus" (Yeni Forum, June 14, 2010) as an independent country. Finally, discussants argued that despite all their resources Arabic nations simply did not do anything about Palestine:

> Today what are the Arabs doing for Palestine? It should be their job before ours to stand for Palestine. They are their neighbors and they come from the same race... But we see that all these wealthy sheikhs are more concerned about ultra-luxurious baths and golden toilet seats. (WOW Turkey Forum, June 1, 2010)

By contrasting Turkish identity with Arab identities through downward comparison, these discursive strategies singled out humanitarian righteousness as a distinctive feature by means of which Turkish identity stood out:

> You should do what is right as a human, and maybe they [other Muslim nations] will be ashamed and be a man. You lead and the rest

can do whatever they wish… Yesterday, a doctor from Qatar was on Habertürk TV and made a confession: "WE COULD NOT BE-COME A NATION." (WOWTurkey Forum, 2 June 2010)

Additionally, the theme of Middle Eastern pro-Gaza support/anti-Israel protest was interpreted differently in the two types of forums. In Islamic-leaning forums, Middle Eastern support for the Gaza "cause" was constructed as the first step in the reunification of a divided *umma*. Islamic-leaning forums also focused on large demonstrations from small towns in Turkey during which protesters waved Saudi Arabic and Palestinian flags, potentially signaling the Islamic conquest of Turkish public sentiments. In contrast, in general-interest forums, Middle Eastern anti-Israeli protests were, at least partly, read as demonstrating solidarity with the Turks. General-interest forums were more likely to display images of large demonstrations both from Turkey and Western countries, potentially signaling a pro-West Turkish orientation continuing the modernization project that started in the 1920s. Speculatively, such displays may have also meant to suggest that Turkish people consider themselves promoters of modern democracy in the Middle East. In the arguably most telling display, Orthodox Jews were captured waving a Turkish flag in New York.[61]

Discussion

In this article, we have analyzed online discussions about the Mavi Marmara incident as a "critical event" appropriated differently by general-interest and Islamic-leaning forums to construct alternative Turkish collective identities. As expected, the metaphor of the gendered body[62] and the charged metaphor of bloody sacrifice played organizing roles in the construction of nationalistic discourse. In both types of forums, the attack on the Mavi Marmara represented an attack on the body of the nation itself, and the death of Turkish activists a righteous sacrifice for the nation.

An added dimension of the organizing roles of the two metaphors emerged when we contrasted the use of these metaphors in two alternative constructions of belonging: a territorial-based nationalism in general-interest forums, and a religion-based belonging in Islamic-leaning forums. Depending on how they perceived the identities of the in-group/out-group members, discussants in the two types of forums constructed their collective social identity differently.

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61 The photograph was originally posted on the website of TodaysZaman.com.
62 Baruh and Popescu, "Guiding Metaphors of Nationalism."

Unlike Islamic-leaning forums, which emphasized the religious unity of the *umma* across geo-political borders, general-interest forums constructed a negative contrast between the Turkish nation-state as a champion of the oppressed and other Arab nation-states richer in economic resources, but lacking the same moral capital. In both types of forums, criticism of the Mavi Marmara activists negated belonging to the in-group and was perceived as betrayal; however, betrayal was constructed as lack of civic virtue in general-interest forums, but as religious infidelity in Islamic-leaning forums. Given the different discursive constructions of collective identity, the historical meaning of the Mavi Marmara incident and its subsequent international reaction were interpreted differently in the two types of forums. General-interest forums emphasized anti-Israeli stand as demonstrating solidarity with the Turkish nation, which was perceived as a Western democratizing agent in the Middle East. In contrast, Islamic-leaning forums emphasized Turkish support for the Gaza cause as a step toward the reunification of the *umma*. This contrasting construction of identity is related to how the metaphors of the nation identified above were discursively deployed, as well as how history was differentially appropriated. For discussants in general-interest forums, the Turkish flag was a crucial civic symbol of the strengths and vulnerabilities of the Turkish nation and thus received special discursive treatment, whereas for discussants in Islamic-leaning forums flags were simply ways to incidentally identify distinct, but not morally significant citizenships. Similarly, general-interest forums emphasized heroic figures of recent Turkish history, whereas Islamic-leaning forums extolled heroes of Islamic history.

Interestingly, despite these differences, discussants in general-interest forums evinced an uneasy fusion of Islamic symbols of belonging and Turkish symbols of nation-state allegiance, which suggests that investigating how discussants come to terms with their dual identity, Turkish and Muslim, is a profitable future research question. Generally, how Turkish discussants negotiate their complex identities against a global backdrop is a suggestive research avenue. For example, future research might look at how the appropriation of the "West" as civilizing symbol is differently handled by Turkish versus other Western online discussants, who—if the introductory quote from a former Spanish prime minister is any indication—might consider the Mavi Marmara incident a symptom of a deeper Western identity crisis. A different dimension of the future analysis might also consider the use of multimedia to articulate graphically the differences we observed in this study.

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