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Helena Vodopija

# When the 'Terrorists' Speak the Language of Humanity

## Counter-Memory of 15 July Coup d'État

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EMA, The European Master's Programme  
in Human Rights and Democratisation

HELENA VODOPIJA

WHEN THE 'TERRORISTS' SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF  
HUMANITY

COUNTER-MEMORY OF 15 JULY COUP D'ÉTAT

## FOREWORD EMA AWARDED THESES 2021/2022

The European Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation (EMA) is a one-year intensive programme launched in 1997 as a joint initiative of 8 universities which now has participating universities in all EU Member States with support from the European Commission. Based on an action- and policy-oriented approach to learning, it combines legal, political, historical, anthropological and philosophical perspectives on the study of human rights and democracy with targeted skills-building activities. The aim from the outset was to prepare young professionals to respond to the requirements and challenges of work in international organisations, field operations, governmental and non-governmental bodies, and academia. As a measure of its success, EMA has served as a model of inspiration for the establishment of seven other EU-sponsored regional master's programmes in the area of human rights and democratisation in different parts of the world. Today these programmes cooperate closely in the framework of the Global Campus of Human Rights, with its headquarters in Venice, Italy.

Up to 90 students are admitted to the EMA programme each year. During the first semester in Venice, they have the opportunity to meet and learn from leading academics, experts and representatives of international and non-governmental organisations. During the second semester, they are hosted by one of the 42 participating universities to follow additional courses in an area of specialisation of their own choice and to conduct research under the supervision of the resident EMA Director or other academic staff. After successfully passing assessments and completing a master's thesis, students are awarded the European Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation, which is jointly conferred by a group of EMA universities.

Each year the EMA Council selects five theses, which stand out for their formal academic qualities and the originality of the research topics, their relevance to the promotion and implementation of human rights and democratic values, the innovation of their argument, methodology, and theoretical approach, their Exceptional knowledge of the academic literature and the excellent capacity for critical analysis demonstrated by the authors.

The EMA Awarded Theses of the academic year 2021/2022 are:

- Carter, Percy Elena Virginia, *Universal Legal Capacity for Persons with Disabilities: Will, Preferences and Communication*. Supervisor: Andrea Broderick, Maastricht University.
- Gscheidlen, Anne Sophie, *At Risk of Falling through the Cracks? The Protection of Children in State Care in Conflict Situations in International Law and Practice*. Supervisor: Katre Luhamaa, University of Tartu.
- Keogh, Briana Maria, *Preimplantation Genetic Testing: the Conflict between Reproductive Autonomy and Disability Rights. With the UK, Ireland, and Portugal as Case Studies*. Supervisor: Helena Pereira de Melo, New University of Lisbon.
- Sheppard, Phoebe Eleanor, *Imperialist Queerphobia. The Curtailment of LGBTQ+ Rights in Uganda and South Africa as a Product of Colonialism, Religion, and Patriarchy*. Supervisor: Ekaterina Yahyaoui, University of Galway.
- Vodopija, Helena, *When the 'Terrorists' Speak the Language of Humanity. Counter-Memory of 15th July Coup d'État*. Supervisor: Josip Glaurdić, Université du Luxembourg.

The selected theses demonstrate the breadth, depth and reach of the EMA programme and the passion and talent of its students. We are proud of the range of topics as well as the curiosity and research skills demonstrated by this year's students. On behalf of the Governing Bodies of EMA and of all participating universities, we applaud and congratulate them.

Prof. Manfred NOWAK  
Global Campus Secretary General

Prof. Thérèse MURPHY  
EMA Chairperson

Dr Orla Ní CHEALLACHÁIN  
EMA Programme Director

This publication includes the thesis *When the 'Terrorists' Speak the Language of Humanity. Counter-Memory of 15th July Coup d'État* written by Helena Vodopija and supervised by Josip Glaurdić, Université du Luxembourg.

#### BIOGRAPHY

Helena Vodopija is a turkologist and anthropologist specialising in anthropology of memory. Her research interests involve politics of memory, nationalism, contemporary religiosity and forms of political resistance in Turkey and Western Balkans. Her academic work is informed by post-colonial, post-marxist and feminist theories.

#### ABSTRACT

The aim of this work was to understand how the antagonism that constitutes the core of official memory of the 15 July coup d'état influenced the lives of those designated as the enemy of the nation – the families of cadets and trainee officers who were sentenced to life in prison for the alleged involvement in the coup; to portray the change in their identity – from *believers* who identify with nationalist discourse to *human rights activists* – and depict their creation of counter-hegemonic movement inspired by the counter-memory of the coup. The research showed how they regain their political subjectivity through re-politicising the normalised subject positions of the nationalist discourse, challenging the embedded antagonism between the nation and its other, and countering the selective vision of justice by their actions that reflect the belief in universal humanity.

15 July coup, counter-memory, identity, cadets and trainee officers

## TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| ECtHR    | European Court of Human Rights  |
| FETÖ/PDY | Fetullahist Terrorist Organization or the Parallel State Structure                                      |
| JDP      | Justice and Development Party   |
| MIT      | National Intelligence Agency  |
| NGO      | Non-governmental organisation   |
| KHK      | Karar Hükmünde Kararname/Emergency decree issued during emergency state following 15 July military coup |

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1.

INTRODUCTION

*No foreign sky protected me, no stranger's wing shielded my face. I stand as witness to the common lot, survivor of that time, that place.*

*Anna Akhmatova, Requiem*

In the times when the polarisation of the world, and worldviews, is on the rise, and the discourse based on the delineation between 'us' and 'them' reached the status of almost undisputed hegemony, 'them' being the barbarian, the horde, the plague, that would overflow us, steal what is most precious to us, poison our blood and our culture; the aggressive nation whose culture should be discarded as uncivilised, their lives marked by their birth certificate; all of those of dissident opinion who are instantly deemed traitors – of the nation, of democracy; this are the times to challenge the unspeakable – to question the line of division. A historical event doesn't present a given, but it is always an interpretation, more or less accurate, more or less inclusive of diverse memories. The way it will be remembered depends upon the discourse dominant at the time, the discourse that at that certain point came out victorious in the struggle for meaning, and that will present a frame, a limit of the meaning of subsequent commemorative ceremonies, public speeches, monuments, museums, schoolbooks. Nonetheless, this discourse, this frame through which we view a historical event, either a distant fact that happened to some distant people, in some distant past or close enough to murder our children, take away our husband, render our brother our sworn enemy; to falsely accuse our children, torture our husband for the crime he never committed, take away our brother's freedom – this discourse can be challenged by the memories that were left

out, forgotten, suppressed in the simplification of events to a narrow view of single narrative mobilised to unify a community – a nation. What if we ask ‘them’ how they remember an event – would it just confirm our knowledge, our vision of the enemy, or would it rather shatter our victoriousness? There is a strong reason not to listen, to forget, to suppress, because the identity of ‘us’ depends on ‘them’ – on their being the cause of all of our suffering and the mirror of our righteousness. Yet, only if we listen to ‘them’, we can claim the universal value of humanity, the universal value of human rights.

On 15 July 2016, an attempted coup d’état took place in Turkey, summoning the bitter memories of the oppressive rule of the military junta in the 1980s and sending shock waves throughout the world. Almost 300 people lost their lives and more than 2,000 were wounded<sup>1</sup>, either in aerial attacks targeting government buildings or in the clashes between the citizens that took on to the streets to oppose the coup, the security forces and soldiers who were present on the night of the coup. After the coup, more than half a million people were prosecuted for their alleged participation in the coup and/or membership in the Gulenist Terrorist Organisation that was accused of organising the coup.<sup>2</sup> The legal actions that ensued were interpreted so as to signify the ‘purification’ from the enemy of the nation, their identity designated and fixed within the official memory of the 15 July coup. The immense effort to render unquestionable the imposed antagonism and the sequel of events that lead to the night of the coup and occurred on 15 July can be observed in the proliferation of various publications regarding 15 July – literature from the area of social science, memoirs, poetry, children’s literature, educational materials for schools, films, songs<sup>3</sup> – all the media that serves to pass certain knowledge to the next generations. Apart from the literary and film production, the government intervened in the public space through the erection of monuments and changing the names of streets

<sup>1</sup> IHA, ‘Başbakan açıkladı: Kaç darbeci öldürüldü? (The prime minister discloses the number of putschists who were killed)’ (IHA, 17 August 2016) <[www.ihha.com.tr/haber-basbakan-acikladi-kaç-darbeci-öldürüldü-580952/](http://www.ihha.com.tr/haber-basbakan-acikladi-kaç-darbeci-öldürüldü-580952/)> accessed 11 June 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Yeni Şafak, ‘Bakan Soylu FETÖ’den gözaltına alınan kişi sayısını açıkladı (Minister Soylu disclosed the number of people detained for the connection with FETÖ)’ (Yeni Şafak, 10 March 2019) <[www.yenisafak.com/gundem/bakan-soylu-fetoden-gozaltina-alinan-kisi-sayisini-acikladi-3450632](http://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/bakan-soylu-fetoden-gozaltina-alinan-kisi-sayisini-acikladi-3450632)> accessed 11 June 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Anadolu Ajansı, ‘15/07 Şafak Vakti’ filmi 15 Temmuz’da vizyona girecek (The Dawn of 15 July in cinemas)’ (Anadolu Ajansı, 4 July 2021) <[www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/15-07-safak-vakti-filmi-15-temmuzda-vizyona-girecek/2293902](http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/15-07-safak-vakti-filmi-15-temmuzda-vizyona-girecek/2293902)> accessed 16 June 2022; Erkan Aktuğ, ‘15 Temmuz’u anlamak için 15 kitap (15 books to understand 15 July)’ (Hürriyet, 15 July 2021) <[www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/15-temmuzu-anlamak-icin-15-kitap-41853590](http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/15-temmuzu-anlamak-icin-15-kitap-41853590)> accessed 16 June 2022.

and other public sites.<sup>4</sup> The institutions for the commemoration of the coup were established, such as 15 July museums in Istanbul and Ankara,<sup>5</sup> and 15 July was proclaimed the Day of Democracy and National Unity, commemorated every year through large-scale events organised throughout Turkey, the most prominent ones being in the sites in Ankara and Istanbul that were rendered symbols of the fight for democracy.

Although a part of the opposition insinuated that the coup might be orchestrated or at least previously known by the incumbent party,<sup>6</sup> and the discourses regarding the falsehood of the coup circulated the alternative media outlets, there has been a general consensus on the antagonism observed in the official memory of the coup and the identity of those considered perpetrators unquestionable. In this context of the almost absolute hegemony of the official memory, not even challenged by the opposition, a small group of people otherwise loyal to the institutions of the state and unattuned to protests decided to stand against what they deemed injustice and render public the memories that oppose the official account of the coup. These were the families and friends of cadets, students of the Airforce Academy and trainee officers of the airforce who were sentenced to life for the alleged involvement in the coup, supported by a rather small number of journalists, human rights activists, lawyers and oppositional politicians who shared their vision of universal justice. Only recently, in the run-up for the 2023 election did they get larger support from the main oppositional actors, yet this support remains limited to closed meetings and occasional public mentions. They retain a strong presence on social media, most prominently on Twitter, through private accounts and common platforms such as Persecuted Cadets (@CadetsTurkish), Kursiyer Teğmenler Platformu (@KursiyerTegm) and Askeri Öğr. Komitesi (@Askeriogrenci16) recently produced a documentary about the persecuted cadets called Mavi

<sup>4</sup> Yeni Şafak, 'FETÖ'yi çağrıştıran sokak isimleri değiştirildi (The names of the streets that evoke FETÖ changed)' (Yeni Şafak, 13 October 2018) <[www.yenisafak.com/gundem/fetoyu-cagristiran-sokak-isimleri-degistirildi-3401890](http://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/fetoyu-cagristiran-sokak-isimleri-degistirildi-3401890)> accessed 16 June 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Yıldız Nevin Gündoğmuş, '15 Temmuz Demokrasi Müzesi' ziyaretçilerini ağırlıyor (Museum of 15 July and Democracy open for public)' (Anadolu Ajansı, 16 July 2021) <[www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/15-temmuz-demokrasi-muzesi-ziyaretcilerini-agirliyor/2306921](http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/15-temmuz-demokrasi-muzesi-ziyaretcilerini-agirliyor/2306921)> accessed 15 June 2022; Hafıza 15 Temmuz (Memory of 15 July) <<https://hafiza15temmuz.org/>> accessed 15 June 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Rengin Arslan, 'Kılıçdaroğlu: 15 Temmuz kontrollü darbe girişimidir (Kılıçdaroğlu: 15 July is a controlled coup)' (BBC Türkçe, 3 April 2017) <[www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-39478777](http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-39478777)> accessed 15 June 2022.

Otobüs<sup>7</sup> (The Blue Bus), along with public actions such as weekly protests in Ankara by the families of trainee officers, individual initiatives in the form of protest marches/sit-in protests by Melek Çetinkaya, one of the most prominent activists for the release of the cadets, and a protest gathering in front of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, in the current political climate of unanimity concerning the 15 July coup, their impact on the broader public remains limited.

In this thesis, the author aims to portray how their designation as the enemy of the nation impacted the lives of the families, friends and supporters of cadets and trainee officers in the way of social isolation and outright harassment, how the families changed the subject positions they identified with and regained political subjectivity through questioning the basis of nationalist discourse and finally how they unified through the means of empathy and belief in humanity so as to form a counter-hegemonic movement.

<sup>7</sup> See Askeri Öğrenci Komitesi, 'Mavi Otobüs (The Blue Bus)' (YouTube, 13 July 2022) <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KXe48msKiw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KXe48msKiw)> accessed 13 July 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Euronews, 'Askeri öğrenciler AIHM önünde "tutuklu Harbiyeliler" için adalet istedi (Cadets demanded justice for the "jailed military students" in front of the ECtHR)' (Euronews, 1 August 2021) <<https://tr.euronews.com/2021/07/31/askeri-ogrenciler-aihm-onunde-tutuklu-harbiyeliler-icin-adalet-istedi>> accessed 10 June 2022.

WHEN THE 'TERRORISTS' SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF HUMANITY

2.

15 JULY COUP AND ITS AFTERMATH

On the evening of 15 July 2016, the military coup started with parallel actions taking place in Ankara and Istanbul by a group of soldiers seizing General Staff Headquarters in Ankara and blocking the Fatih Mehmet Sultan Bridge and Bosphorous bridge in Istanbul with military tanks. A prompt public statement of then-prime minister Binali Yildirim regarding the coup attempt and confirmation by the intelligence services preceded the official declaration of the coup d'état at midnight by the news anchor forced to read the memorandum at gunpoint. What follows is the emblematic public address by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan via Facetime in which he calls upon the citizens of Turkey to take it to the streets and counter the coup d'état. Throughout the night, the prominent governmental sites such as the Parliament, headquarters of the National Intelligence Agency (MIT), Ankara Directorate of Security and a building in the vicinity of the Presidential Complex were attacked by fighter jets whilst the clashes between the soldiers on one side and security forces and civilians on the other continued. The president managed to avoid the attempted assassination at the hotel where he was staying with his family and landed at the Ataturk Airport where he addressed the gathered masses, marking the turning point in

the coup that was slowly brought to an end by midday the next day.<sup>9</sup> Fetullah Gülen, a Muslim cleric residing in the United States, and his followers, now known by the name of Fetullahist Terrorist Organization or the Parallel State Structure (FETÖ/PDY), are accused of organising the coup d'état to overthrow the incumbent government and the president through undermining the constitutional order.<sup>10</sup> The Gulenist movement or the *bizmet* (service) movement has been present in Turkey and abroad firstly in the form of educational institutions and dormitories known as the 'houses of light' since the early 1980s,<sup>11</sup> later spreading its influence in the areas of entrepreneurship and media.<sup>12</sup> Officially it has promoted an allegedly apolitical version of 'mild' Islam<sup>13</sup> that aims to merge rationality connected with the West and Islamic spirituality seen as originating in the East.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Mr Gulen's political influence is widely recognised by an array of scholars and political commentators.

What followed the attempted military coup was the emergency state, first issued on 20 July 2016 on the account of national security, or in President Erdoğan's words, 'The aim of the proclamation of the emergency state is to make necessary steps in a most effective and quick way so we annihilate the threat posed to the democracy in our country, to the rule of law, to the rights and freedoms of our citizens'.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, what was observed in the following two years, up until July 2018 when the emergency state was brought to an end, but having its effect until the present day, was the exact opposite: the deterioration

<sup>9</sup> Department of Corporate Communications of the Presidency, Visual News Chief Editorship & Corporate Communications Directorate of Anadolu Agency, 'July 15 Coup d'état in Türkiye and People's Victory' (Department of the Corporate Communications of the Presidency, 2018) <[www.tccb.gov.tr/assets/dosya/15Temmuz/15temmuz\\_en.pdf](http://www.tccb.gov.tr/assets/dosya/15Temmuz/15temmuz_en.pdf)> accessed 15 March 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Council of Europe, European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), 'Turkey Memorandum Prepared by the Ministry of Justice of Turkey for the Visit of the Delegation to Ankara on 3 and 4 November in Connection to the Emergency Decree Laws' CDL-REF(2016)067, 3 <[www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF\(2016\)067-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2016)067-e)> accessed 21 March 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Helen Rose Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (Springer 2010) 27.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid* 29.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid* 38.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid* 34.

<sup>15</sup> Anadolu Agency, 'Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: 3 ay süreyle olağanüstü hal ilan edilmesi kararlaştırıldı (President Erdoğan: It was decided to proclaim the emergency state in duration of 3 months)' (Anadolu Agency, 20 July 2016) <[www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/cumhurbaşkanı-erdogan-3-ay-sureyle-olaganustu-hal-ilan-edilmesi-kararlaştirildi/612361](http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/cumhurbaşkanı-erdogan-3-ay-sureyle-olaganustu-hal-ilan-edilmesi-kararlaştirildi/612361)> accessed 20 March 2022.



of the rule of law through the intrusion of the executive branch in the judiciary, curtailment of the rights and freedoms of the citizens, most notably the freedom of expression and assembly, right to a fair trial, right to life and security of the person, and exercise of a continuous pressure over civil society that forms a cornerstone of a functioning democracy. The ‘quickness’ and ‘efficiency’ of dealing with a threat to national security were translated into 36 emergency decrees, 32 of them reviewed by the parliament,<sup>16</sup> that covered a vast range of areas – from military and internal security to the economy, social security, health, education and media<sup>17</sup> – surpassed the threshold of necessity and proportional response<sup>18</sup> and lead to more than 1,000 permanent changes in the national legislation.<sup>19</sup> Whilst until April 2017 the decrees were issued by the Council of Ministers, after the referendum regarding constitutional changes that resulted in the change from the parliamentary to presidential system, the president acquired powers to issue emergency decrees that possess the force of law.<sup>20</sup> Not only did the change to the presidential system allow for the expansion of the legislative power of the executive, but it also provided for the control over the judiciary, as the president gained the right to appoint 30% of the members of the Council of Judges and Prosecutors and 80% of judges of the Constitutional Court.<sup>21</sup> What is more, the Constitutional Court ruled that it doesn’t possess jurisdiction to review the emergency decrees, which lead to, in Göztepe’s words, the ‘self-abandonment of

<sup>16</sup> European Commission, ‘Turkey 2019 Report Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy’ COM(2019) 260 final, 9 <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=SWD:2019:220:FIN>> accessed 21 March 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Ismet Akça and others, ‘When State of Emergency Becomes the Norm: The Impact of Executive Decrees on Turkish Legislation’ (Heinrich Böll Stiftung Istanbul, 2018) 7 <<https://tr.boell.org/en/2018/03/15/when-state-emergency-becomes-norm>> accessed 23 March 2022.

<sup>18</sup> International Commission of Jurists, ‘Justice Suspended: Access to Justice and the State of Emergency in Turkey’ (ICJ, 2018) 9 <[www.ici.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Turkey-Access-to-justice-Publications-Reports-2018-ENG.pdf](http://www.ici.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Turkey-Access-to-justice-Publications-Reports-2018-ENG.pdf)> accessed 25 March 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Akça and others (n 17) 7.

<sup>20</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, ‘Report on the impact of the state of emergency on human rights in Turkey, including an update on the South-East January – December 2017’ (OHCHR, 2018) 8 <[www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2018/03/turkey-un-report-details-extensive-human-rights-violations-during-protracted](http://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2018/03/turkey-un-report-details-extensive-human-rights-violations-during-protracted)> accessed 22 March 2022 (OHCHR 2018 Report).

<sup>21</sup> European Commission (n 16) 14.

the constitutional court as a guardian of the rule of law in Turkey'.<sup>22</sup> Thus the process of the gradual siege of the judiciary by the executive branch that started in 2014 with the founding of the Peace Judgeships, courts with a broad range of powers (including the right to issue search, seizure, arrest and detention warrants) that were established due to alleged attempt by the Gulenist network to overthrow the government through the means of the judiciary,<sup>23</sup> reached its peak during the emergency state. In Yilmaz's words:

the party and President Erdogan successfully restructured legal emergency power around a new strategic and liminal legality (...) institutionalizing the 'rule by law' approach based on the principles of prerogative and authorization of the utmost discretionary power of the executive branch.<sup>24</sup>

The immediate effect that the emergency decrees had on the lives of the Turkish citizens were mass dismissals of the civil servants allegedly connected to the Gulenist organisation: more than 152,000 individuals were fired from their posts,<sup>25</sup> mostly in *ad hominem* manner, publicly naming them in the lists added to the decrees that were published in the Official Gazette.<sup>26</sup> Not only did this act make them susceptible to public lynching, but it also violated the principle of the presumption of innocence, since it didn't allow for the defence against the charges made against them.<sup>27</sup> No individual, evidence-based justification was provided for the accusation and subsequent dismissal, apart from the loosely defined 'connection' or the 'affiliation' to the Gulenist network, relating to the period before 15 July<sup>28</sup> and based on a wide range of

<sup>22</sup> Ece Göztepe, 'The Permanency of the State of Emergency in Turkey: The Rise of a Constituent Power or Only a New Quality of the State?' (2018) 28(4) *Zeitschrift Für Politikwissenschaft* 531.

<sup>23</sup> OHCHR 2018 Report (n 20) 13.

<sup>24</sup> Zafer Yilmaz, 'The Genesis of the 'Exceptional' Republic: the Permanency of the Political Crisis and the Constitution of Legal Emergency Power in Turkey' (2019) 46(5) *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 733.

<sup>25</sup> European Commission (n 16).

<sup>26</sup> Council of Europe, European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), 'Opinion on Emergency Decree Laws N°s667-676 adopted following the failed coup of 15 July 2016, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 109th Plenary Session' CDL-AD(2016)037-e, 21-22 <[www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2016\)037-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2016)037-e)> accessed 21 March 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Ufuk Yesil, 'The Cases of Dismissal Under State of Emergency (OHAL): The Right to a Fair Trial' in Hasan Aydın and Winston Langley (eds), *Human Rights in Turkey* (SpringerLink 2021) 245.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid* 240.

publicly non-disclosed criteria – ranging from using ByLock, encrypted messaging application to residing in student dormitories that are connected to the organisation.<sup>29</sup> In May 2017, almost one year since the proclamation of the emergency state, the Commission on the State of Emergency Measure was established to review individual complaints regarding dismissals through the emergency decrees. Whilst the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>30</sup> rendered inadmissible 28,000 applications and redirected them to the Commission as an existent domestic remedy that hasn't been exhausted,<sup>31</sup> there have been serious concerns regarding the Commission's efficiency and independence since the authority to select the members and decide on the rules of the procedure lies solely at the Presidency.<sup>32</sup> Collectivisation of guilt, absence of the presumption of innocence and justification for the crime committed, along with retroactive enactment of laws and compromised independence of appellate mechanisms, lead to denials of principles of non-retroactivity and individuality of guilt, as well as curtailment of the right to a fair trial.<sup>33</sup> Even if the procedure of the dismissals was highly problematic, the issue that had the direst consequences on the lives of the dismissed individuals and their families was the permanent effect of the decree combined with actions restraining their movement, right to work and the possibility of upward social mobility: they were banned for life from working in the public sector and parts of the private sector, such as security companies and law firms, their titles and ranks were revoked,<sup>34</sup> they were almost immediately evicted from the staff housings and, in many cases, their passports and their spouses' passports were revoked. According to the most recent publicly available data, during the emergency state 234,419 passports were annulled, while 155,350 were given back once the emergency state ended,<sup>35</sup> leaving around 35% of passport annulment cases unresolved. In this way, the dismissed, publicly known by the name of 'KHKlular' or the 'emergency decreed'

<sup>29</sup> Venice Commission (n 26) 23.

<sup>30</sup> Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights, as amended) (ECHR).

<sup>31</sup> Venice Commission (n 26) 9.

<sup>32</sup> Yesil (n 27) 248.

<sup>33</sup> Venice Commission (n 26); *ibid* 324/262.

<sup>34</sup> Venice Commission (n 26) 31.

<sup>35</sup> Gazete Duvar, '155 bin pasaporttaki iptal şerhi kaldırıldı (155 passports were retrieved)' (Gazete Duvar, 25 July 2018) <[www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2018/07/25/155-bin-pasaporttaki-iptal-serhi-kaldirildi](http://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2018/07/25/155-bin-pasaporttaki-iptal-serhi-kaldirildi)> accessed 25 March 2022.

were condemned to civic death, in Özdemir’s words: ‘deprivation of citizen’s right to appeal tantamount to an internal exile without geographical expulsion or imprisonment’,<sup>36</sup>

The dismissals had a dire impact both on the independence of the judiciary, with 4,240 judges and prosecutors dismissed from their posts,<sup>37</sup> and knowledge production, with the dismissals of more than 6,000 academics.<sup>38</sup> Yet, the dismissals weren’t the single weapon in the repertoire intended for ‘annihilation of threat’ resulting in disintegration of the rule of law and curtailment of freedom of expression: out of 99,000 people that were held in detention for the alleged affiliation with the Gulenist organisation,<sup>39</sup> there were 1,684 judges and prosecutors, an action that was subsequently condemned by the ECtHR as a violation of liberty and security,<sup>40</sup> along with 150 media workers, journalists and editors among the detained,<sup>41</sup> 56 remaining in jail.<sup>42</sup> As of 2020, there were almost 30,000 people in jail for terror-related charges.<sup>43</sup>

## 2.1 THE CASE OF CADETS AND TRAINEE OFFICERS

What went under the radar of reports and media coverage, with just several exceptions, were the trials of cadets, 19-20-year-old students at the Air Force Academy that were participating in the summer training

<sup>36</sup> Seçkin Sertdemir Özdemir, ‘Civic death as a mechanism of retributive punishment: Academic purges in Turkey’ (2020) 23(2) Punishment and Society 147.

<sup>37</sup> OHCHR 2018 Report (n 20) 12.

<sup>38</sup> Özdemir (n 36) 146.

<sup>39</sup> Hukuki Haber, ‘Bakan Soylu, FETÖ ile mücadelenin bilançosunu açıkladı: 319 bin kişi gözaltı alındı (Minister Soylu revealed the balance: 319 people taken into custody)’ (Hukuki Haber, 22 November 2021) <[www.hukukihaber.net/siyaset/bakan-soylu-feto-ile-mucadelenin-bilançosunu-acikladi-319-bin-h444802.html](http://www.hukukihaber.net/siyaset/bakan-soylu-feto-ile-mucadelenin-bilançosunu-acikladi-319-bin-h444802.html)> accessed 30 March 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Stockholm Center for Freedom, ‘ECtHR condemns Turkey over post-coup arrests of judges and prosecutors’ (Stockholm Center for Freedom, 23 November 2021) <<https://stockholmcf.org/ecthr-condemns-turkey-over-post-coup-arrests-of-judges-and-prosecutors/>> accessed 5 April 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Bora Erdem, ‘US-Turkey Relations in the Light of Turkey’s Freedom of Press’ (2018) 16(30:110) Global Media Journal 1, 5 <[www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/usturkey-relations-in-the-light-of-turkeys-freedom-of-press.pdf](http://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/usturkey-relations-in-the-light-of-turkeys-freedom-of-press.pdf)> accessed 7 April 2022.

<sup>42</sup> MLSA, ‘Cezaevindeki Gazeteciler ve Medya Çalışanları (Jailed journalists and media workers)’ (Media and Law Studies Organisation -MLSA) <[www.mlsturkey.com/tr/cezaevindeki-gazeteciler-ve-medya-calisanlari/](http://www.mlsturkey.com/tr/cezaevindeki-gazeteciler-ve-medya-calisanlari/)> accessed 15 July 2022.

<sup>43</sup> bianet, ‘“Terör” iddiasıyla yargılama değil yaftalama (Trial on the account of terror is not a trial but labeling)’ (bianet, 25 November 2021) <[https://m.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/253889-teror-iddiasıyla-yargilama-degil-yaftalama#\\_ftn2](https://m.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/253889-teror-iddiasıyla-yargilama-degil-yaftalama#_ftn2)> accessed 7 April 2022.

camp in Yalova, a coastal city in the vicinity of Istanbul, and just scarcely older trainee officers, graduates from the academy who took part in the F16 jet training in the Akinci Airbase in Ankara. Still being considered students, both groups didn't have the authority to give orders and according to the statements of the cadets and trainee officers, their families, cadets' lawyer Özge Kartal and independent legal scholar Gökhan Güneş, there was no concrete evidence of their using any force or having an intention related to the coup attempt. They were accused under article 309 of the Turkish Penal Code of 'attempting to overthrow the constitutional order', the article known among the general public by the name 'the coup crime', and given life or aggravated life sentences. As Gökhan Güneş points out in his analysis of the 15 July trials, following the decision of the Cassation Court to render the coup attempt a single act, the principle of individuality was not abided, and all the members of the army present at the sites of clashes or sites of strategic significance were accused of the involvement in the coup – their individual acts notwithstanding.<sup>44</sup> Not only did they get punished most gravely – having to serve life sentences or aggravated life sentences – without necessarily committing a concrete act, but also without the immaterial substance of their act being proven, the mens rea, or the knowledge and intention of wrongdoing, as in the case of listening to orders and acting under threat.<sup>45</sup> There are five trials relating to the case of cadets, named by the districts/sites in Istanbul where they were taken to from the Yalova training camp: Digitürk, Orhanlı, Sultanbeyli, Bosphorus Bridge and Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge. In total 329 cadets were put on trial for 'attempting to overthrow the constitutional order' by presumably having taken part in the attempt to take under army's control a media outlet headquarters (Digitürk,<sup>46</sup> Sultanbeyli<sup>47</sup>), in the clashes with the police

<sup>44</sup> Gokhan Güneş, *Güncel Yargılamalar Işığında Anayasayı İhlal Suçu (The Crime of Violating the Constitution in the Light of Contemporary Trials)* (Roh Nordic AB 2022) 395/399.

<sup>45</sup> ibid 471.

<sup>46</sup> Anadolu Agency, 'TRT ve Digitürk'ü basan FETÖ'cülerin görüntüleri iddianamede (The images of Gulenists that occupied TRT and Digitürk in the indictment)' (*Anadolu Agency*, 23 January 2017) <[www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/trt-ve-digiturku-basan-fetoculerin-goruntuleri-iddianamede/733330](http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/trt-ve-digiturku-basan-fetoculerin-goruntuleri-iddianamede/733330)> accessed 8 April 2022.

<sup>47</sup> Anadolu Agency, 'Darbeci yüzbaşidan "polislerin kafalarına sıkın" talimatı' (Putschist commander gave the order "shoot at the policemen's heads") (*Anadolu Agency*, 23 July 2017) <[www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/darbeci-yuzbasidan-polislerin-kafalarina-sikin-talimati/847656](http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/darbeci-yuzbasidan-polislerin-kafalarina-sikin-talimati/847656)> accessed 8 April 2022.

forces (Sultanbeyli,<sup>48</sup> Orhanlı<sup>49</sup>), occupation or attempted occupation of the main bridges in order to control traffic and clashes with the citizens (Bosphorous<sup>50</sup> and Fatih Sultan Mehmet bridge). In Sultanbeyli and FSM case the cadets didn’t even reach their presumed destination, but they were stopped beforehand.<sup>51</sup> In all trials, apart from the FSM case where most of the cadets (52) were trialed in absentia while 18 of them were detained as of 2019/2020, the cadets spent two years in prison until the verdicts of Heavy Penal Courts were issued throughout 2018.<sup>52</sup> The process that followed, and that is still ongoing, involved appeals on the side of the prosecuted to the second-degree appellate court (İstinaf), which in every case confirmed the decision of the first-degree court, and following appeal to the Court of Cassation (Yargıtay). After the Court of Cassation overthrew the lower court verdict in the Dıgitürk case in 2021, 10 out of 37 cadets were released. The 27 cadets that are still in jail are currently appealing to the Court of Cassation for the second time, after the lower court once again gave them life/aggravated life sentences in March 2022. From the end of May, until the beginning of July 2022, the Court of the Cassation overthrew the verdict in Sultanbeyli and FSM cases, leading to the release of 66 out of 116, and all 18 incarcerated

<sup>48</sup> Anadolu Agency, ‘Darbeci yüzbaşidan “polislerin kafalarına sıkın” talimatı’ (n 47).

<sup>49</sup> Anadolu Agency, ‘“Orhanlı gişeleri” davasında 187 sanık hakim karşısında (187 face the judge in the Orhanlı trial)’ (*Anadolu Agency*, 6 November 2017) <[www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/orhanli-giseleri-davasinda-187-sanik-hakim-karsisinda/957654](http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/orhanli-giseleri-davasinda-187-sanik-hakim-karsisinda/957654)> accessed 8 April 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Anadolu Agency, ‘15 Temmuz Şehitler Köprüsü davası başladı (The 15 July Martyrs’ Bridge Trial has started)’ (*Anadolu Agency*, 9 October 2017) <[www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/15-temmuz-selitler-koprusu-davasi-basladi/930494](http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/15-temmuz-selitler-koprusu-davasi-basladi/930494)> accessed 8 April 2022.

<sup>51</sup> Muhammed Enes Can, ‘FETÖ davasında 70 askeri öğrenciye ağırlaştırılmış müebbet istemi ve tutuklama kararı (Demand for aggravated life sentence and decision of arrest for 70 cadets in Gulenist trial)’ (*Anadolu Agency*, 23 November 2019) <[www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/feto-davasinda-70-askeri-ogrenciye-agirlastirilmis-muebbet-istemi-ve-tutuklama-karari/1653402](http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/feto-davasinda-70-askeri-ogrenciye-agirlastirilmis-muebbet-istemi-ve-tutuklama-karari/1653402)> accessed 8 April 2022.

<sup>52</sup> Elif Unal, ‘Hava Harp Okulu Öğrencilerine Müebbet Hapis (Life sentence for the students of Airforce Academy)’ (*Bianet*, 19 May 2018) <<https://bianet.org/bianet/hukuk/197310-hava-harp-okulu-ogrencilerine-muebbet-hapis>> accessed 8 April 2022; Mustafa Hatipoğlu and Melike Gallenkuş, ‘FETÖ’nün Sultanbeyli’deki darbe girişimi davasında 119 müebbet (119 sentenced for life in Gulenist Sultanbeyli Trial)’ (*Anadolu Agency*, 25 May 2018) <[www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/fetonun-sultanbeylideki-darbe-girisimi-davasinda-119-muebbet/1156504](http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/fetonun-sultanbeylideki-darbe-girisimi-davasinda-119-muebbet/1156504)> accessed 8 April 2022; Elif Unal, ‘15 Temmuz Köprü Davasında Karar Açıklandı (Decision in the 15 July bridge case)’ (*Bianet*, 13 July 2018) <<https://m.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/199125-15-temmuz-kopru-davasinda-karar-aciklandi>> accessed 8 April 2022; TRT Haber, ‘TRT ile Dıgitürk’ün işgali davası ekim ayına ertelendi (The trial for the occupation of TRT and Dıgitürk was postponed for October)’ (*TRT Haber*, 9 July 2021) <[www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/trt-ile-digiturkun-igali-davasi-ekim-ayina-ertelendi-594472.html](http://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/trt-ile-digiturkun-igali-davasi-ekim-ayina-ertelendi-594472.html)> accessed 8 April 2022.

cadets respectively.<sup>53</sup> The trial of the 50 cadets that are still imprisoned in relation to the Sultanbeyli case continues in the first-degree court. In the case of the Bosphorus bridge, four out of 44 accused were released in the first instance. Both in the Bosphorus Bridge case and Orhanli case, the decision of the Court of Cassation still hasn't been proclaimed, leaving all cadets imprisoned, 44 and 58 respectively. At the moment of writing 180 cadets are still imprisoned.<sup>54</sup> Among the five listed cases of the military trainees the Bosphorus bridge case was the most prominent as it became the central symbol of the official account of 15 July. According to the main and most publicly vocal lawyer on the cadets' case, Özge Kartal, the largest issue that awaits the defence in the future is the symbolic value of the case. The Court of Cassation's decision in the FSM and Sultanbeyli cases should legally represent a landmark case, yet, because of the 'political' quality of the trials, she expresses her fear regarding the future of other cases. The case that can be compared to the Bosphorus case in its symbolic value is the Akinci Airbase case in which 79 trainee officers were sentenced to life or aggravated life sentences in November 2020.<sup>55</sup> Only at the beginning of June 2022 did the second-degree appellate court affirm the verdict, and now the case is waiting to be reviewed by the Court of Cassation.<sup>56</sup> The prominence of this case is related to the Akinci Airbase being considered as one of the headquarters from which the coup was directed by the Gulenist organisation<sup>57</sup> and from where the fighter jets took off to bomb prominent governmental sites.<sup>58</sup> The trainee officers were accused of taking part in the actions that allegedly allowed for the bombardment, those actions being keeping watch, taking part in 'preparatory meetings' and such.<sup>59</sup> During their almost seven years long imprisonment, the

<sup>53</sup> Bianet, "FSM Davası"nda yargılanan tüm askeri öğrenciler tahliye edildi (All the cadets trialed in the FSM case released)' (Bianet, 6 July 2022) <<https://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/264182-fsm-davasi-nda-yargilanan-tum-askeri-ogrenciler-tahliye-edildi>> accessed 6 July 2022.

<sup>54</sup> All the numbers are provided in accordance with cadets' lawyer Özge Kartal's interview.

<sup>55</sup> Zafer Kırış, 'Adaletin tecelli edeceğine inanmıştık (We believed that justice would appear)' (*Gazete Duvar*, 8 October 2021) <[www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/adaletin-tecelli-edeceğine-inanmıştik-haber-1537744](http://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/adaletin-tecelli-edeceğine-inanmıştik-haber-1537744)> accessed 10 April 2022.

<sup>56</sup> Serdar Açıl and Cemil Murat Budak, 'Akinci Üssü darbe girişimi davası istinaf mahkemesinden geçti (The Appellate court confirmed the decision in Akinci Üssü case)' (*Anadolu Ajansı*, 3 June 2022) <[www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/akinci-ussu-darbe-girisimi-davasi-istinaf-mahkemesinden-gecti/2604799](http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/akinci-ussu-darbe-girisimi-davasi-istinaf-mahkemesinden-gecti/2604799)> accessed 3 June 2021

<sup>57</sup> Hayri Çetinkuş and Barış Kılıç, *15 Temmuz Darbe Yargılamaları* (Anadolu Agency 2020) 33.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid* 36.

<sup>59</sup> Akinci Airbase Indictment 2963/1728.

cadets and trainee officers were purged from the military, making them a part of the group of the KHKli, or the 'emergency decreed', they lost their right to study, as the online programme was not allowed and were exposed to the dire conditions in the prison, including torture.



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3.

THEORY

Our identity is formed through belonging to a certain group – from the smallest unit of a family to political groups. One of the ways of identification with a certain group is through common memory, events that we either lived through or were told about in a form of a narrative.<sup>60</sup> As we are born into a nation-state we are necessarily impacted by the presumed identity of a nation we are supposed to belong to by birth. This identity relies on an exclusive vision of the national past, anchored in a specific event that serves as an explanation of the fixed character of the nation. This is what Aleida Assmann calls 'political memory', 'history viewed through the eyes of identity',<sup>61</sup> centred around a mythical narrative, a simplified version of events that has motivational, rather than factual value: it tells us how we became what we are, and how our future should look like. The way in which political memory is going to be narrated depends on the 'social frame of remembrance',<sup>62</sup> or in Laclau and Mouffe's terms the hegemonic discourse that will define the contours of political identity as a member of the nation, a subject position we are ought to identify with. Thus the subject position

<sup>60</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Duga senka prošlosti (The Long Shadow of the Past)* (XX Vek 2011) 19/23.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid* 44.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid* 201.

presents a frame of interpretation of remembering and belonging or the answer to the question of what it means to be a member of the nation and how should one remember their common past as an anchor to one's identity. Likewise, it will provide us with the framework of understanding the 'other' – in relation to whom we constitute our identity, or in Mouffe's words the 'constitutive outside'.<sup>63</sup> Each discourse is historically grounded – it contains the traces of previous articulations, and its success in the terms of gaining hegemonic status will depend on its reliance on already rooted, sedimented discourses.<sup>64</sup> Thus a discourse of a certain political movement or a party will already have available mechanisms of remembrance they can rely on. According to Aleida Assmann, up until the period following the holocaust, the heroic discourse dominated the Western discursive field and provided a framework for remembrance. In her view, heroic discourse is based on identifying the nation (viewed as a homogenous whole and thus relating to each one of its members) with two possible roles that can be both interpreted through the prism of heroism – the victor and the victim, also commonly known as a martyr.<sup>65</sup> She locates the 'organic crisis' of the hegemonic discourse in the period that followed the holocaust, calling it the ethical turn in remembrance, leading to the emergence of two new roles, two subject positions that are irreconcilable with the heroic discourse – that of the perpetrator and traumatised victim.<sup>66</sup> The main difference between the two discourses is in the conceptualisation of the victim – while in the first one the loss is transformed into a heroic triumph,<sup>67</sup> in the second one the victimhood cannot be transformed, it can only be affirmed.<sup>68</sup> As portrayed above, the two mechanisms of remembrance, the two once already available discourses contain the subject position, the stance one should take towards a certain event, and towards the other. Yet, the roles of the heroic victor and victim, or perpetrator and the traumatised victim will only present one layer

<sup>63</sup> Anna Marie Smith, Laclau and Mouffe: *The radical democratic imaginary* (Routledge 2003) 123, according to Chantal Mouffe, 'For a Politics of Nomadic Identity' in G Robertson and others (eds), *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (Routledge 1994) 107-10.

<sup>64</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (2nd edn, Verso 1985) 113.

<sup>65</sup> Assmann (n 60) 76-77, 88.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid* 143-44.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid* 79.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid* 89.

that constitutes a subject position – depending on a discourse, different aspects of our position in the larger society – ethnicity, class, gender – will come to the fore. What is more, the differentiation will not only matter of language, but of affect – the memory presents an effective way of conceiving the past,<sup>69</sup> and consequently, the political memory will not only present an input regarding what should we be as a member of the nation but how should we feel. According to Sara Ahmed, emotions are not something that resides in the objects – the nation is not naturally designated as the object of love and the source of fear and the reason for hatred does not reside in what is perceived as the 'other'. On the contrary, the emotions are both imbued in the objects, and they take part in their creation.<sup>70</sup> Within a certain discourse, the other presents 'constitutive outside' according to which we identify with a subject position, in this case of an ideal national, inasmuch that we align against it through fear and hatred.<sup>71</sup> In other words, both emotions directed towards the other simultaneously serve to bring a (national) community together.

All memories that cannot be integrated into the proposed discursive frame, and consequently in the national myth will be forgotten, sometimes even by the use of violence.<sup>72</sup> Thus a certain discourse, and the political memory it provides a frame for, has real-life consequences, not only in the sense of providing the legitimation for the ruling party but even more so, for the ones whose memory is destined to be forgotten, for the ones who are conceived as the 'enemy' in the national myth. The question that arises is what kind of impact will the disavowed memories have on the identity of people who possess them, and consequently how a person, expelled from the community they once belong to, can challenge the label imposed on them and reconstruct their lives.

<sup>69</sup> Assmann (n 60) 44.

<sup>70</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Kulturna politika emocija (The Cultural Politics of Emotions)* (Fraktura 2020) 21-22.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid* 25

<sup>72</sup> Assmann (n 60).

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4.

METHODOLOGY

In order to portray the political memory of the 15 July coup and its discursive framework on one hand, and the counter-memory that challenges the imposed framework and provides for a different one, the author collected the material concerning 15 July that is published by the sources close to the government (think tank SETA, mainstream media, president's speeches) and conducted interviews with family members, friends and supporters (lawyers, journalists, human rights activists) of the cadets and trainee officers that are serving life sentences for the alleged involvement in the coup. The interviews were conducted with eight people, and in some cases on multiple occasions (Ilker Kalin, Zafer Kıracı). In order to allow for unpredicted topics to be encompassed, the form of semi-structured interviews was chosen, where 'the ordering of questions is not strictly determined, the sequence of topics prone to change depending on the dynamics of conversation'.<sup>73</sup> The questions were devised in a way to elucidate how being designated as the 'enemy' impacted the concerned people's lives, what kind of impact did the discrepancy between the official memory and their memories have on their identity and how did they mobilise their memories in order to form a counter-hegemonic movement. The collocutors were chosen according

<sup>73</sup> Sanja Potkonjak, *Teren za etnologe početnike* (HED Biblioteka/FF Press 2014) 72.

to their prominence in the public sphere and contacted via social media or secondary contacts. Although the author intended to conduct interviews also with collocutors who decided to keep away from the public, such as families of cadets who lost their lives during the coup, and managed to contact them, they rejected to be interviewed because of concerns for their safety. All of the collocutors were informed about the goal, scope and context of the research asked in advance whether they consent to the interview being recorded, transcribed, translated and used for the purposes of the research, and given the transcript for a review, thus following the guidelines of American Anthropological Association on the ethics of research.<sup>74</sup> Apart from securing informed consent regarding the interviews, the author aimed to avoid a privileged epistemological position and to secure the consent of participants regarding their representation in the text, when applicable. Apart from the interviews that the author conducted on her own, she analysed subsidiary materials provided by the collocutors (Zafer Kıraç's unpublished interview with Ilker Kalın, interview with Melek Çetinkaya published by Politurco, a letter sent by Buğra Baldan, one of the incarcerated trainee officers, to Ilker Kalın) in order to include topics that were not discussed in the interviews. The collected materials and interviews were processed in dialogue with the outlined theory, or in other words coded, relating to the process of 'categorization of data and attaching names to it that serve to conceptually define it'.<sup>75</sup>

#### 4.1 PARTICIPANTS<sup>76</sup>

Melek Çetinkaya is one of the most known activists involved in the struggle for the release of cadets and trainee officers. At the end of 2018, after the verdict was passed in the Sultanbeyli case, her son Furkan, a former student of the Air Force Academy who was 19 years old at the time of the coup, was among the students given a life sentence for the 'attempt to overthrow the constitutional order', she started speaking

<sup>74</sup> American Anthropological Association, *Code of Ethics* (AAA 2009).

<sup>75</sup> Potkonjak (n 73) 82.

<sup>76</sup> The information about the participants is based on the conducted interviews, if not otherwise indicated.

publicly in the name of the cadets and advocating for her son's release.<sup>77</sup> Along with several other cadets' mothers, she organised a sit-in protest in September 2019 in Ankara that was violently disrupted by the police, and the mothers were taken into custody.<sup>78</sup> She continued her protest on a monthly basis, either alone or in cooperation with several supporters of the Yüksel protest movement (Yüksel Direnişi),<sup>79</sup> recognisable by her vest stating 'We want justice for the cadets' and a performance in which she gave away flowers and released birds from a cage. By the beginning of 2020, she has been already taken into custody more than five times, almost every time that she took to the streets.<sup>80</sup> On 19 January 2020 she organised the Justice March (Adalet Yürüyüşü), a protest march during which she planned to walk from Ankara to Silivri jail, yet it was violently disrupted by the police and she was once again taken into custody.<sup>81</sup> In July 2020, after making an appearance on Akit TV, where she mentioned the Minister of Defence, Hulusi Akar, and Prime Minister at the time of the coup, Binali Yıldırım, she was imprisoned for two months and trialed for 'praising the crime and the criminal'.<sup>82</sup> On two occasions the Minister of Defence Hulusi Akar filed a defamation suit against her. Nevertheless, she continued being active on Twitter and YouTube and making street protests.

<sup>77</sup> Selahattin Sevi, 'Melek Çetinkaya: "Dik duracağız anne, bize vatan haini diyenler düşünsün dedi oğlum"' (Melek Çetinkaya: "We will stand tall mother, let the ones calling us the traitors of the homeland think about it" my son said') (*Kronos* 35, 25 December 2018) <<https://kronos35.news/tr/dik-duracagiz-anne-bizi-vatan-hainligi-ile-yaftalayanlar-dusunsun/>> accessed 6 June 2022.

<sup>78</sup> Evrim Kepenek, 'Askeri Öğrencilerin Anneleri Her Çarşamba Oturma Eylemine Başlıyor (The mothers of cadets are starting with sit-in protests every Wednesday)' (*Bianet*, 29 September 2019) <<https://bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/213592-askeri-ogrencilerin-anneleri-her-carsamba-oturma-eylemine-basliyor>> accessed 6 June 2022.

<sup>79</sup> Protest movement for the reinstatement of the officials that lost jobs through emergency decrees (KHKlı or Emergency Decreed), named by the Yüksel street in Ankara where the protests took place. *ArtıGerçek* Gazette, 'Birinci yılında Yüksel Direnişi (One Year Of Yüksel Resistance)' (*ArtıGerçek* Gazette, 10 November 2017) <<https://artigercek.com/haberler/ihd-yuksel-direnisi-raporunu-acikladi>> accessed 7 June 2022.

<sup>80</sup> Askeri Öğr Komitesi, 'Askeri öğrenci annesi Melek Çetinkaya... (A cadets mother...)' (*Twitter*, 7 December 2019) <[https://twitter.com/search?q=%22Melek%20%C3%87etinkaya%22%20\(from%3AAskeriogrenci16\)&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=%22Melek%20%C3%87etinkaya%22%20(from%3AAskeriogrenci16)&src=typed_query)> accessed 7 June 2022.

<sup>81</sup> *Kronos* 35, 'Harbiyeli annesi Melek Çetinkaya 'Adalet Yürüyüşü'nü sonlandırdı (Cadet's mother Melek Çetinkaya finished her Justice March)' (*Kronos* 35, 25 January 2020) <<https://kronos35.news/tr/harbiyeli-annesi-melek-cetinkaya-adalet-yuruyusunu-sonlandirdi/>> accessed 7 June 2022.

<sup>82</sup> *Kronos* 35, 'Melek Çetinkaya'ya 2 ay hapis yattığı davadan beraat (Melek Çetinkaya acquitted after spending two months in jail)' (*Kronos* 35, 8 February 2022) <<https://kronos35.news/tr/tutuklu-askeri-ogrenci-annesi-melek-cetinkayaya-2-ay-hapis-yattigi-davadan-beraat/>> accessed 7 June 2022.



Ilker Kalin, a political scientist and independent researcher focusing on human rights issues in the context of conflict, political violence and state repression, is the main organiser of the protest movement centred around the trainee officers that were convicted in the Akıncı Airbase case. After graduating from the Military Academy in 2013, he pursued a PhD in political science at Wayne State University in the United States, as a scholarship student of the Turkish Armed Forces. After the coup, the scholarships of all the students financed by the army were revoked, and they were ordered to return to their country. While many of the students stayed in the United States due to concerns for their safety, Ilker decided to return in order to provide support to his family and his brother Alper who was among the trainee officers accused in the Akıncı Airbase case. Upon his return, he was assigned to a non-academic military position where he worked for one year until his suspension due to an accusation of membership in the Gulenist Terrorist Organisation. He was taken into custody that lasted for ten days without knowing what he was charged for and subsequently put on trial that lasted for five years. Apart from being suspended, his passport was confiscated. Although he was finally acquitted, he was purged from the army in 2021 and his passport was not returned for reasons that were not disclosed to him by the authorities until this day. Although the connection between his accusation and his brother's case was not explicitly stated in the trial, the Ministry of Defense used it as an argument to support their decision of his expulsion from the army. Due to his efforts to render this case publicly known, the story of the convicted officers has reached international media outlets, namely the London *Times* and *New York Times*. He created a network of families of incarcerated trainee officers and cadets, aiming to unify them in a single platform, and formed ties both with political representatives from the oppositional parties and independent organisations. As of mid-April 2022, he has been organising protests of cadets trainee officers' families in Ankara on a weekly basis.

Kezban and Ali Kalın, Ilker and Alper's parents, supported Ilker every step of the way and took an active role in the struggle for the release of cadets and trainee officers. They gave interviews for media outlets, became active on social media, took part in the meetings with the oppositional political representatives and played a key role in the protests.

Yunus Gümüşşoy is Ilker's former classmate and a close family friend of the Kalın family. After the coup, he was purged from the Turkish

Armed Forces for the alleged involvement in the Gulenist organisation, despite his voluntary service in the east of the country, near the war zones. He has been involved in the struggle for Alper's and other trainee officers' release since the very start, using his editing and filming skills to support the protests.

Özge Kartal is the most publicly outspoken lawyer working on the cadet's cases. She decided to get involved in the cases because one of her distant relatives was among the accused. Nonetheless, motivated by the belief in their innocence, she is now simultaneously involved in all the five cases in which the cadets are trialed.

Büşra Taşkıran is a lawyer and human rights activist who entered the field of journalism out of a wish to acquaint the broader audience with the case of incarcerated cadets and trainee officers. Her Mother's Day reportage with Melek Çetinkaya and other cadets' mothers presented one of the breakthroughs for raising public awareness concerning their story. She lost her job as a judge apprentice through an emergency decree due to alleged connections to the Gulenist organisation and she spent eight months in jail for 'spreading Gulenist propaganda' after she followed the Akinci Airbase case and posted about it on social media. Since she got released, she has been involved in the organisation of panel talks in which the cadets' families took part, actively engaged in the work of KHK platforms, organisations for the rights of those who were purged through emergency decrees and she followed the case of incarcerated cadets as a journalist.

Zafer Kıraç is a journalist for the independent media outlet Duvar, a film director and a prominent human rights advocate in the field of the rights of prisoners, children's rights and the hospitalised in mental institutions. In his 30-year long career as a human rights advocate he founded and presided over several well-known non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as CIIST (The Civil Society in the Penal System Association) and RUHISAK (Human Rights in Mental Health Initiative Association), and cooperated on projects regarding mental health, rights of prisoners and restorative justice with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the European Commission. He authored a feature documentary DEPO-Life in Mental Hospitals that takes into focus the life of the hospitalised in mental institutions in Turkey.



5.

THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW TURKEY:  
THE MYTH OF 15 JULY

In order to understand in which way 15 July is interpreted within the political memory put forth by the incumbent Justice and Development Party (JDP) it is necessary to delineate its framework – the discourse of the new Turkey. This discourse, resemblant to the discourse of JDP's intellectual and political predecessor, the National Outlook movement (Milli Görüş),<sup>83</sup> can be traced to 2010,<sup>84</sup> the period right before the parliamentary elections in 2011 that secured JDP the electoral hegemony and marked the turn from liberal, pro-European orientation towards a more religious one, with anti-Western undertones.<sup>85</sup> The key signifier of the discourse of the new Turkey is democracy, disarticulated from the principles of secularism/laicism and statism, two of the six arrows – principles of Kemalism, the foundational discourse of the Republic named after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk – and rearticulated with religion so as to form 'conservative democracy'. Within the Kemalist discourse, the principle of secularism/laicism is closely associated with the programme

<sup>83</sup> Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* (CUP 2009) 49 (Secularism).

<sup>84</sup> Nikos Christofis, 'The AKP's "Yeni Türkiye": Challenging the Kemalist Narrative?' (2018) 29(3) *Mediterranean Quarterly* 11, 18.

<sup>85</sup> Tony Alaranta, *National and State Identity in Turkey: The Transformation of the Republic's Status in the International System* (Rowman and Littlefield 2015) 99; Tony Alaranta, 'Confrontational Civilizational Identity in the Making? The New Turkey and the West' in Marko Lehti, Henna-Riikka Pennanen and Jukka Jouhki (eds), *Contestations of Liberal Order: The West in Crisis?* (Palgrave Macmillan 2020) 275-76.

of modernisation, leading to the prominent, yet historically contingent view of Islam and its symbols as the sign of backwardness,<sup>86</sup> while the principle of statism posits the state as the leader in modernisation.<sup>87</sup> However prominent, this interpretation hasn't been left unquestioned and unchanged throughout almost a century of Kemalist hegemony, presenting a target of critique from within the Kemalist camp,<sup>88</sup> while Kemalist politics towards Islam have been at worst ambivalent, aimed at control (and at times mobilisation), rather than complete suppression of the religious discourse.<sup>89</sup> Within the discourse of the new Turkey, all historical versions of Kemalism are reduced to a single meaning, the signifier of democracy serving to posit the Kemalist discourse and the people identifying with it as oppressors of the Turkish nation viewed through the lens of religion.<sup>90</sup> What follows from this discourse is the simplified version of the history of the Republic, divided into two periods – the period of the oppression of the Muslim population by the secularist elites that propagate the discourse of the founder of the Republic in its most extreme form, and the period of steady progress towards democracy seen as the 'return of the oppressed',<sup>91</sup> that starts with the rise of the ruling party and culminates in the 15 July coup attempt. Within this view, the military is seen as the core institution of repressive secularism that suppresses the voices of the Muslim or conservative population through the continuous 'culture' of military coups<sup>92</sup> – in 1960, 1971, 1980, 1997 – and finally in 2016.<sup>93</sup> Throughout that period the identity of Kemalists and their prime institution remains unchanged – they are the enemies of the people to be saved by the ones who represent their voice. The ruling party is seen as the protector of democracy that stands in the opposition

<sup>86</sup> Türkayya Ataöv, 'The Principles of Kemalism' (1980) 20 *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* 19, 33.

<sup>87</sup> Nur Betül Çelik, 'The constitution and dissolution of the Kemalist imaginary' in David Horwath, Aletta J Norval and Yannis Stavrakakis (eds), *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, hegemonies and social change* (Manchester UP 2000) 195 (Kemalist imaginary).

<sup>88</sup> Tony Alaranta, *Contemporary Kemalism: From Universal Secular Humanism to Extreme Turkish Nationalism* (Routledge 2014) 41 (Contemporary Kemalism).

<sup>89</sup> Betül Çelik (n 87) 200 'Kemalist imaginary'.

<sup>90</sup> Alaranta, *National and State Identity in Turkey* (n 85) 112.

<sup>91</sup> Justice and Development Party, 'Özgürlüğün önünü açtık (We paved the way for freedom)' (*Justice and Development Party*, 16 July 2014) <[www.akparti.org.tr/haberler/ozgurlugun-onunu-actik/](http://www.akparti.org.tr/haberler/ozgurlugun-onunu-actik/)> accessed 1 May 2022.

<sup>92</sup> Alaranta, *Contemporary Kemalism* (n 88) 46.

<sup>93</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 'Milletle Hitap (Address to the nation)' (*The Presidency of the Republic of Turkey*, 19 July 2016) <[www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/47677/millete-hitap](http://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/47677/millete-hitap)> accessed 1 May 2022.

to military rule.<sup>94</sup> Thus the events that threaten their rule, such as the 2007 military memorandum that attacked the JDP on the account of their mobilisation of religion for political use and almost resulted in the denial of the presidency to the AKP presidential candidate, only serve to reinforce the portrayal of the party and their leader not only as the representatives of the people that have historically suffered but as their equals in pain.<sup>95</sup> On the other hand, concrete steps are taken so as to enact control over the symbolic and practical power of the military, one of the prime examples being the longest trials in Turkish history, the Ergenekon and Balyoz (sledgehammer) trials for the alleged involvement of the part of the military and their civilian fraction in the conspiracy (sic!) to downturn the ruling party that lasted from 2007 until 2019 and 2010 until 2015 respectively. While the trials were later dismissed as part of the Gulenist plot, they marked the lives of thousands of people, and according to Waldman and Çalışkan, represented the end of the relative political independence of the military.<sup>96</sup>

The introduction of the notion of Gulenists into the discourse of the new Turkey, first by the name of 'Parallel Organisation', started after the 2013 corruption scandal connected to the governing party<sup>97</sup> that was perceived by the majority of non-aligned scholars as a breakdown in the close relationship between Mr Gulen and the ruling party that started cracking since the 2010 Mavi Flotilla incident.<sup>98</sup> Yet it reached its peak on the night of 15 July and the following period when the Gulenists, now known by the name of FETO (Fetullahçı Terör Örgütü) – the Gulenist Terrorist Organisation – are accused as the organisers of the coup. The paradoxical relation between the Gulenists, deemed an extremist religious sect – and the Kemalists, extreme in their application of the principle of secularism/laicism– is established through the notion of the outer enemy the West, thus rendering them partners in crime, the betrayal of the

<sup>94</sup> Alaranta, *Contemporary Kemalism* (n 88) 44.

<sup>95</sup> Baris Gundogan, 'Türk demokrasisinin askeri müdahalelere karşı duruşunda kırılma noktası: 27 Nisan e-muhtırası (The turning point for the struggle of Turkish democracy against military interventions: 27 April e-memorandum)' (*Anadolu Ajansı*, 27 April 2021) <[www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/turk-demokrasisinin-askeri-mudahalelere-karsi-durusunda-kirilma-noktasi-27-nisan-e-muhtirasi/2221945](http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/turk-demokrasisinin-askeri-mudahalelere-karsi-durusunda-kirilma-noktasi-27-nisan-e-muhtirasi/2221945)> accessed 1 May 2022.

<sup>96</sup> Simon A Waldman and Emre Çalışkan, *The New Turkey and its Discontents* (OUP 2017) 32-37.

<sup>97</sup> Yeni Şafak, 'Paralel ihanet böyle başladı (The betrayal of the parallel state started like this)' (*Yeni Şafak*, 17 December 2017) <[www.yenisafak.com/yazidizileri/paralel-ihanet-boyle-basladi-2048159](http://www.yenisafak.com/yazidizileri/paralel-ihanet-boyle-basladi-2048159)> accessed 24 May 2022.

<sup>98</sup> Yavuz (n 83) 'Secularism' 24; Alaranta, 'The New Turkey and the West' (n 85) 274.

Turkish state and national identity, or in the words of the ruling party, the principles of ‘local and national’.<sup>99</sup>

The 15 July coup, as portrayed in the official memory moulded by the discourse of the new Turkey, is seen as the birth, the *Ursprung* of the new era in history, to be remembered both as a final victory in the anti-colonial fight against the outer enemy and its inner collaborators<sup>100</sup> and as the end of the long history of military tutelage and the final victory of democracy.<sup>101</sup> It is portrayed through a mythical narrative whose informative purpose is secondary to its symbolic worth – the events and sites in the coup are selected to become symbols that prove the character of the main actors, whose identity is one-dimensional, viewed through the lens that disambiguates only between good and evil. On one side there are ‘the people’, ‘the nation’, seen both as victims of the violence and heroic defenders of the homeland and on the other the perpetrators of the coup – the violent ‘putschists’. Prime actions that present the visualisation of the violence committed by the putschists are the tanks opening fire and running over civilians and bombardments of governmental buildings, including the Parliament. Those actions are connected to the prime symbolic sites – the Bosphorous bridge in Istanbul, later renamed the Bridge of the Martyrs of 15 July, and Akıncı Air Base in Ankara from which the combat aircrafts rose. The Bosphorous bridge is emblematic in a sense that provides for the visualisation of a supposedly clear line between the civilians on the one side and the putschists on the other, the good and the bad, while the Akıncı Airbase serves as a visualisation of disproportionate force inflicted on civilians, drawing the line between the perpetrators and the victims.<sup>102</sup> The putschists equalled to the followers of Fetullah Gülen are portrayed as members of a hierarchically organised terrorist organisation with underlying

<sup>99</sup> Helena Vodopija, ‘15th July Coup as Anti-colonial Fantasy: Between Memory and Forgetting’ (Masters Thesis, University of Zagreb, 2020) 39.

<sup>100</sup> Fahrettin Altun, ‘Geleceğiniz Varsa Göreceğiniz De Var (Don’t you dare)’ in Burhanettin Duran and Fahrettin Altun (eds), *15 Temmuz: Millet’in Zaferi (15 July: The Victory of the Nation)* (SETA 2018) 126.

<sup>101</sup> Burhaneddin Duran, ‘15 Temmuz’da Yepyeni Bir Süreç Başladı (A new process has started with 15th July)’ in Burhanettin Duran and Fahrettin Altun (eds), *15 Temmuz: Millet’in Zaferi (15 July: The Victory of the Nation)* (SETA 2018) 63.

<sup>102</sup> Fahrettin Altun, ‘15 Temmuz Kıyamı (15th July Coup)’ in Burhanettin Duran and Fahrettin Altun (eds), *15 Temmuz: Millet’in Zaferi (15 July: The Victory of the Nation)* (SETA 2018) 14.

extreme Islamist convictions,<sup>103</sup> mirroring the textbook example from the war on terror manual, such as Al-Qaida.<sup>104</sup>

The people who took to the streets on the night of the coup following the midnight call from the president, as well as those who stayed on the streets for the following days to ensure peace and order, in the action called Democracy Watches, are seen as the genuine representatives of the Turkish nation. The vision of the ideal citizen is militarised – they are viewed as the warriors that stood against the enemy to protect the nation,<sup>105</sup> resembling the classic portrayal of the soldier. Yet the difference is that they are civilians who stood against the military, but not any civilians – but the ones who believe in the party's vision of democracy and the dyad national-traitor. The reversal of the roles between the civilians and the military, yet the retainment of the militarised view, is not only symbolic but it is transferred in the law granting the families of the veterans and the ones who died in the fight the same status and privileges as the families of soldiers who died in government-controlled military actions. The civilians who passed away are granted the highest symbolic status in the national pantheon – that of the *martyrs* that died protecting their homeland and are hailed as heroes.<sup>106</sup> In the same vein, the violence of the ones responsible for the death of the soldiers, in some cases amounting to inhumane torture and murder, is legitimised through the amnesty for everyone that 'acted to protect their homeland', being government officials or civilians notwithstanding.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, the soldiers that were murdered at the hand of civilians are deprived of their membership in the national and religious community even after their deaths – the Ministry of Faith prohibits the religious rites to be performed for the 'traitors' and their families are prevented

<sup>103</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, '15. Temmuz Sonrası İçin Yol Haritası (The roadmap after 15th July)' in Burhanettin Duran and Fahrettin Altun (eds), *15 Temmuz: Millet'in Zaferi (15 July: The Victory of the Nation)* (SETA 2018) 35-36/45.

<sup>104</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, '15. Temmuz Sonrası İçin Yol Haritası (The roadmap after 15th July)' in Burhanettin Duran and Fahrettin Altun (eds), *15 Temmuz: Millet'in Zaferi (15 July: The Victory of the Nation)* (SETA 2018) 35-36/45.

<sup>105</sup> Fahrettin Altun, 'Biz Burada Vatan Savunmasındayız (We are here to save our homeland)' in Burhanettin Duran and Fahrettin Altun (eds), *15 Temmuz: Millet'in Zaferi (15 July: The Victory of the Nation)* (SETA 2018) 46.

<sup>106</sup> Pinar Melis Yelsali Parmaksız, 'The Transformation of Citizenship before and after 15th July Coup Attempt' in Nikos Christofis (ed), *Erdogan's New Turkey* (Routledge 2019) 119-20.

<sup>107</sup> Article 37 of Decree No 668 of 25 July 2016; Article 122 of Decree No 696 of 24 December 2017.



from burying them in the official sites.<sup>108</sup> The relation between the civilians and the military is symbolically and formally sealed, rendering the principle of obedience crucial for the ideal national subject position, yet the obedience to the now known hierarchy – with the ruling party and its leader on the very top. As it can be seen from the differentiation between the Gulenists and the institution of the Turkish Armed Forces, enacted through the reiteration of phrases such as ‘terrorist cells *within* the military’,<sup>109</sup> ‘*infiltration* in the military’<sup>110</sup> and ‘*terrorists* in military attire’,<sup>111</sup> it can be affirmed that the military still retains its symbolic value, yet it is the civilians who have the upper hand.

When it comes to the diversification of the subject position of the ideal national, in the official memory of the 15 July coup the groups that have potentially dissident identities and/or are seen as crucial to the discourse of the new Turkey are deliberately listed – the women and the Kurds.<sup>112</sup> The red trait that serves as their connection and the tool for limitation of their subject position to that of the desirable one is the shared memory of the 15 July coup that is equal to the official version. The women are portrayed as resembling the character of Nene, the female hero that fought in the Russo-Turkish war, and is represented with the child in one and the gun in another hand. In the mainstream media accounts of women martyrs their role in the family – as a wife, a fiancée, a mother – are simultaneously brought up along with the accounts of their heroism.<sup>113</sup> The vision of the woman within the myth of 15 July echoes the subject position given to the woman within the discourse of the new Turkey – in the words of Yuval Davis, that of the site of the social and cultural reproduction of the nation.<sup>114</sup> She embodies the ideal

<sup>108</sup> MansetIzmir, ‘Cehennem kadar yolunuz var! FETÖ’cü darbecilere sela okunmayacak, cenaze namazı kılınmayacak (You should go straight to hell: sela won’t be recited and the funeral prayers won’t be performed for the Gulenist putchists)’ (*MansetIzmir*, 19 July 2016)

<sup>109</sup> Altun, ‘Biz Burada Vatan Savunmasındayız’ (n 105) 45.

<sup>110</sup> Serdar Gülener, ‘Demokrasi Nöbetlerin Halet-i Ruhiyesi (The atmosphere of the Democracy Watches)’ in Burhanettin Duran and Fahrettin Altun (eds), *15 Temmuz: Millettin Zaferi (15 July: The Victory of the Nation)* (SETA 2018) 42.

<sup>111</sup> Sadık Ünay, ‘Siyaset ve Millet Gibi Ekonomi de direndi (Economy also showed resistance as politics and nation did)’ in Burhanettin Duran and Fahrettin Altun (eds), *15 Temmuz: Millettin Zaferi (15 July: The Victory of the Nation)* (SETA 2018) 57.

<sup>112</sup> Nebi Miş and others, *Demokrasi Nöbetleri: Toplumsal Algıda 15 Temmuz Darbe Girişimi* (SETA 2016).

<sup>113</sup> Akşam, ‘15 Temmuz direnişinin Nene Hatunları (The Nenes of 15th July resistance)’ (*Akşam*, 15 July 2017) <[www.aksam.com.tr/guncel/15-temmuz-direnisinin-nene-hatunlari-c2-c2/haber-642877](http://www.aksam.com.tr/guncel/15-temmuz-direnisinin-nene-hatunlari-c2-c2/haber-642877)> accessed 1 June 2022.

<sup>114</sup> Nira Yuval Davis, *Rod i nacija (Gender and Nation)* (Ženska Infoteka 2004) 64.

of the mother who sacrifices herself for her children and their future equalled to the future of the nation, while she is simultaneously modest and pious.<sup>115</sup> This portrait is represented in one of the most widely circulated photographs from the night of the coup – that of the woman completely covered in a black burka, her face not being seen, only the Turkish flag that she carries on her back.<sup>116</sup> The role of the women as the mother of future soldiers, what Cynthia Enloe calls 'militarized motherhood',<sup>117</sup> comes to the fore in the interviews with the mothers of the martyrs conducted and circulated by the mainstream media after the coup. In this sense the statement of one of the mothers, Sevgi Yeşilyurt, is emblematic: 'The pain of the lost child can never be forgotten, but to lose one child for the homeland is not much'.<sup>118</sup> In this way, two main faces of the ideal citizen come to the fore – the civilian soldier, protector of the homeland and the mother of soldiers, that is ready to fight on their side if necessary. They are both guardians of 'national and local' values, belief – in God, nation and the party, sacrifice – of their lives and their children's lives, and modesty – of attire and actions.

Although within the discourse of the new Turkey the military is viewed mainly in the negative light of a series of military coups, militarism still perdures in the formation of subject positions. If we take into account Altınay's claim that the military has presented an essential part of Turkish nationalism since the 1930s as a gendered discourse<sup>119</sup> that has been naturalised as a cultural institution,<sup>120</sup> it can be claimed

<sup>115</sup> Nur Sinem Kourou, 'Sağ Popülizm ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Karşıtı Hareketlerin Birlikteğinde AKP Hükümetlerinin Aile Siyaseti ve Popülist Siyasal Mobilizasyonu' (2020) 2(2) Feminist Tahayyül 207; TRT Haber, 'Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'dan Anneler Günü mesajı (The Mothers Day Message from the President Erdoğan)' (TRT Haber, 8 May 2022) <<https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-anneler-gunu-mesaji-678632.html>> accessed 1 June 2022.

<sup>116</sup> Access the picture at Milliyet, '15 Temmuz fotoğrafları ve görselleri! En güzel Türk bayrağı resimleri ve fotoğrafları (July 15 photos and images! The most beautiful Turkish flag pictures and photos)' (Milliyet, 15 July 2020) <[www.milliyet.com.tr/galeri/15-temmuz-fotograf-lari-ve-gorselleri-en-guzel-turk-bayragi-resimleri-ve-fotograf-lari-6259931](http://www.milliyet.com.tr/galeri/15-temmuz-fotograf-lari-ve-gorselleri-en-guzel-turk-bayragi-resimleri-ve-fotograf-lari-6259931)> accessed 1 June 2022

<sup>117</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (University of California Press 2000) 248.

<sup>118</sup> Mustafa Çavuş, '15 Temmuz şehidinin annesi, hüznü ve gururu bir arada yaşıyor (The mother of 15th July martyr experiences both sadness and pride)' (Anadolu Agency, 14 July 2021) <[www.aa.com.tr/tr/yasam/15-temmuz-schidinin-annesi-huznu-ve-gururu-bir-arada-yasiyor/2303948](http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/yasam/15-temmuz-schidinin-annesi-huznu-ve-gururu-bir-arada-yasiyor/2303948)> accessed 1 June 2022.

<sup>119</sup> Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth of the Military Nation: Militarism, Gender and Education in Turkey* (Palgrave Macmillan 2004) 3.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid* 25.

that the discourse of the new Turkey heavily relies on the Kemalist conception of the nation and its relation to the military.

The overflow of people on the streets and their fight against the putschists are seen as a visualisation of the will of the people who present the constituents of the nation (*milli irade*). Their answer to the call of the president to stand up to the putschists is not seen as the act of (blind) obedience, such as the actions of the alleged Gulenists, but as proof of the congruence between the president's actions and people's will.<sup>121</sup> The sovereignty of the people is thus not mediated but mirrored – the party and its leader become the mirror image of the people. Siding with the people and positioning themselves against the oppressive institutions of the state even throughout their rule, now the JDP becomes the state, the embodiment of the new order in which the state finally represents the will of the people. Thus the actions of the state cannot be questioned, as consequently, the will of the nation would be put at stake. It can be observed that employing civil society as a site of legitimisation mirrors the strategy of both secularist/Kemalist and Islamist camps throughout the 1990s as portrayed by Yael Navaro Yashin. It presents the enforcement of statism – viewed not only in narrow terms of economic interventionism or the state's leadership role in the process of modernisation but as a belief in the sacredness and eternal quality of the nation-state<sup>122</sup> – through provoking and including agency from below.<sup>123</sup> In the words of Navaro Yashin: 'civil society was transformed in the symbolic ground on which legitimate state power is going to be based', leading to the blurring of the lines between the civilian agency and state power.<sup>124</sup>

The state, now equalled with the people's will through the ruling party serving as the messenger, is seen as the protector of the peace, democratic order and guarantee of human rights, as opposed to the

<sup>121</sup> İsmail Çağlar, '15 Temmuz kalkışması: Paralel Örgüt Kurucu Millete Karşı (The 15 July Uprising against the constitutive nation)' in Burhanettin Duran and Fahrettin Altun (eds), *15 Temmuz: Millet'in Zaferi (15 July: The Victory of the Nation)* (SETA 2018) 54.

<sup>122</sup> Yael Navaro Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey* (Princeton UP 2002) 185.

<sup>123</sup> *ibid* 153.

<sup>124</sup> *ibid*.

chaos and violence perpetrated by the terrorists/putschists.<sup>125</sup> By defining the state as the protector of human rights of citizens against the 'threat' that is to be annihilated, also the subject, the 'human' in human rights, the 'citizen' to which those rights belong is defined. Only those who fought against the oppressor on the night of the coup or share the same memory of the coup are regarded as the national citizens whose protection is to be preserved by the state, while the others are denied this protection. As the 15 July is portrayed as the ultimate victory of historical justice against the years of oppression, the ideal nationals are viewed as its sole embodiment, either to be hailed as its bearers or as the ones who finally brought about the just order or to be revenged. In the words of the president, '[t]he justice that we seek is the blood of 250 of our martyrs'.<sup>126</sup> Thus the meaning of justice is fixed as the site of struggle defined in clear terms – the struggle that was won against the historical enemy on the night of the coup, but to be continued until the final eradication of the Gulenists hidden in every pore of the society. As such it cannot be questioned – as it would question the core premise of the newly established order – it's being morally just.

<sup>125</sup> Anadolu Agency, 'Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: 3 ay süreyle olağanüstü hal ilan edilmesi kararlaştırıldı (President Erdoğan: It was decided to proclaim the emergency state in duration of 3 months)' (*Anadolu Agency*, 20 July 2016) <[www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/cumhurbaşkanı-erdogan-3-ay-sureyle-olaganustu-hal-ilan-edilmesi-kararlaştirildi/612361](http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/cumhurbaşkanı-erdogan-3-ay-sureyle-olaganustu-hal-ilan-edilmesi-kararlaştirildi/612361)> accessed 20 March 2022.

<sup>126</sup> Anadolu Ajansı, 'Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Bizim aradığımız adalet, 250 şehidimizin kanıdır (The justice that we seek is the blood of 250 of our martyrs)' (*Anadolu Ajansı*, 20 June 2017) <[www.aa.com.tr/tr/gunun-basliklari/cumhurbaşkanı-erdogan-bizim-aradigimiz-adalet-250-schidimizin-kanidir/845777](http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gunun-basliklari/cumhurbaşkanı-erdogan-bizim-aradigimiz-adalet-250-schidimizin-kanidir/845777)> accessed 5 June 2022.

HELENA VODOPIJA

6.

OBJECTS OF HATRED, OBJECTS OF FEAR

The portrayal of the alleged members of the Gulenist organisation that took part in the attempted coup as the threat that should be annihilated possesses an impact that reaches beyond the mere rhetoric of political speech and the procedures of law. This impact is exercised through attaching the emotions of hatred and fear to the figure of the Gulenist, which informs the actions of the ones identifying as a member of the nation while reducing the ones considered as a threat to the status of an object of the negative emotion and thus denying them political subjectivity other than uninhabitable one, that of the cause of fear and hatred. According to Sara Ahmed, the object of hatred is produced by mobilising the discourse of pain – the normative subject, in this case, the ideal national is seen as the one to whom the pain was inflicted,<sup>127</sup> thus resonating with the position of the heroic victim. It is presumed pain that is felt that motivates the hatred, thus rendering revenge – the infliction of the same pain – the prime response.<sup>128</sup> From the account of Ms Melek, which conveys the memories of her son Taha Furkan and

<sup>127</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Kulturna politika emocija (The Cultural Politics of Emotions)* (Fraktura 2020) 63.

<sup>128</sup> *ibid* 86.

his fellow cadets from the night of the coup, the infliction of pain to the ones considered Gulenists can be vividly visualised:

Because all the things started at the Bosphorus bridge, when people understood there was a coup going on, they rushed there, of course. Our children who were there suffered a lot. Two cadets were unfortunately killed, they cut their throats and broke all of the bones in their bodies.

The enactment of hatred not only constitutes a national subject, but it ‘equals them with rights’.<sup>129</sup> The rights in question can be read as human rights that were breached by the oppressor and thus rendered the national subject a victim. Nevertheless, if we take into consideration Foucault’s account of torture as a mode of punishment through which the sovereignty is inscribed in the body in a form of a sign,<sup>130</sup> the right of the national subject can be read as the sovereign right to punish. The national subject becomes the true sovereign through the enactment of hatred and punishment of the object of hatred. Yet, it is not only the national subject that is constituted through the enactment of hatred and infliction of violence – but it is also the object whose identity is fixed through a violent act.<sup>131</sup> It is in the very act of violence informed by one’s identity – be it physical or verbal – that the contingency of that identity and the need for its fixation comes to the fore. This kind of identity-motivated violence is visible from Ms Melek’s account of cadets’ treatment in jail: ‘For four days they were tortured at the Caglayan courthouse. (They were told) you are traitors, you are not worthy of the uniforms that you wear, they were constantly beating the boys, they didn’t give them bread, they didn’t give them water, they tortured them’.

The accounts of the journalist Büşra Taşkıran regarding the scenes of violence that she witnessed while following the Akinci Airbase trial and the cadets’ lawyer Özge Kartal’s recount of her personal experience at the cadets’ trials portray the same logic of hatred while emphasising its constructed nature:

<sup>129</sup> Ahmed (n 127) 63.

<sup>130</sup> Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* (Vintage Books/Random House 1991) 34-35.

<sup>131</sup> Ahmed (n 127) 85.

They would gather the female branch of the JDP, the women that are the members of the ruling party, and bring them to watch trials, to shout, to insult, this was made by the members of the party, and in the end, some saw that money was given to those people. (Büşra Taşkıran)

I heard there (at the hearing) the swearwords I have never heard in my life, they insulted me, they insulted the boys, the plastic bottles were flying around, chairs, the coins are thrown. Different people came as observers. Some of them might be even brought, they bring people with the buses, I came to this conclusion (...) Normally there should be no insults, but they insulted us. They called us traitors, dogs, they swear at us. (Özge Kartal)

As in the previous cases – of the brutal murder of cadets at the Bosphorous bridge and the torture performed upon them in jail – what matters is that 'the people' are the bearers of the right to punish – the national heroes who fought the enemy, the faithful police officers who perform their duty to the country, the women who present the site of the moral reproduction of the national community. The cadets are brought to direct judgment, not of the court, but the 'people', the ones portrayed in the myth of the 15 July as the sole bearers of sovereignty, the legitimate perpetrators of violence and delegators of punishment. The state is ever present yet through the concealed means of its servants who need to prove themselves as worthy of being called the members of the nation, of belonging to the only acceptable subject position, of adhering to the norm, because otherwise, they would be susceptible to the same punishment.

The torture is not public, as it would endanger the role given to the state as the protector, shielded by the apparatus of the penal system, yet it is both acceptable and encouraged through of circulation of pictures of soldiers that are visibly bruised and in humiliating positions. Journalist and human rights activist Zafer Kıraç recounts the actions of mainstream media following the coup that are specifically aimed at fortifying the belonging to the national community against the hated enemy:

From the first day onward, very ugly photos were served to media, they were served by their media, photographs of them having been beaten up, being stripped, and waiting naked in places resembling barns, beating, the beating was used a lot. Specifically, these photographs were given to the media. It was done so that the part of the society takes pride in it.



The functioning of hatred is based on elevating an individual to a collective, in the words of Sara Ahmed: ‘it imbues a specific otherness with meaning or force, defining it as the member of a collective’.<sup>132</sup> This doesn’t only carry the meaning of a symbolic attack on a collective through inflicting violence on one of its presumed members, but it implies spreading the hatred, and the infliction of pain, seen as legitimate within the logic of vengeance, to each member of the community one belongs to – in this case, their family. The effect it produces also refers to a collective, or rather its cohesion. In this case, it puts the families of cadets in front of an impossible choice – between providing support for their loved ones or psychological and physical survival. Mr Ali, whose son Alper is one of the accused in the Akinci Airbase case, recounts what he had to go through to visit his son in jail after he got transferred to Diyarbakir, a city near the Syrian border that geographically presents the furthest possible point from his hometown Ankara:

I am bound to take a bus, I get on the bus at six in the evening, and at eight in the morning I will get in (the jail). Fourteen hours. And then I will have to return the same day. You see, I am fifty-five, fifty-six years old, can I physically endure this? See, I don’t know whether I can endure this burden not only financially, but also physically. (...) That is to say, only the fact that they are in prison, that they are lying in prison despite their being innocent, and that they received a life, an aggravated life sentence bother me psychologically, but now they are making me physically, financially strained.

The incarcerated cadets and military trainees are not only devised as the objects of hatred but the objects of fear. The fear functions as the anticipation of danger, ‘anticipation of future pain’ that could come upon us, and thus incites us to distance ourselves from the possible source of pain.<sup>133</sup> It also provides for motivation that is turned towards the future yet it defines our present behaviour – the sense of insecurity that produces the fear for our lives and the life of our community – be it nuclear or national – keeps us anchored to the status quo.<sup>134</sup> Thus the objectification of the alleged Gulenists leads to their isolation – people in their surroundings run away from them in the anticipation of future pain – in the form of loss of job, trial, incarceration – and are bound not

<sup>132</sup> Ahmed (n 127) 72.

<sup>133</sup> *ibid* 100.

<sup>134</sup> *ibid* 112.

to question the status quo in the process out of fear for their lives. Mr Ali recounts how one of his close relatives got distanced from him:

For example, one of my relatives, I am calling him and he is not answering the phone. One day after, he comes to me and says, you called me yesterday, I couldn't pick up the phone. I ask him, so how come you couldn't answer your phone and you came all the way here? They might be listening to my phone, he says, they might understand I am talking to you.

Mr Melek shares a similar story in which she lost contact with many of her friends and relatives: 'If I continue seeing Melek, I will get sacked, if I am seen getting out of her house, they will sack my child – many people had this kind of fear and for this reason, they stopped visiting us, they blocked my phone number'.

Thus fear effectively constitutes the borders between 'us' and the 'other', on one hand enforcing the need to belong, to find security in the community that is perceived as desirable, and on the other disintegrating the social unit one belongs to, 'destabilizing social relations and divides communities through the creation of distrust, suspicion, ambiguity, intimidation, and apprehension'.<sup>135</sup> It renders the object of fear the pariah of society, leading to feelings of loneliness and helplessness, and – ultimately – passivity. Büşra Taşkıran accounts her experience that became a constant in her work as a journalist:

They tried to isolate me. When this first happened to me, I talked with the people from the left who lived through this experience, they told me, they won't let you work, they want to bring you to the state in which you cannot work, and they will isolate you from the community you belong to. So you would go to them. You will say, I am very lonely, and you will go. For eight months they were bothering me, for eight months I really couldn't work on any news report, I couldn't go anywhere, they pushed me to a corner. After eight months, one day I was lying down, and I told myself I am so lonely, I said, I am so lonely.

<sup>135</sup> Ramazan Aras, 'State Sovereignty and the Politics of Fear: Ethnography of Political Violence and Kurdish Struggle in Turkey' in Cengiz Gunes and Welat Zeydanlioglu (eds), *The Kurdish Question in Turkey* (Routledge 2013) 90; according to Linda Green, 'Fear as a Way of Life' (1994) 9(2) *Cultural Anthropology* 227.



7.

CHANGING MEMORY, CHANGING IDENTITY

The official memory of 15 July presents both the normative stance and behaviour of a nation and the prescribed knowledge about the alleged Gulenists. The myth of 15 July serves both to fix the meaning of the coup and the identity of those involved. Consequently, if the myth should be challenged, so would be the status of the nation as heroes, the Gulenists as perpetrators – but most importantly – the ruling party as the leader in heroic victory, and state as protector.

Ms Melek, mother of Taha Furkan, a cadet that was present on the night of the coup in the Sultanbeyli, one of the five districts of Istanbul cadets' trials were named after, emphasises the unawareness of cadets of the actual nature of the events at the night of the coup: 'They are told that there is a terrorist attack that Yalova, which is the campsite, is not safe, and they are told to be ready with their weapons, saying that we will return to the air force academy in Istanbul Bakırköy'.<sup>136</sup> As the picture of Gulenists painted in the myth of 15 July, they unquestionably listen to the orders of their leader, yet the leader, in this case, is the military commander; they do seek to achieve what is perceived by them as the greater good, yet that greater good is not changing the political

<sup>136</sup> Engin Yigit, 'Melek Çetinkaya: "Turkish state under Erdogan regime took me out on the street"<sup>35</sup> (*Politurco*, 17 March 2022) <<https://politurco.com/melek-cetinkaya-turkish-state-under-erdogan-regime-took-me-out-on-the-street.html>> accessed 20 March 2022.

leadership, but protecting their homeland from the terrorist threat, just as it is asked from the ideal member of the nation. It is not only the ‘putschists’ who do not yet perceive the role dedicated to them, but it is also the people who are asked by their leader to take on to the streets and fight the ‘terrorist threat’: ‘Now, they are singing Independence March with the people, you know, Turkey has its Independence March, written by Mehmet Akif Ersoy, they are singing it and the people are putting our children back in the buses, cheering “the glory to our soldiers”’. At one point part of the people turns against them – the very people who fell victims to the violence of the putschists, who only acted in the face of imminent threat so as to protect their homeland and are hailed as heroes:

Around seven, eight in the morning a bunch of people are being brought there. They bring plenty of people with stones, sticks, knives, and cutting tools in their hands. In the morning, that group strikes at our children’s buses, they are breaking the windows, shaking the buses, climbing the bus and stomping on it, afterwards some of them are saying, throw the bus gas tank on fire, kill all of them – some of them are yelling.

It is in the reaction of the cadets that the key difference between the roles that they are given in the official memory and their own lived experience as told by Ms Melek is revealed: they are not any longer the extremists who are merciless in their use of violence against the people, the terrorists whose prime purpose is to instigate fear, but non-violent students fearful for their lives – the victims of the violence.

And to this our children – at this moment, at the moment when this is happening, they have the G8 guns, they have forty bullets each – and despite all that had happened, they are not relying on their weapons they are hiding their weapons underneath their seats so the people don’t get even more agitated, they get up, hug each other and saying their goodbyes, they are saying – my son told me this – we are not getting out of this alive, this morning, right here, they are going to kill us. They are saying this and bidding farewell.

Ms Melek concludes her account in disbelief: ‘Now, are these boys traitors? Did these boys kill people?’.

Ilker, the brother of Alper, one of the trainee officers that were present at the time of the coup at Akıncı airbase in Ankara, portrays a similar scenario that is even more benign. Similar to the sequel of

events as told by Ms Melek, the trainee officers were told that there is a counter-terrorism military drill. In this case, they were already present at the key site of the coup, yet they were completely isolated and unaware of what is about to happen:

Squadron commander gathers the trainee officers' phones, locks them in a room, and tell to the trainees that they should listen to the orders they get during this drill (...) The television in the trainees' mess was taken away because of the so-called 'drill' and all the communication tools, including their phones, were taken away from the trainees.<sup>137</sup>

During the night the military trainees spent time doing mundane tasks they have been given – carrying tables, keeping watch in front of the building they have been told to stay at – until they understood something else might be happening other than a regular military drill:

One of the trainees goes to his car, hears the sentence 'the coup is happening' over the radio and informs his colleagues. After this, the trainees are starting to gather in the mess one by one. They still don't understand what is going on. They are getting more and more afraid once they start hearing the sounds of bombing before dawn.<sup>138</sup>

Thus, as in Ms Melek's account, the trainee officers are portrayed as non-violent, fearful and obedient, drawn into the coup only by their presence at the site where they are otherwise doing military training, against their free will and knowledge. Mr Ali, Ilker and Alper's father, and a retired military officer echoes Ms Melek's shock and outrage regarding the incommensurability between trainee officers' actions and the accusations laid against them: 'There is nothing that they have done, they were assigned to that place, that was their place of duty. For example, I am now in the real estate office, this is my real estate office, this is my place of duty, my presence in this place cannot constitute guilt'. Finally, both Ms Melek and Ilker emphasise the element of chance that underlined cadets' and military trainees' presence on the night of the coup and defined their and their families' lives for the next six years. In contrast to the official account that insists on wilful and thoroughly planned participation in the coup of each alleged member

<sup>137</sup> Unpublished interview with Ilker Kalin conducted by Zafer Kıraç.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*

of the Gulenist organisation, Ms Melek points to the absurdity that led to her son's trial:

There were 700 students in the camp. But 350 students were taken to the coup. Because the day before, the regimental commander Hüseyin Ergezen called a bus company and rented a bus from the bus company. (...) After the bus company understood the situation, after the news in the media and the President's statements, it realized the situation and did not send the rest after the first buses.<sup>139</sup>

Likewise, Ilker brings up the random allocation of the trainee officers into groups, and the misfortune of his brother's group being first in the row to participate in the training:

The 2014 graduate trainee officers who participated in the training in Akinci Airbase in June 2016 were part of the group A, so they were first to start the flight training. Some of my brother's colleagues who were assigned to different groups (...) stated that if the coup attempt wouldn't have taken place in July, and would have taken place in some of the upcoming months, then they would have shared the same destiny as their innocent friends.<sup>140</sup>

In this way the memories of 15 July, as narrated by the families of cadets and trainee officers, hold the potential for destabilisation of the subject position of the traitor as portrayed in the official memory: the soldier remains true to their beliefs and code of conduct, seen as the victim, rather than the perpetrator of violence, and thus filling the role of the ideal national. Nevertheless, what is yet left undisclosed is the perpetrator as portrayed in the alternative memory of 15 July and the subsequent period. After the cadets and military trainees are put into custody, their families' reactions however imbued with outrage and disbelief, remain hopeful. They believe that the justice delegated by the state will resolve this misunderstanding and that the state of affairs will get to its original point – how would it otherwise be if the soldiers dedicated their lives to serving that very state? 'For three and a half years I waited for justice to come', Ms Melek exclaims before continuing to narrate the excruciating, kafkaesque process that involved waiting for the sentence, for the reasoned decision, for the appellate court, each step

<sup>139</sup> Yigit (n 136).

<sup>140</sup> Unpublished interview with Ilker Kalin conducted by Zafer Kıracı.

taking more than a year. Ilker echoes Ms Melek's words, emphasising the reason why he and his family endured even a longer process: 'We were very silent until recently. Because we believed in justice. So, I was expecting in the final verdict – ok, it took like four and a half years – but finally, they will release cadets, and trainee officers because there is no evidence showing otherwise'.

At the point when the appellate court confirmed the decision when it became evident that the expected outcome, *justice* is not going to be dealt by the state's hand – there comes the switch, the blow, the breakdown of belief. The objectifying gaze, once turned to the families of military trainees and cadets viewed as traitors to be disposed of is turned back, towards the state – now it is the state that becomes the object of inquiry, the object of questioning, the object whose identity is destabilised and once again structured – while it is cadets' and trainee officers' families who set the norm of justice. The ones who are seen in the official account of 15 July as a source of fear locate that fear elsewhere – not necessarily within the people who deprived them of support, but in the government. 'It is because they fear the system, it is because they fear the government that they stood away from us or against us', Mr Ali concludes. His wife, Ms Kezban, continues to explain the very acts that lead to the climate of fear that rendered the expression of solidarity hardly possible: 'Constant accusations (...) perception management, they are making people afraid, they are spreading fear, everybody is afraid, everybody fell silent'. Ms Melek almost empathises with the people who didn't provide her with support and shares the same disambiguation between the people and the very source of their fear: 'This is not because they think we are bad people, it is because they are afraid of the government. Because they threatened to fire every person close to us, they frightened them. So, people stopped visiting us because they are afraid for their own children'. This very government becomes the trigger of disenchantment not only with any government to come in the future, but with the state itself; in the words of Ms Kezban: 'The State is not to be trusted'.

What is shattered is the state's role as protector of rights, order, life. The selectivity of its role as a protector of life comes to the fore, as its power to 'let die'. In the words of Ms Melek: 'The state protects those that suit it, and the ones that don't, well it does away with them, it doesn't keep them'. The core institution of the state that mirrors its role – the army – is not anymore seen as the guarantee of safety,



resembling a trustworthy family the children were sent to be taken care of and given a secure future – but as the source of insecurity that failed in its presumed role. ‘We in Turkey had always thought that the most trustworthy institution in the country is the Turkish Armed Forces. We had thought so’, Ms Melek emphasises her belief in the prime institution of the state and points to the betrayal of the utmost trust that a parent can put into the state and its institutions, the trust that their children will be protected:

But at this point, we saw that Turkish Armed Forces are the worst institution there is. (...) You gave your children when they were thirteen, fourteen years old, and when they were twenty TAF declared your children traitors. They declare traitors the children they had raised.

Not only does the state become the source of fear and insecurity, but also a *traitor*. In this way, the state starts to take shape of the identity given to the Gulenists in the official account of 15 July, yet it is only when it is overtly proclaimed a *perpetrator* that the complete reversal of the myth takes place: ‘They don’t care for what is necessary for our children’ survival, anyhow their goal was to kill all of our children on 15th July 2016, and I think they still hold that belief in the jail’, Ms Melek concludes.

The families endorse the discourse of traumatised victimhood against the heroic discourse underlying the official account of 15 July – their imprisoned family members regain the status of helpless victims against the violence of the state. The only tool available to combat this violence is conviction in the truth of the incarcerated soldiers’ memories and the knowledge about the state – the knowledge and experience of its violence. This knowledge allows them to transgress the fear of acting against the prescribed norms. ‘I don’t have anything to be ashamed of, I don’t fear anything, I don’t have anything to hide’, Ms Melek emphasises her conviction that gives her strength to proclaim in public the memory of her son. Ilker relates his lack of fear to the experience of having been maltreated, beaten up, incarcerated: ‘Now I don’t have fear. Because you are afraid of things that you don’t know. I am not afraid because I know what is going to happen’. What is more, they transform the fear they are objectified through, or in the words of Özge, the main lawyer on the cadets’ case:

Probably they are looking for a perpetrator because if you take out the cadets, there is no more a perpetrator of the coup. So, the people will start doubting, they will say if it is not them, who did this then? The truth will come to the fore. It seems that the mainstream media is afraid of the truth.

Disillusionment with the view of the state as protector through identification with the traumatic discourse of remembrance leads to the change in point of identification – the subject position they adhere to. While the families of the cadets and military trainees consider their family members and themselves as the victims, they are not in the position to seek affirmation of their victim status and subsequent compensation. They are bound to seek the change of political conditions that lead to their victimhood, which presents, according to Blouin-Genest and others, a demand for political subjectivity.<sup>141</sup> Once objectified through the official myth of 15 July as traitors worth only fear and hatred, they question and rework previous subject positions that they identified with – that fit the description of the ideal national citizen – regaining their subjectivity as activists. With their own action – their individual change – they show the change in discourse that they demand.

Ms Melek sees her former position as that of a 'regular person from Anatolia': 'I was a regular, typical Anatolian person who brings her children to school and back, watches over them so they do their school work, makes their food, cleans the house'. The expression that Ms Melek uses is commonly associated with the pastoral ideal of genuine Turkish folk, described as simple, yet honest and hardworking, that can be traced back to the nationalist movement from the beginnings of the Republic, centred upon the land and the people of Anatolia.<sup>142</sup> Thus, she sees herself as a commoner, the 'woman of the people', not standing out in any manner from the norm of Turkishness. This norm is translated in the array of 'womanly' duties as a mother and a housewife, her enclosure in the private space of the home, and limited access to the outside world in the form of contact and access to information. The isolation from the public space in Ms Melek's account forms a cultural code that spans from her upbringing to her life as a married woman:

<sup>141</sup> Gabriel Blouin-Genest and others, 'Conclusion: Changing Human Right Practices and the Battlefields of World Politics' in Gabriel Blouin-Genest and others (eds), *Human Rights as Battlefields: Changing Practices and Contestations* (Palgrave Macmillan 2019) 272.

<sup>142</sup> Eylem Saltık, 'Atatürk Dönemi Türk Şiirinde "Anadolu" ve Milli Mücadele Manzarası (The Anatolia and National Struggle in the poetry of Atatürk era' (2010) 20 *Türkbilgi* 294.

I lost my mom and dad when I was very young, my grandparents from my father's side raised me. (...) we had very strong family ties, you couldn't go out to the street too much, study, and so on. (...) And until I got married I didn't really go to the market. Imagine. I was even prohibited from watching television. Anyway, I finished elementary school, my grandpa didn't let me attend other schools. He didn't let me study. After that, I got married when I was nineteen and I became a mother when I was twenty. After I became a mother – unfortunately, my husband's culture was similar, the woman shouldn't go out to the street too much, she should say to her husband what she needs, he will buy it and bring it.

Ms Melek's view of motherhood is intimately related to her conceptualisation of the role of the military as the protector of the nation and the territory it inhabits, their homeland: 'I always used to say, if only I had ten sons I would give all of them to TAF. Let them work for this country, for this homeland, let them give their lives'. Thus her former view on motherhood echoes the concept of the ideal woman citizen as portrayed within the myth of 15 July – she is the mother of the sons to become soldiers that will fight, and if necessary die for their country. She is ready to sacrifice even what is most precious to her – her children – for the welfare of the homeland.

The subject position Ms Melek identified with, that of a 'regular Turkish woman', defined by motherhood and enclosed private space of family is merged with the subject position of a Muslim woman as seen by the ruling party, as confined to the private space only by the formal, juridical constraints resulting from the aggressive secularist stance towards veiling:

Twenty years ago, when there were elections, we gave our vote, we supported JDP to come to power for the first time because, in Turkey, we were deprived of some rights, because there was no equality, because we are covered, religious people, we thought that the girls should study even if they wear a veil, that the government officials should be able to work even if they wear a veil.

By entering the public space she pushes the boundaries of motherhood beyond the limits that are prescribed and confined to the space of privacy, simultaneously revealing the other side of the confinement – the non-juridical, yet structural one – left undisclosed in the ruling party's campaign for the rights of (Muslim) women. She is pressured by her husband in terms of attempts to limit her view of motherhood and return it to the status quo:

To be honest, it was very hard for (my husband) to accept it. He still hasn't completely accepted it, one evening, some days ago he again told me – I don't want you to appear on any television program, I don't want you to talk to anybody about this, stop it already, let other mothers do some work, are you the only one who is a mother?

Nevertheless, she doesn't yield to the pressure, her answer is once already contained in the ideal characteristic of the mother, that of sacrifice, yet now mobilised so as to serve in her struggle for the freedom of her son: 'I told him, some people need to sacrifice themselves, this cannot be done if we are afraid'. At the same time, she paradoxically enters the role of the Muslim woman as presented in the discourse of the ruling party – present in the public space, being both politically active and fulfilling her duties to the family, seeing her political engagement as a prolongation of what she does at home. Yet she disentangles the notion of motherhood from the one of reproduction of militarised society, seeing the bond to her child as a basis for activism: 'As a mother, I couldn't bear staying silent. (...) I made a decision as a mother to take to the streets, for two years I have been getting out to the street, I am trying to get my voice heard at all the relevant places'. Thus she changes her subject position by taking the meaning of the ideal woman literally – the mother who would do anything that is necessary, even if it means pushing the limits of her own identity.

Ilker's change in the subject position he identifies with occurs at an earlier date, in 2014, during his stay in the United States where he continues his education as a PhD student of political science after being granted a scholarship from the Turkish Armed Forces. He explains his position as the one wearing security glasses:

Before, I have looked at the world through security glasses, what mattered the most was national security (...) I was filled with national 'pride' and had my 'security' glasses on, like many other military graduates all around the world. Back then, many issues were related to 'security' to me.

While his belief in the core institution of the nation-state, and the role of the soldier, in his own words, his 'militarism' was not as prominent in comparison to his friends and colleagues, it had a certain commonsensical value that could not be openly questioned and opposed. The main points of this belief – relating to the clear disambiguation between the nation and the enemy, and the one-dimensional view of the foundation

of the Republic that testifies to the victorious, rather than the violent character of the nation – would come to the fore when conflicted, in this case by his close friend: ‘When she said Turkey committed genocide over Armenians, I got angry. I just (said) – “No, Turkey didn’t do this”. I tried to produce counter argument to defend my nation’. Learning about the core issue of the day the army was concerned with – the Kurdish question – presented the turning point for his understanding of the nation and the nature of conflicts:

Before I never read about the Kurdish issue, I just relied on what I heard. I thought they are separatists, terrorists. But then I started knowing the background of the issue. (...) Learning about the Kurdish issue was an eye-opener for me. Reading about conflicts all around the world, I realized how ethnicity could be a source of bias and intractable conflicts.

The second element of Ilker’s former subject position that comes to the fore when conflicted is the belief in God. Although he didn’t consider himself strictly religious back in the day, the belief presents one of the points in the plethora of commonsensical convictions: ‘Back then I was a believer, and she mocked me for believing in god. So, I got offended. So, I wasn’t religious, but I was a believer. I said, why do you do this?’.

The starting subject position that Ilker primarily identifies with complies with that of the ideal national as portrayed in the myth of 15 July – he sees the role of the soldier as the protector of the nation – either by his words or his deeds. He holds enough belief in God to be considered as part of his identity and defended if attacked. However the expression of his belonging to the nation might not be as passionate as in the case of Ms Melek, the unquestionable quality of his beliefs at the time is enough to provide him with the primary characteristic of the ideal national – obedience. The change that occurs, the identification with the subject position of human rights advocate, the researcher-activist, presents for Ilker a specific kind of freedom – freedom from belonging: ‘I have grown into a human rights advocate, breaking myself free of previous prejudices, biases, and ignorance (...) since then, I consider myself a free person; free of any bounds that might bias my reasoning and world views’. In this manner, he rejects the meaning and status that the role of a soldier as the presumed ideal national brings about, both from the supporters and opposition to the hegemonic discourse – he rejects to be named:

In Turkey, people, by and large, are divided into two groups when it comes to the military: those who admire soldiers and those who hate them. The former group thinks that soldiers have a holy duty and defend the nation, therefore they are somewhat heroes. The latter group thinks that soldiers are fascists and coercive tools at the hand of the repressive state. When I meet new people, I don't want them to have either view of me, because I am neither a hero nor a fascist.

He endorses the same strategy in his approach to the coup and the consequences of the division of people into the nation and the enemy, not only questioning the label given to his brother and himself but the naming itself, closely related to the worldview he once adhered to and now strictly rejected:

If you want to get to the bottom of this issue we need to talk about terrorism. So what is terrorism? Who is a terrorist? Because it is very easy to be a terrorist in this country, to be known as a terrorist. (...) Being a terrorist is enough to justify anything. The term terrorist, terrorism (...) can be weaponized, can be used, and this is the discriminatory, polarizing rhetoric. (...) We are not here to define who is a terrorist and who is not, because we don't accept the term itself.

While he changes the subject position he identifies with before coming to Turkey due to his brother's imprisonment, and cuts the ties with the nation he once belong to, his belief in the state or state-delegated justice still remains firm, until it is finally shattered once his brother is convicted:

When my brother got a sentence, aggravated life (sentence), I was so shocked. I was stupid to be shocked. The system that kept some person for four years of course could take this further. You know, it is the same system. So, what did I expect? And then, after that, it was a wake up call for me.

The two prominent ways in which the change of the subject position from that of a believer to one of an activist occurs, amount to two strategies of struggle against the hegemonic discourse of the new Turkey – disentangling motherhood from the nation-state so as to regain the status of sole decision, right and possession of a woman on one hand and destabilising the meaning of the given label, the given name and thus challenging the difference between the nation and the traitor, in the guise of the terrorist.



8.

BIRTH OF A COUNTER-HEGEMONIC MOVEMENT

As identification with a certain version of memory that imbues the portrayal of the community we belong to – the nation – and its other with the emotions of love on one hand, and hatred and fear on the other, will motivate us to act in a violent manner, or distance ourselves from the other, so will the memories of our past experience, imbued with emotion, inform our emphatic response, forming an intersubjective connection with the others. In her work on empathy building on the work of Husserl, Esra Özyürek emphasises his view of (emotional) experience: 'what I have learned in the past does not leave me untouched. It shapes my understanding and interpretation of new objects by reminding me of what I have experienced before'.<sup>143</sup> To put oneself in the other's shoes, to experience the world from the other's perspective, what in Husserl's view amounts to empathy, will depend upon our memories. What Esra Özyürek adds to Husserl's view on the role of memory for the production of empathy, which 'serves as a glue that binds communities together',<sup>144</sup> is its frame – the subject positions we adhere to and through which we interpret our memory. While in the previous chapter it was explained how personal experience and memory

<sup>143</sup> Esra Özyürek, 'Rethinking empathy: Emotions triggered by the Holocaust among the Muslim-minority in Germany' (2018) 18(4) *Anthropological Theory* 456, 461.

<sup>144</sup> *ibid* 460.



purport one to change the subject position one identifies with, disavow their belonging to a certain community, and question the meaning given to that community and its members in the hegemonic discourse, now we are going to look at the ways in which a new community is formed, through the same experience, memories of past experiences and the subject position of a human rights activist that recognises universal empathy as a moral principle.

The families that came together in a struggle for the cadets' and trainee officers' release didn't necessarily know each other in advance, chance had it that it was their sons and daughters, their brothers and sisters that were caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. While the change in subject position can be observed in rare cases, namely in the case of Ms Melek and Ilker, along with his family to some extent, a vast majority of families didn't go out in public with their concerns, and the ones that did so mostly inspired by the actions of Ms Melek and Ilker. Ilker brings up two reasons that might have prevented them from taking action: 'When you talk to Melek and me, so we are already visible (...) it is that we changed our mind. (...) But, I don't know about other people, why they don't want to become visible, are they afraid or do they still believe in the system?'. Zafer Kıraç leans towards the second reason of observed passivity, locating the issue of mobilisation in the subject position of the believer, of the religious and nationalist member of the nation that remains unchanged: 'Most families of cadets are very religious and nationalist. For this reason, they didn't resist for a long time'. The difference in subject positions they identify with between the families of incarcerated soldiers posits them as the Other in each other's eyes. What serves as a connecting tissue among them is a different version of the memory of the 15 July coup, that posits the soldiers and their families in the place of the oppressed, the ones upon which the injustice was inflicted. Nevertheless, there is still a difference among them in conceiving the source of that injustice, in relation to the previous or newly found identities they take. Ilker recounts an anecdote from a protest he organised with the participation of several other families in which a conflict arises between his mother Kezban and the other mothers of the incarcerated trainee officers:

My mom said I don't like this country, I don't like this terms terrorism, terrorist, if there is a terrorist it is the state itself, the state is terrorist, my mother said (...) and then several moms reacted, no don't say the state is terrorist again, devlet, don't say, you have to differentiate between state and the government, yes the government is bad but, we love our state, vatan (homeland), devlet (state).

What is then that serves to unite families around the common cause? It is the emotion that memory produces – the pain they feel because of the unjust loss of their children, their brothers, and their loved ones that erases the ideological differences between them, the differences in subject positions they adhere to. In Ilker's words: 'We all share the same feeling, but, then, when we put things into words, it might come out differently, or we can perceive things differently, but inside we feel the same pain, inside we feel the same'. It is through direct experience of pain coming from the same cause that the community takes shape. The prime example of transcending differences in identification with certain subject positions is Ilker and Alper's close friend Yunus that is considered a part of the family. Yunus, a former soldier that was purged after the coup, shows a peculiar position of scepticism towards the state: in his view, its role as a protector remains unchanged, yet it loses the sacral characteristic, now being prone to questioning and thus conflating with the concept of government:

To be honest, I am now sorry that I used to be a statist. We are very statist. Generally, our statism should look like this, the state is there for the people (...) If the state would be always governed by smart, educated, competent people, so as to say, those people who deserve that job, then I could defend the state.

While the experience of being purged and his friend being jailed has changed him in a sense that he started questioning concepts that he previously deemed commonsensical, his patriotism remains unchanged: 'I don't have an issue with loving my homeland, I love it, I love my country, however, there is an issue with our people, I love them too. I have hope. I haven't completely broken all the ties. Neither with my country, neither with my homeland'. Although his stance towards the army has changed in the same sense as the one towards the state so that the competency of its leadership and members can now be questioned, he considers it as objectively necessary, connecting it to the objective value of nationalism: 'If you don't have a good army here, you get

into trouble. For this reason, we cannot expect the people to give up nationalism in one day, to give up statism, to give up militarism. This region is not suitable for that'. His stance, however changed, places him in opposition to Ilker's and his family's anti-militarist and anti-nationalist views. Nevertheless, apart from the shared history, they share the same pain: 'Because I am family friends with Ilker, I witnessed all the suffering that Alper went through, his trial, his time in jail, I experienced all of it, all the pain'.

Yet, the difference among the families is not the only one that arises, and that needs to be transcended, it is also a difference between the incarcerated soldiers and their families that struggle for their freedom that comes forth as potentially destabilising. Ilker recounts his observance of the (in)ability to change the subject position of the believer among his brother and his colleagues: 'My brother, he still takes pride in the nation. He is still that twenty-three, twenty-four-year-old he was at the time of the coup. As if life has paused there for six years. He has no idea about the people on the outside. It makes me so sad'. The symbol that Ilker chooses to represent the movement for the freedom of the incarcerated cadets and military trainees – the blue ribbon – serves to translate the beliefs of the soldiers into the claims of the families, the distance between the two otherwise being insurmountable. The idea comes from Bugra Baldan, a rewarded pilot that returned to Turkey in 2015 after finishing his education in the United States and was praised for his successes by the local media by displaying a blue ribbon for a whole day. In the letter with the same title that he sent to Ilker during their correspondence, but was intended for larger audiences, Bugra uses the symbol of the blue ribbon to explain how he conceived of being a part of the Turkish Military Forces as a pilot: "Blue Ribbon" was displayed at the corner of the TV broadcast that symbolized the blue sky and freedom. Now I wear that blue ribbon on my wrists as a handcuff, the same ribbon I once carried on my shoulder with pride and honor'.<sup>145</sup> His wish is to once again be reintegrated into society in the same role, to 'untie the knot' and put the blue ribbon back on his shoulder. As he emphasises in the excerpt of his defence statement that he includes in the letter: 'I love my country very much! And my love for my country has never diminished within these 4.5 years. I have always

<sup>145</sup> Bugra Baldan's letter to Ilker Kalin.

worked hard to become a productive and useful citizen to my beloved country'.<sup>146</sup> Thus by displaying the blue ribbon, the families, even those disenchanted by the idea of the state, nationalism and militarism, are paying respects to the beliefs of a large part of incarcerated soldiers, while articulating their claims so as to exclude patriotism/nationalism, in Ilker's words:

I said, ok I am not a vatansever (patriot), I don't like my country, so, can you justify that I can be sentenced to a life term in prison? So, this shouldn't be the defense statement. We can just say: are you saying there is a coup, and can you prove that these students were involved?

The support that the families find among the people that are not related to the case of the cadets and military trainees through familial ties arises both from empathy caused by similar experiences and moral conviction. Büşra Taşkıran, a former judge apprentice, who took up journalism after she lost her job through an emergency decree and became among the first and rare journalists that wrote about the cadets' case, stands in between those who were directly affected by the cadets and military trainees' incarceration and those who empathise with them through a shared experience. She first started following the Akıncı Airbase case in which Ilker's brother Alper was convicted, because a close friend of hers, that she considered almost her kin, was among the trainee officers put on trial. It is the loss of a loved one that served as the impetus for her to take action – to closely follow the trial and provide the wider public with the otherwise unreachable information. Yet, it was the experience that followed, that served as a tipping point for her to relinquish the belief in the state and become an activist for the rights of incarcerated soldiers and other prisoners. Because she followed the trial she got imprisoned for spreading 'Gülenist propaganda' and stayed in jail for eight months. She experienced the violence of the state on her own skin, and saw the maltreatment of the prisoners with her own eyes, which pushed her to empathise and stand in solidarity with the ones who experienced the same:

<sup>146</sup> Baldan (n 145).

You think that ‘the finger cut by the state doesn’t hurt’, but I realized this, because of this period I spent in jail and the people’s stories that I later saw – this is not solely connected with what happened to me, but also what I witnessed – because of that I saw that the state presents a completely different mechanism. I saw that it can cover up the breaches of human rights, that it sees itself as having the power to do so, I saw the confidence in people to commit unlawful acts when they feel that the state stands behind them. To be honest, the state scared me.

Zafer Kırış, a life-long human rights activist in the field of the rights of prisoners and journalist that followed the case of incarcerated cadets and military trainees, explains his path towards activism as the empathy that arose out of the personal experience of the violence of the state:

I started university just after the 12 September military coup. The effects of the coup were still felt, Kenan Evren and his people, the cases of torture, maltreatment. I was a young student and I decided to found a student organization, the first NGO. After the coup, my first association. I had an experience in the police station. For this reason, I never took closed institutions out of my mind. Foucault (...) sees closed institutions as a place of darkness. My wish is to put light on them.

Apart from his own experience of violence, he shares with the families of incarcerated soldiers the feeling of pain and loss, due to the years-long imprisonment of his closest friend and colleague Osman Kavala who was convicted in the case related to the Gezi protests in 2013:

Osman Kavala is my friend, my closest friend for twenty-seven years. We worked together, we founded many NGOs together (...) we founded together seven, eight associations together. (...) And my beloved friend is in jail for five years, and he cannot do nothing about it, nothing.

Alluding to the silence of the media, he makes a comparison between the two cases stating that the ‘Osman Kavala example’ happens once again. Nevertheless, the main impetus for his engagement with the case, that allows him to transcend the difference between his worldviews and the incarcerated soldiers’ and their families’ subject positions they identify with, is his conviction, established throughout the years as an activist, the belief in the universality of human rights: ‘This boy has been in jail for years, he had his dreams, he was a soldier. I am against the military, I am a conscientious objector, but I am also human rights advocate, this is what I am trying to do here’.

The shared experience of loss and violence, along with presumed conviction comes forth in the strategy of amassing followers of the movement for the freedom and rights of incarcerated cadets and military trainees. On the account of shared feeling of loss, concretely motherly loss of a child, Ms Melek reaches out to the Saturday Mothers, a well-known organisation of families, mothers by large, whose loved ones were victims of the forced disappearance and political murders since 1980. The experience of state violence, concretely the loss of employment and social security through the emergency decrees, serves as a point of convergence between Ms Melek, but also Ilker, and his family, with the KHK platforms, the organisations that advocate the rights of the 'decreed'. 'Cadets and trainees are also KHKli, because they have been purged, as well. (...) and they were among the first ones that got purged. That's why I said in my speech, yes, they are also KHKli, but they cannot represent themselves here', Ilker recounts his public appearance at the event co-organised by the KHK platform and the main oppositional party CHP. On the account of empathy by conviction in the universality of rights, both Ms Melek and Ilker reach out to the IHD, one of the main human rights organisations in Turkey. While there is an immediate goal to be reached – to get their children and siblings out of jail – it is the genuine empathy they search for. Thus, whereas they manage to get support on both sides of the oppositional political spectrum, there is still a differentiation made between their political goals and genuine empathy as a basis of trust. In Mr Ali's words:

I wish it wouldn't be this way, I wish that they would truly, sincerely hold our side. I believe that they support us because the elections are approaching, that they think about their votes. This bothers me. (...) this makes me wonder what is going to be their stance, their behavior once they get their votes.

Nonetheless, their starting position doesn't allow them a real choice, the political allegiance out of conviction becomes a privilege that they don't have access to, in Ms Kezban's words: 'Even if they do it because of the votes, I need to value it. I need to reach out more to them, tell them about my problems, if it's for votes, let it be, I cannot do anything about it, my child needs to get out of there'.

Although they do get support in the terms of physical and media space, there is still a shared feeling of isolation. Ilker relates this isolation

to the scepticism towards a different subject position one presumably identifies with: 'When I came there they didn't accept me right away, they were prejudiced against me'. On the other hand, Ms Melek traces it to the narrow focus of some organisations:

Everybody takes care more of their own, they are talking more about the sufferings of their own people. That is a fact, nobody can deny it, even if in this process people put aside their differences, it doesn't matter anymore whether they are right-wing or left-wing, Sunni or Alevi, and even if they say we are always at your side, there is always one group they focus more upon.

Although the discourse of the movement for the rights and freedoms of incarcerated soldiers is centred around the signifiers such as 'justice' and 'humanity', it cannot be simply said that the activists of this movement endorse human rights discourse. Since the discourse of new Turkey that they challenge is closely intertwined with the discourse of human rights, what they challenge is its meaning, the meaning of justice that the respect of human rights brings about, and the meaning of humanity that is constitutive to the conceptualisation of rights. The meaning given to justice within the discourse of the new Turkey – that of the project of eradication of the enemy of the nation as a voucher for freedom and human rights of the citizens – is challenged by endorsing the traumatic discourse of viewing the past in which the state is posited as the source of injustice. Mr Zafer views the opposition between the two opposed meanings of justice as the one between restorative and retributive justice, rendering the meaning of justice given within the discourse of the new Turkey as vengeful:

There is either restorative justice or retributive justice. Unfortunately, in Turkey they are doing it as an act of revenge, they are taking revenge (...) Let's say that if the state wants to kill somebody, they close them in a room and kill them. But why this, this has reached another level, another level of spreading fear. (...) they want to inflict pain.

Justice is viewed as widening the scope of the 'human' in human rights, so as to include even those who are considered the enemy. In Ilker's words: 'There is justice, but not for homo sacer, just for the acceptable citizens. (...) We need justice for terrorists too'. Justice is closely related to the vision of homeland, the symbolic concept that presents the undercurrent of subject positions of citizen-soldier and

citizen-mother. In the discourse of the new Turkey, the homeland is viewed as the object of protection and of sacrifice, the site inseparable from the nation that inhabits, the site that should physically delineate the borders of the nation, implying the expulsion of the traitor. In contrast, in this discourse homeland is viewed as a site of justice for others. In Ms Melek's words:

A country where there is no justice doesn't feel like my homeland anymore. In this kind of homeland, you feel redundant. (...) When the situation is like this, when there is no justice, I would say that your homeland is where you feel safe, where you find justice, where you live in peace and safety. That is to say, even if it's not your home country, how much you might feel that you don't belong there, justice is very important.

The only criterium that renders a certain place home is the consideration and treatment of all of its population as equal in their humanity. 'Just so we are treated as humans, believe me, it can be any place'; Ms Kezban states her vision of a homeland. Her husband, Mr Ali agrees with her view: 'Every place where you live as a decent human being is a homeland'. In this way, the belonging to the nation, seen as a sacred object that cannot be dishonoured and that has to be sacrificed to, and the territory that physically delineates the borders of the nation is substituted with the belonging to humanity. 'I guess I cannot say that I am a patriot, that I love my homeland. I love people, whoever they might be I love people', Büşra contrasts her views with that of patriotism. Mr Zafer shares her thoughts, adding the notion of sacredness:

I actually love people, people have some characteristics that distinguish them from animals (...) those characteristics that people gained (...) the ability to create, to share. (...) these I consider sacred. (...) What would you deem sacred – for me it is the international conventions, human rights conventions, these are my holy book.

Ilker concludes his disenchantment with the concepts he previously believed in by professing his unquestionable attachment only to a single notion: 'For me, nothing is holy except humanity'.

Apart from the first meaning imbued in the signifier of justice – that of the universality of being human that reaches even the ones deemed worthy only of expulsion from the community – there is another meaning central to it, that presents a possible site of dispute among the activists for the rights of the incarcerated soldiers – that of the justice



seen as a site of struggle, and not something to be given and waited for. In Ilker's words:

Some people have this justice belief. They feel like if there is a superior justice system, in the universe, so justice always prevails. Most of them have them – some of them religiously, some of them spiritually, some of them politically. (...) So that's what prevents them from getting engaged.

By the less religious part of the activist group, this belief is seen to be rooted in religious views that necessarily lead to passivity. In Ms Kezban's words: 'The belief system, the problem is the belief system. The thought that we need to accept everything that happens to us, the belief in destiny'. On the other hand, the more religious part sees the proclivity for inaction in the face of injustice as being rooted in statist culture and sacralisation of the state, in Busra's words: 'In Turkey, the conviction that the state is sacred is still very widespread, for us the state is still very sacred being, and everything that it does, it goes unchallenged, is commonsensical, we accept it'. While religion seems to be the key point of divergence among the families of cadets and military trainees, and a general issue for gaining larger support, as it can be seen from Busra's account the issue is located elsewhere. It is the view of the state that needs to be challenged, the counter-historical consciousness to be endorsed, for a movement to unite and grow, and for justice to be established, or according to Ilker: 'They think that if you're innocent justice will come, but it doesn't happen unless you push it'.

Experience of pain, endorsement of the traumatic discourse in terms of disclosure of violence that is inherent to the establishment of order and meaning of justice as based on universal humanity, leads to empathy with those who are conceived as the oppressed and dedication to the critique of any government to come – two core elements of future struggle for justice. Ms Kezban emphasises the contingency of judgment – the need to be sensible to different meanings:

One needs to be sensible. (...) It's not only about the injustice that I experienced, I will stand by the side of everybody (who experienced the same). One should understand the others, ask them what has actually happened; listen first, and only then judge. People don't do this, but after this, I will do everything that is in my power to help (the others).

Ms Melek conceives of this sensibility as a basis for the critique of (any) government, while expressing her dedication to the struggle for the justice of the oppressed:

I believe that it is my duty to fight for those people's rights, to stand by the side of victims. If my son gets released from jail, it doesn't mean that justice came to this country. (...) Whoever comes to power, maybe JDP goes, maybe it stays, I cannot know that, but whoever else comes to power, we are bound to state their wrongs.

Finally, Ilker posits empathy towards others and critique of authority in the context of human rights advocacy:

I will always be an opposition, it doesn't matter who is in charge, who is in power, if you're human rights advocate, you should always place yourself in opposition, regardless of who governs. Because, even the most democratic country isn't perfect, so we need to fight, always, to make it better.



9.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to understand in which way does being expelled from a community as a traitor impact one's life and identity, how one mobilises their own memory in order to regain political subjectivity and create a solidarity-based community. In order to observe how one is treated after once being labelled as a traitor and how they resist that treatment, it was necessary to observe in which way the subject positions of the ideal Turkish national and its other – the Gulenist – are portrayed in the myth of 15 July and are moulded by the discourse of the new Turkey. In the myth of the new Turkey, the Gulenists are portrayed as violent perpetrators that present the ultimate threat to the lives of innocent people – the nation, which, as a united, homogenous whole, heroically fought them against all odds. They resemble the trope of an Islamic terrorist, but what is more important for the national imagery, they are the traitors of the nation – their treachery consisting in the allegiance to the 'outer forces' that are intended to colonise and diminish everything that is 'local and national', embodied in the president and his party. Apart from being objectified through discursively prescribed and limited knowledge about their identity, they are also objectified through emotions of fear and hatred attached to them. As it can be observed from their statements, these emotions serve to mobilise people they come in contact with – from a policeman in custody to their broader family, neighbours, colleagues – so as to fix their identity of a traitor through hate-motivated acts of

torture (in the case of incarcerated soldiers) or to alienate them from the broader community, thus preventing their unification and inciting them to search refuge in the very community that alienated them (in the case of families and their supporters). Against the backdrop of the other, the traitor, the subject position of the ideal citizen is gendered and moulded by a sedimented discourse of militarist nationalism. It takes the form of a civilian soldier and militarised mother – both embodied in the people who took on the streets following the call from the president and participated in the democracy watches – their common trait being faithfulness – to their homeland, ‘local and national values’ that prescribe the role of protector to a man and role of the mother of the protectors to a woman, and to the incumbent party’s view of democracy, justice and human rights. Justice is viewed in a retributive, and thus necessarily selective, manner – it is a historical justice for all of the generations of believers that suffered under the oppressive, secularist military tutelage supported by the foreign powers that should be enacted as retribution towards the Gulenists.

The memories of the night of 15 July and the subsequent period of the incarcerated cadets and military trainees, along with the experience of pain due to their loved ones’ absence and suffering, purport their families to endorse the traumatic discourse against the heroic discourse that underlines the myth of 15 July: the cadets and military trainees are given the role of victims while the state figures as a violent perpetrator. Furthermore, belonging to a national community and its betrayal are reinterpreted – seen in their utmost obedience to the given orders and dedication to the protection of their nation as observed in the rejection of the use of violence, the cadets and military trainees come to figure as the ideal citizens, while the state, and its central institution, the Turkish Armed Forces – come to figure as a traitor – betraying the faith of its believers. In this way, the families of incarcerated soldiers reverse the myth of 15 July, not only destabilising the meaning of the very coup – but the identities of the nation, its leader and its enemy. Identification with the counter-memory of 15 July and subsequent disillusionment with the state seen as a protector, leads the families of the incarcerated soldiers to question the subject positions they previously adhered to – the ones of ideal citizens – and transform their identity into the one of a human rights activist. They regain their political subjectivity through re-politicising the normalised subject positions of a mother and a soldier by disentangling motherhood from the function of symbolic reproduction

(in the case of Melek Çetinkaya) and questioning the dividing line between a faithful national and a traitor (in case of Ilker Kalın). Thus they are embodying the position of a traitor on their own terms and ridding the state of the privileged position of knowledge producer – they are intentionally 'betraying' the set norms.

Still, only a limited number of soldiers' family members changed the subject positions they identify with, the rest being either constrained by fear or their change limited to questioning the concrete acts of government. Likewise, at least a part of the incarcerated soldiers still remains faithful to their beliefs. What brings the families together is the common emotion of pain caused by the incarceration and absence of their loved ones, while the difference between a part of the families and soldiers is overcome through the symbolic means that allow them to unite in pride for the soldiers' achievements, regardless of their context. The previous experience of oppression serves both as the key point of strategy for amassing supporters of the movement for the release of the incarcerated cadets and military and as a basis for empathy for the ones who already provide support to the families. The experience of oppression is elevated to the abstract level within the conviction in the universality of human rights as can be seen in Zafer Kırac's case. The signifier of justice is central to the counter-hegemonic discourse in the making – it serves to challenge the observed selectivity of the state as the protector that rendered the incarcerated soldiers and their families the pariah of Turkey and demand equal treatment for all citizens of Turkey. The exclusive allegiance to the nation and its territory – the homeland – is replaced by belonging to humanity that doesn't allow for any national borders. In this way, the concept of 'human' in human rights is broadened – regaining them not only their political subjectivity but humanity. Justice also carries the meaning of struggle – struggle against militarism, nationalism and statism that fix the borders between a genuine national and traitor, between those worthy of being called human, and the others to whom the rights do not apply. With their belief in universal justice and effort to transcend differences the families of incarcerated cadets and trainee officers represent enlivened pluralism.

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- Interviews with Ilker Kalın (28 March, 1 April, 19 April 2022)
- Interview with Ali and Kezban Kalın ( 2 April 2022)
- Interview with Yunus Gümüşsoy (4 April 2022)
- Interview with Özge Kartal (27 June 2022)
- Interview with Büşra Taşkıran (15 March 2022)
- Interviews with Zafer Kırac (29 March, 30 April 2022)



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