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Populism Beyond the West: Dissonant Diversities and Fragmented Politics

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"Female Migration Outcomes: Human Rights Perspectives", Vol. 13, No. 1, 2011
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"The Human Rights of Migrants", Vol. 11, No. 1, 2009
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Populism Beyond the West: Dissonant Diversities and Fragmented Politics

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Populism is one of the most contested topics of our times. Even though the phenomenon is anything but new (see Ionescu and Gellner 1969), the increasing salience of populism and the rising power of populist actors around the globe have prompted a new wave of interest in the topic. Scholars have so far focused on a vast array of questions, such as the definition of populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, Mueller 2016, Laclau 2005) the difference between right-wing and left-wing populisms (Rama and Santana 2019), and the role of social media in the rise of populist actors as well as in the dissemination of populist logics and discourses (Crilley and Gillesbie 2019; Salgado 2019). The nature of the relationship between populism and democracy (Pappas 2019; Urbinati 2019; Weyland and Madrid 2019), populism and nationalism (Brubaker 2017, 2019; De Cleen 2017), and populism and authoritarianism (Norris and Inglehart 2019) have also been of increasing interest to scholars.

While these analyses have a lot in common, they also greatly differ from each other due to the variety of the cases where populism is observed. Populists might apply different economic policies (Franzese 2019; Rodrik 2018), be on the right or on the left (March 2017; Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis 2019; Weyland 2013), resort to nationalism or nativism (Bonikowski et al 2018; Pappas 2018), or they might depart from democracy and turn into authoritarian actors or not (Dix 1985; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012). Despite this variety, however, existing accounts mostly adopt institutional and structural approaches, paying little attention to the cultural component of populism (see Gidron and Hall 2019 for an exception underlining both cultural and structural explanations for populism). Questions such as how populist discourse influences and is influenced by social relations, how it transforms and is transformed by citizens' understandings as to "the people," and to each other, remain, to a large extent, unanswered. Thus, we still know little about how social cleavages shape the way "the people" is conceptualized by populist actors as well as how populist discourse shapes existing social cleavages. The few existing works on this topic turn their gaze towards either North American (Bonikowski et al. 2019) or European cases (Bornschier 2010). However, we believe that an emphasis on social cleavages is important and necessary in understanding how populism operates beyond Western democracies, particularly in historically diverse countries. Interestingly, such non-Western countries with multi-ethnic, multi-religious populations have so far received little attention from scholars. When non-Western cases are discussed in the literature, except for a few recent works on populism in Africa (Cheeseman 2018; Resnick 2017) and in Southeast Asia (Case 2017), Latin American countries featuring important examples of left-wing populism (De La Torre 2016) are usually the ones to take the centre-stage, to the detriment of others.

Against this background, in this special issue, we focus on the relationship between populism and ethnic and religious diversity beyond Western Europe and the Americas. We are particularly

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interested in the following questions: What is the role of cultural and social grievances in the emergence and spread of populist discourses and vice versa? What differences, if any, are there between the form populism takes in historically diverse societies and the form it takes in societies where diversity is a fairly recent phenomenon related to immigration? How does populism relate to social, political, and affective polarization in post-imperial societies with multi-cultural populations?

Constructing "the people": Historical diversity and social cleavages

Considering that the juxtaposition of "the people" against "the elites" is integral to populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017), understanding how "the people" is defined and to whom it refers is vital to any analysis of populism. This is where existing societal cleavages and historical diversity become important. In diverse societies with "historical others" populists tend to swiftly revive and mobilize the dormant (and sometimes not so dormant) societal divisions. Often, populist actors deploy existing social cleavages for their own benefit and utilize them in propagating a divisive discourse that represents social groups in binary moral terms (Khaleeli 2016) and that shrinks the borders of "the people" so as to leave out certain groups. Efe Peker's article in this issue, for instance, demonstrates this in the specific case of India by analysing how Hinduism is adopted and articulated by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in equating "the people" to the Hindu majority. Similarly, Shanon Shah's analysis interrogates this topic via the question of whether a multi-ethnic, multi-religious nation of Malaysians is possible. Along the same lines, Zeynep Yanaşmayan, Ayşen Üstübici and Zeynep Kaşlı demonstrate how co-religiosity has not made it easier, at the societal level, for Syrian refugees to be considered a part of "the people" in Turkey.

Populist discourse that brings together different actors with varying interests against a common "enemy" is one of the crucial tools in this process. This particular populist logic works by "formulating demands, rather than a set of demands" (De Cleen and Galanopolous 2016). Through the creation of a "chain of equivalence" (Laclau 2005), populist discourse speaks for "the people" and in the name of "the people," claiming back the "nation" for those to whom it belongs. In other words, its primary claim is one of reparation—enabling a corrective of power inequalities and injustices. This is apparent in Shah's discussion of how a focus on economic inequality and corruption was able to bring together diverse societal sectors in Malaysia, leading the alliance of opposition actors to win against the incumbent political alliance in the 2018 election.

Unsurprisingly, populist discourse is often accompanied by narratives of victimhood that juxtaposes "the oppressed" against "the oppressor" in both moral and affective terms. As such, it can portray minorities and marginalized groups as "enemies" of the nation, as has been seen with a range of populist right wing parties in Europe since the 1990s (Berezin 2007, Mudde 2004, Učeň 2007), the populist appeals of both the Democrat and Republican Parties in the U.S. (Bonikowski and Gidron 2016), and with "Chavismo" versus "opposition" in Venezuela (Samet 2013). Such portrayal is possible mainly because of the ambiguity of the very term "the people." As Brubaker (2019: 13) reminds us "populist claims-making is located at the juncture of the *politics of inequality* and the *politics of identity*" (original emphasis). Yanasmayan et al. draw attention to this juncture in their discussion of migration debates in Turkey by the incumbent and opposition parties.

Populism, in a way, "presents [a] rupture with an existing order" but also "introduces 'ordering' where there is basic dislocation" (Laclau 2005:122). This duality opens up many possibilities in terms of the extent to which such populist logic continues to prevail in the political system (see, for instance, Pappas 2014). In other words, the deployment of populist discourse for strategic purposes might not necessarily imply that such discourse will continue once a populist

party is in power (Bonikowski 2016), if it manages to come into power, that is. Articles by Toygar Sinan Baykan, Peker, and Yanaşmayan et al. explore cases where political parties continue to deploy a populist discourse once they come into power. Such continuation arguably facilitates further consolidation of power by the ruling political party. During this process, populist discourse remains unstable, as the parameters of the "common enemy" change depending on the shifts in alliances among political actors.

This second phase of populist rule and power maintenance is rather different than the deployment of populist discourse to come into political power, as, in the former, the struggle over state institutions and over who or what represents the people often overlap. In this second phase, the struggle for institutions is essentially over, as populists already control them. Political parties risk becoming the state itself, forcing an illiberal and even authoritarian departure from electoral democracy. Ultimately, this process might be tantamount to the formation of a partisan bureaucracy, as well as a partisan base, founded on an allegiance to the ruling political party and political leader. In order to retain power, incumbent populists often resort to utilizing additional tools as populist discourse by itself does not suffice to maintain power. Building patronage networks is, for instance, a commonly used strategy by ruling populists. In his article on the role of intra-elite factionalism in the growth of populism in Turkey, Baykan demonstrates the vitality of such networks for the continuation of the incumbent Justice and Development Party (JDP) rule.

Interestingly, the definition of "the people" keeps changing throughout this phase, contingent on the political aims, needs and tactics of the populist actors. It is, thus, also arguably the phase when the boundaries between populism and nationalism (of various sorts) might get increasingly blurred, reproducing existing stereotypes and value judgments that solidify divisions among fellow nationals*. Although populism and nationalism often get conflated in literature, De Cleen (2017) suggests that they differ from each other in that populism locates membership in "the people" on a vertical axis, putting emphasis on the dichotomy between "the elites" (upper strata) and "the people" (lower strata). Nationalism, on the other hand, locates membership in the nation on a horizontal axis, putting emphasis on the dichotomy between "fellow nationals" (in the nation) and foreigners (outside the nation). Yet, despite this difference, Brubaker argues (2019), the two are analytically dependent on each other and they usually intersect to produce an exclusionary image of "the nation" narrowed down to "the people," as envisaged by populist actors. Shah, for instance, demonstrates this via his discussion on how ethnoreligious nationalism characterizing the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition have surfaced in the form of "morality" during the Pakatan Haratan (PH) rule, motivating the reactions from within the newly elected PH government to the LGBT+ controversies. This emphasis on the friction within the ruling bloc about the LBGT+ community helps highlight both the question of what happens when populist actors come into power and how the intersection of populism and ethnoreligious nationalism impacts who is included in "the people."

An overview of the articles

The four articles featured in this special issue all focus, in varying ways, on the questions of how populist actors construct "the people," how they establish and maintain their rule, and how social cleavages and historical diversity impact this process. Going beyond the discursive and stylistic emphasis that currently prevails within the scholarship on populism, Toygar Sinan Baykan reminds us of the focus early populism scholars had on "the cross-class/group appeals and the coalitions upon which the populist movements, parties and leaders relied." Under that rubric, he invites us to think about the relationship between upper-classes and populist leaders and

* Note that the reproduction of existing stereotypes to bring about further polarization in the society is not particular only to the second phase; it might, and does, occur in the first phase as well.

parties—an area that is often overlooked in the literature.

In the specific case of Turkey, Baykan argues, the support from within the bourgeoisie for the ruling JDP cannot be understood without an analysis of differentiation within the business elites along cultural and political lines—the secular, urban first generation bourgeoisie vs. the conservative, rural second generation—a differentiation the roots of which lie in the social cleavages that have been in place since early Republican times. Through a historical tracing of how two main factions within the bourgeoisie emerged and evolved, Baykan demonstrates that the JDP was able to deepen its patronage networks by incorporating "the underdog business faction" that has rapidly accumulated financial capital and influence, while lacking cultural capital.

With a similar emphasis on the need to focus on networks and historical cleavages, Efe Peker traces the intersection of populism with religion through a case study of India under the rule of Narendra Modi's BJP. In exploring how Hinduism is articulated by the BJP as "part of a national-populist programme in India," Peker takes populism beyond a mere focus on discourse. Employing a theoretical framework that builds on social movements studies he looks into the means and temporality of how BJP mobilized masses and underlines the vitality of two factors: First, a discursive construction of "the pure Hindu people" against the "corrupt secular elites" and against "non-Hindu enemies"; second, the existence of a historically-established network of grassroots *Hindutva* organizations, namely the Sangh Parivar, headed by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the BJP's parent organization. Increasing communal polarization, especially since the 1980s, plays a catalysing role, in Peker's narrative, not only in normalizing the BJP's ethno-religious rhetoric but also in its ability to increase its popular support. However, were it not for the charisma of Modi, Peker argues, Hindutva would perhaps have not reached "its most forceful populist moment." Overall, Peker's adoption of a social movements approach in analysing how religion is articulated as a majoritarian tool in BJP's populism allows him to surface the role of grassroots dynamics and historical processes in not only populist actors' rise to power but also in the ways in which they maintain that power.

The third article by Zeynep Yanaşmayan, Ayşen Üstübici and Zeynep Kaşlı also focuses attention on a case where populists continue to deploy populist discourse, as well as existing social cleavages, after they come into power, i.e. Turkey. Through an overview of immigration debates in party programs, parliamentary proceedings and public statements by presidential candidates between 2014 and 2018, Yanaşmayan et al. demonstrate that the ruling JDP has established a hegemonic civilizationist populist discourse that welcomes refugees from Syria on the basis of religious (Muslim) brotherhood and neo-Ottomanist aspirations. Opposition parties criticize the JDP's policies towards refugees mainly as a foreign policy issue, on the one hand, and they at times posit refugees as economic and social threats to the well-being of Turkish citizens, on the other hand. Yet, they also affirm JDP's moral superiority claim against the "anti-immigrant West." Overall, the domination of the JDP's civilizationist populist rhetoric about 3,5 million refugees who currently reside in Turkey leaves almost no space for a rights-based approach. These empirical findings confirm those within the literature that a dominant anti-immigrant discourse, as prevalent in the West, has no relation to the actual number of migrants in a country. Moreover, their emphasis on the JDP's selective definition of "the people," based only on religious identity, and the articulation, at the societal level, of an alternative definition, based on ethnic identity, draws attention to the importance of exploring migration debates in places of high ethnic and religious diversity.

With a similar focus on the role of morality in party politics, Shanon Shah looks at the ways in which populism as a form of moral politics played an effective role in the electoral defeat of Malaysia's authoritarian government in the 2018

elections. Shah argues that the opposition alliance PH, which includes a wide array of societal sectors, was able to win against the incumbent BN by mobilizing a diverse body of constituencies on the basis of economic grievances. PH's strategy to represent the corruption scandal that involved the state-created sovereign wealth fund—1MDB—as a moral deficit of the ruling elites, Shah argues, was influential to weaken the appeal of BN's simultaneous (and perhaps also contradictory) commitments to economic development, supremacy of Islam and Malaysia's multicultural heritage. However, the successful deployment by the PH of a populist rhetoric to win the election, catalysed by an increasing splintering within the ruling bloc, might not necessarily amount to, Shah urges us, the institutionalization of an inclusive politics. The most recent controversies around LGBT+ rights demonstrate the salience of fault-lines within the PH and a lack of internal consensus concerning the exclusionary ethno-religious nationalism prevalent in the country.

Overall, the articles in this special issue take a step forward in understanding how existing societal cleavages influence the workings of populism and vice versa, especially in historically-diverse societies. A historically-constituted ethnoreligious understanding of the "people" often makes it easier for populist actors to mobilize masses against internal "enemies," as Peker shows in the case of India. In addition to helping populists gain power, mobilization of ethnoreligious cleavages can also trigger internal conflicts and fractions once populist actors are in power, as Shah demonstrates in the case of Malaysia. The Turkish case, on the other hand, showcases, as demonstrated by Yanaşmayan et al. and Baykan, the ways in which religious, ethnic and class cleavages can intertwine with one another in populist mobilization.

Even though research on populism has lately proliferated with numerous scholars producing an invaluable body of work on the topic to better understand increasing democratic de-consolidation and polarization around the globe, we still know very little on the relationship between societal cleavages and populism. In putting together this special issue, our aim has been to address this question by drawing attention to how populism works under the shadow of dissonant diversities and fragmented politics. We believe that the four articles featured in this issue, and their focus on the different aspects of this process in Turkey, Malaysia, and India, all serve to fulfil this aim. We hope that future research will complement our endeavour with a comparative focus on other countries with similar characteristics.

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Populism and the Bourgeoisie: The Role of Intra-Elite Factionalism in the Growth of Populism in Turkey

by Toygar Sinan Baykan (Kırklareli University)

Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the role of upper-class elements in the rise of contemporary populism by focusing on the socio-cultural divide and factionalism within the Turkish business class. Current scholarship on populism revolves around the discursive, strategic and stylistic-performative dimensions; but the revival of populism—and the reaction against it—in our age has its own political sociology based on various coalitions of distinct social forces with diverging economic and mobilisational capacities and resources. Classical and contemporary studies analysing the social bases of populism have overwhelmingly focused on the role of lower socio-economic segments. This paper, in contrast, deploys a historical and socio-cultural analysis to highlight the role of upper-classes in the rise of populism today, and argues that economic and socio-cultural factionalism within the bourgeoisie paves the way for the "underdog" bourgeois factions to support populist politics.

1 Introduction*

The rapport between populist leaders and low-income peripheral majorities is vital for the phenomenon of populism to thrive.[1] Yet, the cross-class/group nature of populism is evident, as is the ability of populist actors to engage with seemingly different social and status groups (Conniff, 1999:14). While it is absolutely vital for populist parties and leaders to incorporate the masses, the populist ruling elite do not usually experience similar socio-economic conditions to their low-income constituencies. Instead, populist political elites may come from higher socio-economic status groups and the constituencies of populist parties tend also to include upper-class elements. The relationship between populists and popular sectors is relatively understandable, since the hallmark of populism is a "plebeian culture and mannerism" (Panizza, 2005: 24), a "low" socio-cultural and political-cultural appeal (Ostiguy, 2017), and the distinction it makes between the people and the elite. But what explains the relationship between populist politics and some sections of the elite, the upper-middle classes and specific segments of the "business classes" or the "bourgeoisie"?[2] How can we understand

* It was Francisco Panizza who pointed out the important role played by factionalism within the bourgeoisie in the rise of populism in his comments on the paper I presented at the APSA conference in 2016. His comments inspired the writing of this paper. I also benefitted immensely from the criticism and suggestions of the co-editors of this special issue, Gülay Türkmen and Sinem Adar, as well as the recommendations of two anonymous reviewers. I am indebted to all for their valuable contributions.

[1] See studies on populism in Latin America that highlight popular sector mobilization as the basis of the phenomenon, e.g. Ostiguy (1997), Knight (1998), de la Torre (2000), Collier and Collier (2002 [first edition: 1991]), Levitsky (2003). See also Norris and Inglehart (2019) for the emphasis they put on a similar social basis in their analysis of the current rise of populism in established Western democracies.

[2] In the rest of the paper, I will usually refer to these business classes as "the bourgeoisie". By the term "bourgeoisie", I do not refer to the urban middle and

the strong support some populist parties enjoy among certain economically privileged segments of their constituencies?

This paper seeks to answer these questions through a close examination of the case of Turkey. Turkey's modern history since the foundation of the Republic in 1923 represents a key case in this analysis since it contains a broad variety of examples of the relationship between the bourgeoisie and party politics as well as a history of solid factionalism within the business class that is embedded in the socio-cultural divides of Turkey. Therefore, the case of Turkey has theoretically and empirically inspired the entire analysis in this study. In this paper, I argue that the bourgeois support for populist actors in a given setting is related to the emergence of different factions within the business class with different judgements of taste and uneven cultural capital. Methodologically, this paper engages in a historical analysis that focuses on the relations between politics and different factions of Turkey's business class. In order to complete this historical analysis, the paper particularly focuses on the socio-cultural reflections of factionalism present within the Turkish business class by examining the perceptions contained in various academic and semi-academic accounts, newspaper commentaries and popular culture products that evaluate Turkey's upper-classes, the lifestyles and political engagements of members of different business factions, and the public statements of politicians in Turkey regarding the Turkish business elite.

2 First- and second-wave literature on populism: bringing social forces and socio-cultural affinities back into the current debate

In the last couple of decades, we have witnessed a renewed interest in populism. Most of these studies, with their attention to conceptual clarity and concept building, underline the importance of either discursive elements (Mudde, 2004; Hawkins, 2010), strategic dynamics (Weyland, 2001), or stylistic components (Moffitt, 2016; Ostiguy, 2017) of populism. Although first-wave studies (starting with Ionescu and Gellner's seminal 1969 volume) misleadingly associated populism with certain social classes and stages of development, their efforts to draw attention to the social forces behind the phenomenon should be acknowledged. In contrast, the current focus on the form and content of the populist message and rapport has diverted the attention of students of populism away from the social forces behind the phenomenon.[3] The role of rural segments and radical middle classes in the rise of populism in North America was addressed by first-wave studies.[4] In western Europe, Betz, for example, underlined the fact that in the 1980s and 1990s, radical right-wing populist parties were supported overwhelmingly by "less well educated working- or lower middle-class voters" (1994: 156). More important than this, while conflating patron-client relations, import-substitution economy and populism, some studies from the first-wave literature were at the same time addressing a very important dynamic with regards to populism: the cross-class/group appeals and the coalitions upon which populist movements, parties and leaders relied.[5]

It is surprising to see that while populism is still a cross-class/group phenomenon, this dimension of populism is rarely highlighted in the current literature,[6] since many studies have moved away from more empirical analyses with a focus on the social class dynamics behind the phenomenon in order to focus on the discourse and appeal of populism.[7] Although some schol-

upper classes, but rather to businesspeople in the possession of means of production and capital and who employ several or more workers in their businesses.

3 In addition to the classic volume by Ionescu and Gellner (1969), see also Germani (1978) and Collier and Collier (2002).

4 See particularly the chapter on American populism by Canovan (1981) and Hofstadter (1969).

5 See Stewart (1969).

6 An important exception here is the account of V. R. Hadiz (2016) on Islamic populism.

7 Studies comparatively analysing the socio-economic and socio-cultural profiles of populist constit-

ars and commentators have paid attention to the obvious irony that certain wealthy populist leaders, such as Berlusconi in Italy, Palmer in Australia, and Trump in the US, have so little in common in socio-economic terms with their low-income, peripheral constituencies, the relationship between upper-classes and populist leaders and parties is still an underexplored phenomenon. Yet, it is enormously important to understand the reasons for this strange chemistry between resource-rich populist leaders (some of whom are wealthy), upper and middle classes and popular sectors. What, exactly, has brought these different socio-economic groups together in a populist movement/party? How are certain segments of the bourgeoisie able to generate populist appeals when promising a better future for the unprivileged, ordinary people? What connects rich populist leaders with their low-income constituencies?

In order to address these questions, in this paper, I embrace Pierre Ostiguy's approach (2017) to populism, which considers the phenomenon as the politicization of the socio-cultural hierarchies and divides in a given society through a populist style and script. Ostiguy defines populism as "the antagonistic, mobilizational flaunting in politics of the culturally popular and 'native', and personalism as a mode of decision making" (2017: 84). According to Ostiguy, this stylistic aspect is complemented with a populist script which celebrates the downtrodden, excluded "people from here" against domestic and international elites (2017: 76-77). Therefore, his definition shares core features with other predominant definitions in the literature.

Nevertheless, Ostiguy's approach moves beyond these stylistic[8] and discursive elements and incorporates the analysis of populism with social divides/cleavages[9] and the formation of party systems. He argues that the distinction between anti-populism and populism (or "high" and "low", as termed by Ostiguy) is orthogonal to the distinction between left and right, and these axes together form a "two-dimensional political space" in many party systems (2017: 77-88). This also means that populism could be combined with left or right and it is independent of ideological and programmatic appeals regarding the distribution of wealth and power. For Ostiguy, while "high" politics stems from a political and historical legacy that aims to modernise or civilise societies from the top, "low" represents a kind of resistance to these "modernizing" or "civilizing" missions. The low is usually in congruence with the historically entrenched and spontaneous cultural inclinations of the masses, which could be religious, patriarchal, nationalistic, nativist, egalitarian, popular, low-brow, non-sophisticated, and so on, in their content (2017: 75-84).

In contrast to Ostiguy's approach, neither Mudde's (2004) minimal definition nor Laclau's (2005) discursive approach nor Weyland's (2001) strategical understanding helps researchers to fully engage in a kind of historically informed analysis that is sensitive to historical resentments and social tensions underlying the phenomenon of populism. This does not mean that the definition and methods proposed by Mudde and Kaltwasser, Laclau or Weyland are inadequate or wrong. In fact, for example, the minimal defini-

uencies are limited. For a couple of recent analyses engaged in such an inquiry, see Norris and Inglehart (2019) and Spruyt et al. (2016).

8 The link that connects Ostiguy's approach to a kind of political sociology of party systems is precisely the fact that he sees populism as something embedded in the populist actors' and audiences' "manners, demeanours, ways of speaking and dressing, vocabulary, and tastes displayed in public" (2017: 78). There remains only a small step from this point to connect populist style with a kind of socio-cultural habitus embedded in social divisions. See Ostiguy's explanation in Baykan (2018a). Populism can appropriate different divides and it is not necessarily related to social class distinctions in *economic* terms. In my view, populism can also be related to a sense of poverty and/or deprivation in *cultural* or *moral* terms, something widespread among populist actors and audiences.

9 See a body of literature starting with Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) seminal account and including more recent takes on the issue such as the work by Deegan-Krause (2007), which essentially argue that party systems are based on overlapping and diverging economic, social and cultural cleavages or divides.

tion proposed by Mudde (2004) can be extremely useful in both small-N and large-N comparative studies of contemporary populism.[10] Yet, for an analysis such as the one developed in this paper, which takes a longitudinal view on the development of populism in a single case, it seems indispensable to incorporate the public discourse and performance of populist actors with a social, historical and cultural background narrated through a "thick description" (Geertz, 1993). Hence, Ostiguy's approach has the potential to develop a historically and sociologically anchored understanding of the phenomenon that does not consider populism as something merely ideational, discursive or stylistic. Therefore, in this analysis, I focus on the socio-economic as well as socio-cultural components of social divides in Turkey by examining factionalism within the Turkish bourgeoisie.

3 Factionalism within the Turkish bourgeoisie and its socio-cultural consequences

3.1 Historical background

The initial formation of the Turkish business class in the late Ottoman period paved the way for future factionalism within the bourgeoisie. The ascent of the Turkish business class accompanied a process of, what Brubaker (1995) called, "unmixing of peoples", in which non-Muslim merchants and businessmen were gradually "cleansed" as a result of the increasingly nationalistic orientation and policies of the Ottoman military and bureaucratic elite. The catastrophes of World War I and its aftermath resulted in the destruction and expulsion of the majority of non-Muslim ethnic groups in Turkey, such as Armenians and Anatolian Greeks. A considerable number of people from these ethnic groups were engaged in trades, commerce and business (Göçek, 1999). The wealth left behind by these populations, as well as their privileged positions in the economy, were subsequently transferred to Muslim merchants and businessmen through the intervention of the political and state elite.[11] Hence, the late Ottoman period and the early Republican era (roughly from 1923 to the middle of the 1940s) represented a phase of rapid rise for a Muslim and Turkish business elite under the auspices of an increasingly nationalistic Turkish state (Atagenç, 2017: 74; Karaveli, 2018).

Yet, the decisive secularist turn of the state during the foundation of the Republic sowed the seeds of a future rift by gradually incorporating the embryonic business class into the secular nation building process.[12] Factions of this new business class close to the secularist ideology and centre of the state enjoyed unprecedented privileges, while peripheral and provincial segments were pushed away by this increasingly secularist state ideology. The rise of the submissive secularist "fat cats" (Cammett, 2005) in commerce, industries and finance during the early Republican era and the incorporation of the first-generation bourgeoisie with a secular metropolitan urban culture started to create an "underdog" business class embracing a conservative and populist worldview.

This recently-arrived business faction (mainly consisting of landowners, small and provincial merchants) turned to the masses and to seasoned populist leaders for the protection of their factional interests. The underdog business faction also embraced a populist and conservative political worldview since "Islam" was the important virtual component of the "Turkishness" that was constructed during the early Republican period (Yıldız, 2001; Çağaptay, 2006). For those elites, the secular nation-building process ignored and belittled this important component:

[10] See editions by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012) and Hawkins et al. (2018) for this merit of the minimal definition.

[11] I would like to point out the importance of the complicity between the first-generation bourgeoisie in Turkey and the state during the Turkification of Anatolia during the first quarter of the 20th century. This was accompanied by a massive wealth transfer from non-Muslim groups to Muslim merchants and was a very crucial moment which transformed Turkey's business elite into submissive accomplices of the state at a very early stage of their emergence. See Keyder (2003).

[12] See Keyder (2003) for these economic developments.

the "true self" of the nation. Hence, class factionalism and cultural divisions started to overlap and intermingle, creating the cross-class coalitions of "populists" (the political tradition roughly encompassing conservative right to centre-right positions) and "anti-populists" (the political tradition encompassing positions stretching from secular left to secular and liberal right) in Turkey.

From the perspective of political economy, the rift within the Republican People's Party and the rise of the Democrat Party from within the former, in the middle of the 1940s, could also be seen as an outcome of this class factionalism, which pushed landowners and provincial merchants to defend their rights through a kind of conservative populism that effectively mobilised the poor rural and urban masses (Eroğul, 2014; Karaveli, 2018: 113-123). It is important to note that the organisational and mobilisational capacity of this populist centre-right tradition has largely been linked to its populist style and script, more than to its religious appeal. As the works of Demirel (2004; 2009; 2011) illustrate in rich and vivid detail, vast majorities in Turkey were drawn to the appeal of these new centre-right political parties, to a great extent, due to their cadres' warm, "humane" (2011: 123) attitude when making contact with the masses, as well as their successful implementation of urban and rural patronage. This contrasts with the highly reserved and bureaucratic approach of the Republican People's Party elite towards the masses.

After the coup of 27 May 1960, this conservative and populist tradition was inherited by the Justice Party of Süleyman Demirel, who had an extraordinary ability to engage with the low-income and poorly educated sectors of Turkish society (Komşuoğlu, 2007). Although the Justice Party of Demirel was by no means a major opponent of Turkey's first generation business faction, it helped the second-generation bourgeoisie to grow in major urban centres across Turkey throughout the 1960s and 1970s. After the coup of 12 September 1980 and during the 1980s, the major representative of the populist centre-right in Turkey was Özal and his Motherland Party. While the Motherland Party was by no means an enemy of secular big business in Turkey either, the party's liberal policies targeting the dissolution of the import substitution economy of the previous era, in which the state was a major player, mainly benefitted the second generation bourgeoisie (the "underdog", small- and medium-sized business groups) in Turkey. These groups took advantage of the somewhat more competitive economy of the era and the new opportunities provided by the liberalisation of international trade (Şen, 2010: 71). The economic liberalisation of the era combined well with the colourful and down-to-earth personality of Özal, whose warm and relaxed demeanour in the public space appealed to a cross-class coalition, including the urban poor.

In the 1990s, however, the growth of Turkey's underdog bourgeoisie found itself under dual pressure when Özal passed away and his Motherland Party lost momentum and entered a period of gradual dissolution. This dual pressure stemmed from both the secularist state elite and the Islamist Welfare Party of Necmettin Erbakan, whose ideas on economy (or, more precisely, his hostility towards liberal market arrangements) were becoming increasingly alienating for small- and medium-sized conservative business circles across Anatolia (Yıldırım, 2016: 88). Meanwhile, at least from the middle of the 1990s, the underdog conservative business faction in Turkey sought to curb the power of the secular establishment, and its secular big bourgeoisie, by supporting liberalisation and reducing the size of the state (Atasoy, 2009: 118-120). This was one of the factors that paved the way, at the beginning of the 2000s, for the rise of Erdoğan's JDP (The Justice and Development Party – *Adalet ve Kalk*ınma Partisi) (Jang, 2005), which was strongly supported by the new Islamic bourgeoisie in Turkey and their business association (Gümüşçü & Sert, 2009; Şen, 2010; Hoşgör, 2011). In a comparative study, Buğra (1998) illustrates the concrete differentiation within the Turkish business class: while the established, secular big business

is organized under the roof of the TÜSİAD (*Türk Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği* – The Association of Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen), the new provincial business faction, which became enriched after the 1980s, is organized under a different business association: MÜSİAD (*Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği* – The Association of Independent Industrialists and Businessmen).

Regardless of their sincere beliefs and the factual validity of their claims, the business association of the second-generation bourgeoisie in Turkey always presented the business faction it represented as the hard-working Anatolian entrepreneurs who have always been treated unfairly by the secular state and big business. As Lord observed: "MÜSİAD … has typically asserted that it represents Anatolian national capital, a bottom-up social (Muslim) movement in a Muslim society that it claims has been deprived of access to resources previously dominated by minority, monopolistic İstanbul rentier capital that comprises an elitist group of secularist Kemalist bureaucrats and big business and that are dependent on state patronage. Narratives of victimhood pervade the body's discourse, with MÜSİAD's journey being described as a 'painful walk from periphery to the centre' while facing discrimination and being impeded by the Kemalist elite and centre" (2018: 176). In fact, the second generation business elite or the "new Islamic bourgeoisie" in Turkey explained the rationale behind the presence of MÜSİAD vis-à-vis TÜSİAD through a distinction between "the people" and "the elite", and by presenting themselves as the representatives of the "Anatolian people and lower strata" in the business world against the "elitism of the İstanbul capital (*İstanbul sermayesi*)" (Yankaya, 2014: 103).

The worldview of the second generation bourgeoisie and their material expectations of Erdoğan's JDP led this class faction to incorporate itself into Erdoğan's populist project.[13] The rise of the JDP was, after all, based on a very well organised party structure across Turkey that penetrated into the smallest corners of the country (Baykan, 2018b). This organisation facilitated a large and all-encompassing clientelistic network across Turkey. Apart from the economic growth registered during the early phases of JDP rule and Erdoğan's highly convincing populist style, these clientelistic networks were also key to the party's success, and crucial, therefore, for protecting the interests of Turkey's underdog business factions. As Esen and Gümüşçü (2017) and Lord (2018: 202) illustrate, in return for privileges in state bids and other business-related regulations that particularly benefit small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs, second generation bourgeoisie in Turkey financially supported the JDP's clientelistic networks by pouring money and aid in kind into waqfs, religious charities (Göçmen, 2014) or party branches, to be distributed to the urban and rural poor.

Here, the importance of these underdog businessmen sharing a common socio-cultural background and habitus with their workers and "clients"[14] cannot be stressed too much. Academic monographs based on detailed ethnographic research and interviews documenting the rise of the "Anatolian tigers" or "the underdog business faction" in Turkey demonstrate the painful childhoods of these emerging "patrons" spent in poverty and in grim working conditions (Cengiz, 2013). As a result, these businessmen were well aware of the problems and expectations of low-income and poorly educated constituencies and had a kind of natural affinity with the populist style of Erdoğan and the JDP. In addition, these upper-class elements of Turkish society had the advantage of "speaking the same language" (Cengiz, 2013: 163-164) as their "clients" and subordinates, and of being able to convert them to a "hegemonic project" that was not entirely working to their benefit (Tuğal, 2009).

In contrast, the first generation bourgeoisie,

[13] For the populism of the JDP, see Dinçşahin (2012), Yabancı (2016), Çelik and Balta (2018) and Baykan (2018b).

[14] The term "client" here refers to the literature on patron-client relations.

after a phase of "primitive accumulation", so to speak, under the auspices of the state elite, started to take their privileges for granted as they obeyed the secularist state and powerful politicians.[15] Hence, it was never a viable or necessary strategy for the first generation bourgeoisie to construct grassroots clientelistic networks or actively engage in politics by explicitly supporting parties and politicians. Although the first generation bourgeoisie have not been harmed during the JDP's rule, more recently, they have started to feel less and less secure in economic terms as power is concentrated in the hands of Erdoğan and as the judiciary has lost much of its independence after the transition to the presidential system (T24, 2019). This has recently driven Turkey's first generation bourgeoisie to engage more pro-actively in politics.[16]

*3.2 A closer glance at the socio-cultural dimension of factionalism within the business class: "cultured fat cats" against "*parvenues*"*

The historical background briefly described above gave rise to socio-cultural factionalism within the Turkish bourgeoisie. On the one hand, throughout the Republican period, the first generation of the secular bourgeoisie, or the "fat cats", who were supported by the Kemalist regime, became gradually detached from their provincial origins and located in big cities, particularly in İstanbul. The country's secular bourgeoisie became increasingly incorporated into the secular nation building process. Although they carefully refrained from any explicit association with the Republican People's Party,[17] they represented the Kemalist ideals of Republican citizenry with an emphasis on their cultural capital in their daily lives. For example, regardless of the factual consistency of his portrayal of the *nouveau riche*, İshak Alaton, a member of Turkey's first generation secular bourgeoisie expressed the following view of the second-generation bourgeoisie, highlighting the socio-cultural component of factionalism within the Turkish business class:

> Those in the first group know a few languages. They are cultured, they are into fine arts and classical music. They contribute to Turkey's image as a developed country. They are philanthropists, they are tolerant… [For the second generation bourgeoisie] financial power is at the forefront. They try to counterbalance their lack of culture with generous gestures, by spending a lot of money…They mistreat waiters and frequently insult service personnel. Their watches have thick golden straps ornamented with jewellery. They frequently wear a wide open shirt and you can see their thick golden necklaces (as cited in Bali, 2002: 39-40).

In contrast, the most prominent representatives of the country's secular bourgeoisie, the Koç and Sabancı families, gradually directed their economic capital into cultural investments, and, in recent decades, have become formidable patrons of arts and sciences. Koç and Sabancı families support numerous museums and art events, and, more importantly, they have financed two high-quality private universities: Koç and Sabancı Universities. The leading figures of these families have started to be perceived as part of Turkey's high culture. For instance, a member of the Koç family who had started to appear in the ruling

[15] See Buğra (1995; 1998) for the submissive attitude of the first-generation bourgeoisie in Turkey in relation to the state elite and politicians.

[16] One of the leading members of the Koç family visited Istanbul's newly elected mayor from the Republican People's Party after the contested election result, even though the family was well aware of the fact that the JDP government was preparing to appeal against the election results (Habertürk, 2019).

[17] The submissive public attitude of the first-generation secular bourgeoisie in their relations with the populist rule of the JDP should be discussed in this context. Public figures from Koç and Sabancı families frequently appear in newspapers and on TV reluctantly confirming government policies or cautiously criticizing them. Yet, I also think that in these cases, the "hidden transcripts" (the views that the first-generation bourgeoisie cannot state publicly) are entirely different. It is also remarkable to see the zealous support for government policies among the second-generation bourgeoisie, provided by figures such as Galip Öztürk. Such an attitude is entirely lacking in the first-generation bourgeoisie, who, time and again, do not shy away from upsetting the JDP government by commemorating Atatürk through high-quality advertisements in newspapers and on TV.

bodies of the Koç Group was welcomed by columnists in the secular media:

> Ömer Koç graduated from Robert College high school and studied at Columbia University in New York, completing an MBA at the same university. He lives in London and İstanbul. … He knows English and French and has a serious collection of French literature. At his home, there are pictures of great artists, such as Egon Schiele and Francis Bacon, as well as a huge collection of İznik ceramics (Eğin, 2016).

On the other hand, there was a silent capital accumulation process in Anatolia during the 1970s and 1980s, by which time the country's secular bourgeoisie had already accumulated a considerable amount of influence and fortune and started to transform their economic resources into cultural and symbolic capital. Increasing urbanization and industrialization in Turkey brought new waves of entrepreneurs to Turkish cities. While some of these entrepreneurs came from an already rich stratum of traditional local elites, such as large landowners, some of this new small-scale entrepreneurial class consisted, at the beginning, of poor immigrants in the country's medium-sized and large cities. Within a generation or two of their emergence, they had acquired great wealth through commerce, and subsequently through small-scale production in many medium-sized cities across Turkey and in İstanbul. Unlike the gradual growth of the secular bourgeoisie (or "fat cats") over decades and under state protection, these new and relatively small businesses and their owners rapidly found themselves with considerable wealth and influence while lacking cultural and symbolic capital.

This rapid rise and the mismatch between the economic and cultural capital of these new entrepreneurial groups generated some deeply rooted stereotypes in Turkish culture following the 1960s. The country's secular bourgeoisie, as well as the urban upper and middle classes that had been rooted in cities for several generations, looked down upon this so-called *nouveau riche* (*türedi*) faction of the Turkish bourgeoisie. After the 1960s, the country's brightest artists began focusing on the rise of this so-called *parvenue* (*sonradan görme*) class. One of Turkey's most talented directors, Ömer Lütfi Akad, depicted the typical story of a provincial entrepreneurial family which migrated to a big city and enlarged its business through small-scale retailing in the 1970s. From the point of view of a young bride in the family, the movie *The Bride* (*Gelin*) tells the dramatic story of how this large family, consisting of an older mother and father and several married sons with children, accumulated its capital. The plot underlines the fact that while the family achieved its ambitions by expanding its business, this was accomplished at the cost of the life of a family member due to greed and a narrow-provincial outlook which disregarded the health complaints of the bride and the child. Hence, capital accumulation processes that Turkey's second generation bourgeoisie went through have disturbed the country's cultural elite and, despite acknowledging the diligence of these "provincial" (*taşralı*) entrepreneurs, a certain hostility towards these segments of the bourgeoisie has prevailed among Turkey's secular, urban upper and middle classes.

The new Islamic wealth created during the JDP era has also been looked down upon and evaluated with contempt by the secular upper and middle classes. For example, an architect who decorates the houses of the new Islamic bourgeoisie describes their taste as "extravagant, exaggerated, Arabic" (*T24,* 2009). Considering this new wealth and the tastes these segments have embraced, one of the columnists of the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, the bastion of secularist high culture in the Turkish media, does not even want to refer to these segments as bourgeois: "To be bourgeois is an elegant undertaking, which is not a suitable description for those who lack culture, experience in arts and living, who lack refined tastes moulded throughout centuries" (Aral, 2012). As highlighted by this comment, the contempt of the secularist upper and middle classes for Turkey's new bourgeoisie is obvious. Yet, it should also be mentioned that this socio-cultural rift between the first-generation bour-

geoisie and the second generation, rather more pious, business class also usually overlaps with the secular vs. religious, central-urban vs. provincial-rural separations. In this analysis, however, I am not embracing the centre-periphery paradigm (Mardin, 1973), as I agree with the criticisms drawing attention to its culturalist and dualist approach to Turkish politics (Açıkel, 2006) that solely focuses on the contestation over religion (Çınar, 2006) and its reductionist understanding of the concept of "state" (Navaro-Yashin, 1998). In fact, the socio-cultural rift that I highlight in this analysis extends beyond the contestation over religion and is not always and necessarily related to a struggle around the state. In the next part, I will take a closer look at some representatives of the business class that demonstrate the socio-cultural divide within the bourgeoisie in Turkey.

3.3 Turkey's "low" bourgeoisie that indirectly supports the JDP: Ağaoğlu

In order to see the cultural resonance between the second-generation bourgeoisie and populism in Turkey, in this section, I would like to take a closer look at a specific example. Ali Ağaoğlu is a popular media figure and a business tycoon specialising in real estate development in İstanbul. Ağaoğlu comes from a provincial region on Turkey's eastern Black Sea coast, famous for its street-smart, small-scale constructors. Although Ağaoğlu has no explicit political engagements with the JDP, he does not shy away from publicly praising the party (*Ensonhaber,* 2012), and his relations with Erdoğan, thought to have provided him with certain advantages in his investments, have been highlighted by an opposition deputy in Turkey's Grand National Assembly (*Sol,* 2012). Moreover, his rise to prominence, and to the status of a popular media icon, overlapped with the rise of the JDP drawing on a highly convincing populist style/appeal. Building on his father's fortune, Ağaoğlu enlarged his real estate construction business during the JDP years.

Ağaoğlu, a married man, often features in Turkish tabloid headlines with his various luxury cars and new girlfriends who are much younger than him. Unlike the country's first generation bourgeoisie, he enjoys showing off his fortune. For instance, he has emptied his pockets and counted his money on a live broadcast on CNN Turk and has many times caused sensation by what he says in interviews that belittle women (Türk, 2011). Although most of the JDP elite would refrain from such showy lifestyles that include extramarital relations, Ağaoğlu's tastes and pompous demeanour strikes a chord with the new public and official symbols and spaces created by the JDP and Erdoğan, such as the sumptuous new Presidential Palace. Not surprisingly, Ağaoğlu has always been received with visible hostility by Turkey's urban secular upper and middle classes. In the secular liberal media, he is usually depicted as a *nouveau riche* who lacks manners and taste. It is apparent that, socio-culturally, there is a huge gap between this new type of wealth and power and that of Turkey's well-entrenched secular upper and middle classes, who have been established in the country's big cities like İstanbul and Ankara for several generations.

3.4 First-generation bourgeoisie takes matters into its own hands – and fails: Boyner

The relationship between the bourgeoisie and politics in Turkey is, of course, not restricted to populist movements indirectly backed by the second-generation bourgeoisie. In the middle of the 1990s, the country's traditional secular bourgeoisie flirted temporarily with party politics when Cem Boyner, from a well-known family of textile industrialists in İstanbul (Öğüt, 2013), decided to lead a political organization called the New Democracy Movement (*Yeni Demokrasi Hareketi*). At that time, Boyner was in his late 30s. He had been educated at the country's most prestigious colleges and universities, such as Robert College and Boğaziçi University. He successfully managed his father's businesses during the 1990s and 2000s and chaired TÜSİAD.

When Boyner founded the New Democracy Movement with the backing of some of the

country's prominent liberal intellectuals such as Cengiz Çandar and Asaf Savaş Akad, Boyner's liberal democratic agenda was received with enthusiasm by Turkey's secular-liberal media. The Turkish political scene in the 1990s was characterized by the diminishing popular appeal of centre-right parties alongside the general decline of the legitimacy of the political system. The rise of this new party was seen as a promising possibility among the liberal intellectual circles. Boyner, after all, was not only a well-educated person committed to liberal values, but he was extremely telegenic too. He was handsome, fashionable and representing the ideals of Turkey's upwardly mobile urban middle classes in the 1990s in every respect. He was also a true Istanbulite gentleman with his manners, accent and taste in clothing (Bali, 2002: 190-194). Nevertheless, despite the support of Turkey's mainstream liberal media, the New Democracy Movement could only attract 0.5% of the vote in the 1995 general elections, and later on lost momentum and disappeared from the political arena. The quick fall of the New Democracy Movement illustrates that the kind of appeal that Boyner had is a liability more than an asset in Turkish politics. As Bali emphasizes (2002: 194), the majority of the electorate in Turkey attaches great importance to "candor" and a plebeian political style that resonates with the tastes of Turkey's lower classes. Moreover, personalism is more important than abstract ideological narratives (Baykan, 2019). In contrast, Boyner's political movement identified itself as an anti-populist force in Turkish politics which had a thick liberal doctrinaire content.[18]

4 Conclusions: populism and the upper-classes in Turkey and beyond

In this paper, I have examined the relationship between populist politics and the bourgeoisie by focusing on the case of Turkey. Although, many studies highlight the role of "popular sectors" or "social groups who feel left behind by a cultural shift" [19] or "poor and excluded segments", very few studies have examined the role of the upper classes in the phenomenon of populism. In this attempt, I have put a strong emphasis on the role of upper classes, more precisely, the business elite, and proposed to investigate the roles of resource-rich social segments in the rise of populism. I have pointed out the role of intra-class factionalism within the bourgeoisie, which distinguishes between well-established, globally connected, old business classes and new, smaller, more national or provincial bourgeoisie. I have demonstrated that the underdog bourgeoisie is prone to financially and organisationally support populist leaders and parties, as well as these leaders' and parties' clientelistic networks, in order to protect their class-factional interests through political patronage.

Based on the leaders and movements analysed so far, it is also clear that it is not only the socio-economic position of these figures but the appeal/style of the leader and his/her socio-cultural resonance with the populist audience and supporters -including the "underdog bourgeoisie" and "popular sectors"- that is key. Populist audiences have no major problem with socio-economic inequalities as long as there are no widespread feelings of economic insecurity (Norris & Inglehart, 2019), but they are more worried about being pushed aside socio-culturally as a result of socio-economic change (Gidron & Hall, 2017). It is even possible to argue that populist audiences and supporters enjoy the leadership of a strong man with economic resources who speaks the language of the poor and the excluded, and who embraces "plebeian mannerisms" and tastes.[20]

Therefore, it is not surprising to observe that populist audiences are so resistant to corruption accusations against their "leader." Populist audiences often enjoy how the leader "gets around"

[18] See Mahçupyan's analysis (1994), which juxtaposes the New Democracy Movement against Turkey's populist traditions, in an edition published by the New Democracy Movement.

[19] See Norris and Inglehart (2019).

[20] This part is based on the psychoanalytical dynamic highlighted by Ostiguy in an interview. See Baykan (2018a).

the official system and they may even be happy to think that the leader is getting stronger against the "establishment". Hence, these populist leaders emerge, in the eyes of populist audiences, as modern, national-scale "patrons", "caudillos" or "aghas/sultans" who appear to possess the resources to protect their supporters and solve their problems. Moreover, these "national-scale patrons" extract resources from culturally similar resource-rich upper-class sectors, or from "small patrons", in return for favours and privileges for their businesses, and redistribute these resources to their poor constituencies through charities and party branches.

Thus, it cannot be stressed enough how important it is to understand the upper-class component of the populist politics of our age. Without the personal or financial involvement of social sectors with considerable economic resources, such as new business elites, the populist projects of our age would have been remarkably weaker. As such, future research should focus more seriously on the elite component of populism to better understand the global rise of populism and the democratic backsliding related to this wave.

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Religious Populism, Memory, and Violence in India*

by Efe Peker (University of Ottawa)

Abstract

While the literature on right-wing populisms has focused on the phenomenon as an ideology, political style, and economic policy, populist interaction with religions, especially in non-Western cases, remains underexamined. Contributing to the study of religious populism, this article discusses the case of hindutva (Hindu nationalism) in India, concentrating on Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in power since 2014. From a social movements perspective, the analysis amalgamates three interrelated components: framing practices, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities. Regarding framing, the article deals with how the BJP redefines national identity and historical memory in exclusive association with Hinduism—at the expense of religious minorities. Concerning mobilizing structures, the BJP's grassroots network Sangh Parivar is examined as an extensive set of organizations promoting Hindu pre-eminence, as well as the personalized communication tools centred around Modi himself, fostering a quasi-sacralised image of the leader. Finally, post-1980 sectarian violence is recounted as a key political opportunity that facilitated the BJP's consolidation of power. Illustrating the aggressive articulation of Hinduism by the BJP via these three mechanisms, and incorporating an array of data such as the declarations of key figures in the movement, movement websites, newspaper articles, reports, as well as other historiographies and analyses, the article makes two theoretical propositions. First, it contends that a social movements outlook allows for a broader analysis of populism, one that takes into account grassroots forces and historical progression, which goes beyond understanding it merely as a rhetorical people-elite distinction. Second, it argues that religion warrants more attention in the literature as a cultural component of contemporary populisms. Shifting the focus to non-Western cases would help advance the study of the populism-religion nexus in its culturally and geographically variegated forms.

Introduction

In a grand inaugural event on October 31, 2018, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled the world's tallest statue on the banks of the Narmada River in Gujarat. Twice as tall as the Statue of Liberty, the 182-meter-high "Statue of Unity" depicts Sardar Patel, the "Iron Man of India", a hard-liner nationalist and pro-Hindu politician during India's independence movement. The choice of Patel, instead of secularly oriented founding leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru, is part of a larger turn towards Hindu nationalism as a populist political project in India, championed by Modi's *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) government. Having already declared Patel's birthday National Unity Day a few years earlier, Modi announced the Sardar Patel Award

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for National Integration, in December 2018, to be conferred annually to any citizen who contributed to national unity.

This article inquires into the articulation of Hinduism as part of a national-populist programme in India under Modi's BJP government, in power since 2014. Drawing on the social movements literature in political sociology, it examines the framing practices, mobilizing structures, and the political opportunities that have shaped *hindutva* (Hindu nationalism) as a populist phenomenon. With regard to framing, the article discusses how *hindutva* discursively redefines national identity and historical memory in exclusive reference to Hinduism. This rhetoric rests on a tripartite distinction typical of populism: "the people", "the elite", and "the others" (Marzouki, McDonnell, and Roy 2016). The BJP equates "the people" to the Hindu majority (roughly 80%), delineates "the elite" as the secular politicians and intellectuals centred around the Indian National Congress (henceforth Congress)—the founding party that ruled during most of the post-independence period—, and characterizes "the others" predominantly as non-Hindus, especially the Muslim minority (14%). As part of its belligerent rhetoric, the BJP often singles out Muslims as a source of imminent threat to national security, deemed in collusion with Congress, and, externally, with Pakistan.

Turning to mobilizing structures, the article lays out the symbiotic relationship between the BJP government and a vast network of grassroots *hindutva* organizations. Headed by *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), the BJP's parent organization, this network makes up *Sangh Parivar*, a family of several dozen entities ranging from unions and occupational organizations to news and communication networks, religious associations, think tanks, educational bodies, economic groups, and social service providers. These organizations endorse the ideal of *Hindu Rashtra*, a state with Hindu characteristics, underpinning national-populist discourses and policymaking to favour the primacy of the Hindu majority. In addition to these networks, this section also touches upon the highly effective (and affective) personalized mobilization tools created around Modi himself, promoting a quasi-sacralised image of the populist leader through a carefully orchestrated, technology-driven marketing campaign resting on Hindu symbolism.

Finally, the article recounts a key political opportunity that the BJP both benefited from and contributed to in the 1980s and after: increasing ethno-religious conflict and violence, especially between Hindus and Muslims. Episodes such as Sikh extremism and the Ayodhya disputes of the 1980s and the 1990s, the Gujarat Riots of 2002, and the Kashmir conflict with Pakistan helped solidify a militant support base for the Hindu cause. The BJP's populist policy framework to advance a communalist politics of fear through these items "allows political mobilization in the name of cultural defense, promotes a majoritarian nationalism in the name of challenging … secularism, justifies anti-minority violence … and legitimizes themselves perpetually in the name of defense of the Hindu nation" (Anand 2011: 151).

The article begins with a brief overview of the literature on populism, including its complex relationship with nationalism. Here, I follow Rogers Brubaker (2017, 2019) in defining the two phenomena as not entirely separate, but as inherently intertwined discourses that make up a "national-populist" moment in the singular. This section also examines the populist articulation of religions, which remains relatively underexamined, especially for non-Western polities. The subsequent section goes on to elaborate on the concepts of framing, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities in the social movements literature. It also lays out the benefits that accrue from using a social movements (SM) perspective in the analysis of contemporary populisms, particularly due to SM's sensitivity to grassroots dynamics and historical processes. The rest of the article draws on the tripartite theoretical scaffold of SM theory to explore religious populism in India, which has reached its zenith during Modi's rule in the post-2014 period. Each of

these three mechanisms attests to the centrality of religion's articulation as a majoritarian tool: in how "the people" are framed against the rest, in the religiously-inspired mobilizing networks and a quasi-sacralised Hindu leader, and the exploitation and further triggering of denominational violence for political gain.

By demonstrating the abundant utilization of Hinduism through these three mechanisms, the article draws upon an array of data such as the speeches, tweets, and books of key figures in the movement, websites of various *Sangh Parivar* fronts, newspaper articles, reports, as well as other historiographies and analyses on *hindutva*. Two theoretical propositions follow from the analysis: first, I put forward that a social movements approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of populism as more than a rhetorical framing tool based on a people-elite dichotomy. Populisms, including religiously-stimulated variants, often rely on various historically-rooted grassroots networks that seek ways to gain political power, which will be elucidated by the SM theory's analytical tools. Second, I argue that religion, as a cultural component of majoritarian politics, warrants more than the scant attention it has been given in populism scholarship. More particularly, shifting the focus beyond Western cases holds vast potential to expand the social scientific inquiry of the various ways in which national-populist movements get entangled with religions. The analysis further concludes that the BJP's religious populism has been straining India's democratic institutions and threatening the condition of religious minorities via its homogenizing project. The BJP's triumphant re-election in spring 2019 is likely to herald the exacerbation of these tendencies in the party's new term in power.

Populism, Nationalism, Religion

The scholarship on populism emphasizes the diverse aspects of the phenomenon as an ideology, political style, and economic policy (Müller 2016, Taggart 2000, Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). Despite the variety, there is a consensus that all populisms forge a dichotomy between the virtuous and disadvantaged "people" versus the privileged and corrupt "elite". The dichotomy is accompanied by the presence of malicious "others", who are portrayed as collaborating with the elites to deprive the "real people" of their essential rights, values, and wellbeing. Against the threat of the elite-other alliance, populists are anti-pluralist by definition, claiming that "they, *and only they,* represent the people" to take back power (Müller 2016: 20). The populist leader often emerges as a "charismatic strongman", a person of action with a "gift of grace", a political outsider that bypasses traditional institutions to have a direct relationship with "the people" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017: 63-66). Understood as a homogenous and morally superior community, "the people" are the real owners of an idealized heartland (Taggart 2000), facing increasing contamination from the elites and others.

Populism's relationship with nationalism is a complicated one. I subscribe to the theoretical framework proposed by Brubaker (2019, 2017), which recognizes the analytical distinction between the two concepts, but rejects operationalizing them as sharply independent. Brubaker critiques "purist" and one-dimensional formulations where nationalism and populism are seen as separate horizontal and vertical discourses, respectively. In this view, nationalism constructs "the people" through an in/out dichotomy between the "nation" and outsiders, while populism is structured around a down/up antagonism between the people "as underdog" versus the elite (see, for instance, De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017). While accepting these definitions, Brubaker (2019: 2, 10) devises a two-dimensional model of populism where the dual components are inherently "intersecting and mutually implicated", because "the tight interweaving of vertical and horizontal registers … is central to and constitutive of populist discourse". The ambiguity of multiple appeals to "the people" is precisely what gives populism its rhetorical and pragmatic power. To identify contemporary

right-wing mobilizations, Brubaker (2017: 1192) thus contends speaking of "a national-populist moment in the singular". This approach does not conflate populism with nationalism or reduce the latter into the former but highlights the "family resemblance" between the two systems of discourse (Brubaker 2019: 18).

How does religion come into play? Religiously-coloured populist and nationalist discourses are similarly fused. Religious nationalism is a distinctive kind of nationalism with discursive and institutional specificities. Discursively, it utilizes a sacred language to make "religion the basis for the nation's collective identity and the source of its ultimate value and purpose on earth" (Friedland 2001: 139). Institutionally, it establishes "links between politics and a particular religious group", privileges the majority religion via legal or other forms of favouritism, and "legitimates policy programs using religious values" (Soper and Fetzer 2018: 7). Much less studied, religious populism is "a form of populism that shares its conceptual centre but reproduces it in a specific religious key or fashion" (Zúquete 2017: 445). Religion similarly becomes an identity marker where populists mobilize religio-cultural resources to sacralise "the people" and moralise the cause, to reproduce a Manichean dichotomy of "good" versus "evil" against the elite-other coalition, and to inspire a mission of salvation (usually through a charismatic leader) (Arato and Cohen 2017, DeHanas and Shterin 2018).

National-populist engagement with religion is generally theologically impoverished and superficial. Such movements do not essentially embrace religion qua faith or doctrine, but lean on "religious tradition", that is, "the historical continuity of systems of symbols" that derive from religion, intermingling with ethnicity and nationality (Riesebrodt 2010: 55). Marzouki et al. (2016), for instance, demonstrate that virtually all right-wing populisms in the West discursively exploit Christianity (and Judaism in Israel) to fortify the border between "us" and "them"—often in a clash with the Church establishment. Sarkar et al. (1993), likewise, document the weak and opportunistic engagement of *hindutva* with the teachings of Hinduism. Yet while political appropriation devalues religion globally, the literature is increasingly sensitive to differences across cases, especially in the extent to which religion becomes constitutive in a given populist movement. Zùquete (2017: 460), for instance, distinguishes between "covert" and "overt" manifestations of religious populism and makes a call to expand to the non-Western world for better grasping such difference, because "the focus is still overwhelmingly Western-centric". DeHanas and Shterin (2018: 178) also indicate that non-Western religious populisms can possess distinctive characteristics. National-populist articulation of Islam in Turkey and Indonesia, Buddhism in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, and Hinduism in India and Nepal may indeed demonstrate more "overtly" religious manifestations than their North Atlantic counterparts. Without falling into a "West and the rest" essentialism, what the literature presently needs is empirical (and comparative) studies of the variegated and culturally/geographically specific displays of the populism-religion nexus. To contribute to this emergent research agenda, I employ a social movements perspective in my analysis of the Indian case.

Framing, Mobilizing Structures, Political Opportunities

The SM literature highlights three elements in the analysis of collective action: framing processes, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities (Benford and Snow 2000, McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, Tarrow 2011). Framing refers to how a social movement discursively creates the meaning and parameters of its contention. Mobilizing structures are about the social networks, organizations, and strategies of a given movement. Political opportunities concern the larger socio-institutional milieu that facilitates or hinders collective action. These three components are closely intertwined.

Political opportunities are events or processes that help a social movement advance its cause.

The literature highlights that these can range from shorter-term episodes such as wars, civil conflict, and international realignments to longer-term shifts such as demographic changes, industrialization, and prolonged unemployment. Opportunities can, therefore, denote brief openings for power change, or slow-paced currents stretched into multiple decades, providing the conditions for the emergence, sustainability, or success/failure of a movement (Tarrow 2011: 160, McAdam 1982: 40-43). Whether or not a movement can capitalize on such opportunities depends on its deployment of mobilizing structures. These refer to organizational networks providing membership, leadership, and communication mechanisms. Mobilizing structures are the "collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action" (McAdam et al. 1996: 3). Framing, finally, ignites, sustains, and develops mobilization by transforming the people's perception and emotions. It is the moral-cultural story that a movement tells itself, featuring the definition of the problem and attribution of blame, the identification of targets and strategies, and a call to action to ameliorate the situation (Benford and Snow 2000: 615).

Although both social movements and populism are primarily about mass mobilization against perceived elites, research on the two phenomena has mostly followed separate paths. To rectify the situation, a growing body of work proposes utilizing an SM perspective to advance the understanding of contemporary populisms (Roberts 2015). Aslanidis (2017), for instance, suggests seeing beyond the top-down rhetoric of the people versus the elite and underlines the investigation of populism's grassroots components. Jansen (2015), similarly, argues for shifting the attention from populism as a "thing" to "populist mobilization" as a dynamic and evolving phenomenon. Another advantage of the SM outlook is that it inevitably brings in a historical dimension to the phenomenon studied because social movement scholars are aware that "important processes unfold over time", and they "commonly find their way to history, sooner or later" (Markoff 2015: 68, 82). In my analysis of the Indian case, history features in two ways: in the twentieth-century evolution of *hindutva* as a national-populist movement, and in the movement's reframing of historical memory from a pro-Hindu standpoint.

An SM approach remains relevant even when populists end up taking political power (as is the case with *hindutva*). This is true for at least two reasons. First, as Tilly and Tarrow (2015: 7) elucidate, the study of contentious politics is not limited to insurgent/oppositional movements targeting the state. Governments can also be "initiators of claims", thus a legitimate object of analysis from an SM perspective. Second, as the scholarship dealing with populists in power confirm, populism is energized by a permanent state of collective mobilization even when ruling because it keeps on propagating the image of the elites still in control behind the scenes (Pappas 2019, Urbinati 2019). The rest of the article teases out how the three mechanisms of framing, mobilization, and opportunities play out in the case of religious populism in India.

The Long March of *Hindutva*

With its ideational origins dating back to the 19th century, the popularization of the term *hindutva* is owed to the writings of the Indian politician V.D. Savarkar in the 1920s. *Hindutva*'s ideological framework developed in reaction to the secular-universalist conception of nationalism forged by figures like Gandhi and Nehru before and after independence in 1947. Characterizing Congress as "the elite" disconnected from the (religious) values of "the people", *hindutva* favoured instead an ethno-religiously defined nationalism centred exclusively on the Hindu majority. Accordingly, "Indian culture was to be defined as Hindu culture, and the minorities [that is, the "others"] were to be assimilated by their paying allegiance to the symbols and mainstays of the majority as those of the nation" (Jaffrelot 2007: 5).

As deeply rooted as the suspicion towards secularism is *hindutva*'s hostility towards Islam and

Christianity. For Savarkar as well as K.B. Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS, the early 20th century pan-Islamic movement of Indian Muslims (known as the *Khilafat*) had to be countered by militant Hindu mobilization. Unlike Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, Islam and Christianity were identified as alien traditions forced by external powers, namely the Mughals and the British. Savarkar (1923: 110-113) wrote that to belong to India, one has to adhere to the "set of religions which we call Hindu dharma", which is "truly the offspring of this soil", whereas "Mohammedan or Christian communities … do not look upon India as their Holyland". Constituting the largest "non-Indian" religion, Islam was the primary threat. The India-Pakistan partition in 1947, a Hindu-Muslim conflict claiming up to 2 million lives and displacing 14 million according to some estimates, firmly entrenched the antagonistic perception towards Muslims.

The RSS (National Volunteer Corps) was established in 1925 to boost traditional Hindu values among the male youth. The movement organized itself in the image of European right-wing paramilitary groups, hosting various religio-nationally coloured activities of physical, martial, and ideological training. It expanded to thousands of *shakhas* (branches) across the country in a few decades, with an estimated 600,000 *swayamsevaks* (volunteers) at the time of the partition. The organization refused to ally with Congress during independence, criticizing Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy and cooperation with Muslims. As a former RSS member killed Gandhi in 1948, Prime Minister Nehru temporarily banned RSS the same year—the first of three times after independence.

The RSS quickly realized that it needed more political weight to get ahead. *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (BJS, the precursor of the BJP) was founded in 1951. Yet in that decade, "Nehru's staunch insistence on state secularism and his watchfulness about the danger from the Hindu right, together with the lack of any issue favouring their rise, gave the organizations of the Hindu right a weak political presence" (Nussbaum 2008: 168). During the India-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971, the BJS blamed Congress for its "weak" policies. At home, banning cow slaughter was a central policy item. As the 1971 census showed a mild decrease of Hindus since 1961 from 83.4% to 82.7%, the RSS stoked fears that Muslims and Christians would overwhelm Hindus. The demographic anxiety led the movement to be more inclusive toward the Dalits (formerly Untouchables), the most susceptible Hindu group to conversion. The BJS had modest yet steady success in its first two decades, rising from 3 seats in the general elections of 1951 to 14 in 1962 and 35 in 1967. Still, it was far from supplanting Congress as the major brokerage party in the 1950s and 1960s.

Communal Polarization as Political Opportunity

The BJP (Indian People's Party) was founded in 1980 as the novel instalment of the BJS, yet its political opportunities began to take shape in the previous decade. In the early 1970s, the BJS joined forces with other non-Congress groups to oppose the Indira Gandhi government, but the movement found itself banned for the second time during her state of emergency of 1975-1977. Providing the mainstay of the anti-Emergency coalition under the umbrella of the new Janata Party, the RSS and the BJS took part in a pro-democracy alliance. In the elections of 1977, Congress lost power for the first time after independence, while the BJS increased its seats to 94 as part of the Janata Party, with certain RSS veterans such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani holding key cabinet posts. The Janata government imploded in less than three years, and Congress returned to power in 1980, but the BJS came out of the experience as a legitimized force in Indian politics. The BJP built on this momentum starting from the 1980s. *Hindutva*, which was until then peripheral to Indian politics, began moving to the centre, especially with "the eruption of mass social movements and a political party … that represented a majoritarian, chauvinistic, anti-minority ideology of Hindu supremacism" (Bhatt 2001: 1).

A key factor for the meteoric rise of the BJP was the escalation of ethno-religious violence in the 1980s and 1990s. Certainly, communal violence was not the only political opportunity. The literature notes a combination of other factors such as Congress's inability to build legitimacy for neoliberal reform, the endorsement of big capital, increased corruption scandals, and other institutional frailties (Chacko 2018, Pardesi and Oetken 2008). I bring forth communal violence as an influential cultural phenomenon that intensified ethno-religious agitations to create an opportunity for the propagation of national-populist discourses. To name but a few: after her violent military offensive against Sikh separatism in Punjab, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh security guards in 1984, followed by anti-Sikh pogroms across the country leading to murders in the ten thousands. When his son Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi intervened in the Buddhist-Hindu conflict in Sri Lanka, he was killed by a Tamil suicide bomber in 1991. In notable episodes of Hindu-Muslim violence, independent riots claimed at least 400 lives in Moradabad in 1980, 300 in Ahmedabad in 1985, and 1,000 in Bhagalpur in 1989. The forced expulsion of Kashmiri Hindus by separatist Islamists in 1989-90 left a thousand Hindus dead and about half a million displaced. Sectarian violence, in short, became the order of the day.

The BJP and its grassroots networks were in a two-way engagement with communal conflict: they were both the benefiter of its spread, which normalized their ethno-religious identity politics, and they were also instigators of further tensions via provocation or direct violence. Two key issues placed the BJP in a leading position. First, in the Shah Bano Affair of 1985, when an Indian Supreme Court decision on divorce undermined Islamic private law in favour of the national civil code, Congress passed a bill to nullify the decision and upheld the jurisdiction of Muslim courts. The BJP attacked the "pseudo-secularism" of Congress, namely that secularism was a camouflage to undermine Hindu interests against minority religions. Second, in the Ayodhya Incident of the late 1980s, the BJP initiated a nationwide campaign to restore a traditional Hindu pilgrimage site in Uttar Pradesh, believed to be the birthplace of the god Lord Rama, which was replaced by the Babri Mosque in the sixteenth century by the Mughals. RSS volunteers, led by the BJP leader Advani (together with his then young acolyte Modi) began a cross-country pilgrimage to commemorate Lord Rama, depicted as a hypermasculine militaristic symbol of the nation. Decade-long propaganda eventually paid off: in 1992, *hindutva* militants destroyed the mosque brick by brick, and around 2,000 people died in the ensuing communal violence in Ayodhya, with an additional thousand in Bombay six weeks later. The RSS was provisionally banned for the third and last time after the incident.

The strategy to capitalize on and further provoke violent communalism was quickly translated into votes. "Hindu-Muslim violence improved the BJP's electoral performance in the 1990s", increasing its representation in the legislature from 2 seats in 1984 to 85 in 1989, 120 in 1991, and 161 in 1996, with its percentage of votes rising from 7.7% to 20.3% within roughly a decade (Wilkinson 2004: 50). The electoral victory of 1998, where the party received 25.6% of the votes and 182 seats in the parliament, heralded a six-year-long BJP-led coalition government, with Vajpayee serving as the Prime Minister. In power, the BJP somewhat moderated its aggressive policy agenda to keep the coalition intact and sought to consolidate itself as the alternative brokerage party to Congress. Still, the lasting effect of the 1998-2004 period was "a redefinition of Indian democracy from a secular … basis to a … fully majoritarian entity, and the entrenchment of communalism and communal politics" (Ogden 2012: 22-23). *Hindutva* thus became mainstream at the turn of the 21st century.

Mobilization Networks

The RSS and Sangh Parivar

The RSS played a central role in the post-1980 violence. Writing on the BJP, Ahmad (2016: 174) notes its "uniqueness", namely that "it is not an

independent party at all but only a mass political front of a seasoned and semi-secret organization, the RSS". Indeed, the RSS is an extensive socio-political force in India, claiming to be the world's largest voluntary missionary organization with 58,967 *shakhas* in 2018, with estimated membership over 5 million people. *Shakhas* are run by full-time organizers/preachers called *pracharak*. RSS members are identified by their single uniform of khaki shorts and white shirts. As it expanded, the RSS added various new fronts to its *shakha*-based network, giving birth to *Sangh Parivar*, a large family of *hindutva* organizations.

While the RSS was an exclusive men's club, the *Rashtra Sevika Samiti* (National Women Volunteers Committee) was founded in 1936 as the women's wing, currently holding about 5,000 *shakhas* and about 2 million members. Targeting leftist student movements, *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad* (All Indian Student Council) was established in 1949 as a right-wing student body. Often collaborating with *Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha* (Indian People Youth Front, founded in 1978), the Council has since taken active roles in multiple violent episodes and it is presently India's largest student union with 3 million members. Also regarding education, a network of RSS schools, *Vidya Bharati* (Indian Knowledge) was created in 1977. The network defines its goal as "building a generation … committed to Hindutva and infused with patriotic fervour", and runs 12,754 formal and 12,618 informal schools across India with 3.3 million students (Vidya Bharati 2019). This is in addition to *Ekal Vidyalaya* (Foundation of Solo Schools, established in 1986), functioning in rural and tribal zones with over 81,112 schools and 2 million students (Ekal Vidyalaya 2019).

Sangh Parivar is also active in the world of labour. *Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh* (Indian Workers' Union, founded in 1955) is India's largest trade union with approximately 10 million members. Its agenda identifies "national interest … as supreme", and defends that "the class concept … is a fiction", and it "would ultimately result in the disintegration of the nation" (BMS 2019). Likewise, *Bharatiya Kisan Sangh* (Indian Farmers' Collective, formed in 1979) endorses cooperation between "landowners and agricultural labourers" and rejects "suicidal propagandas such as class struggle" (BKS 2019). On the religious front, *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (All-Hindu Council, VHP) was founded in 1964 to unite different Hindu sects in a church-like centralized structure. An essential front of *Sangh Parivar*, the VHP defines itself as "the indomitable force of the Hindu society for the protection of its core values" and the "the increased expression of Hindu pride and unity" (VHP 2019). *Bajrang Dal* and *Durga Vahini* were founded in 1984 and 1991 to serve as the youth and women's wings of the VHP, respectively.

Sangh Parivar also comprises several dozen *hindutva* organizations including news and communication networks, think tanks, social welfare providers, development agencies, and rural/tribal associations, among others. According to Jaffrelot (2005: 10), despite occasional internal disagreements between the RSS, the VHP, and the BJP, these bodies unite in the objective "to penetrate society in depth, at the grassroots level, and to convert it into Hindu nationalism". The BJP maintains a synergetic relationship with this massive network. When in power between 1998-2004, the party appointed *Sangh Parivar* affiliates to innumerable administrative posts, allowing it to rest on extra-state powers and anti-minority mobilization. In February 2002, the horrific episode of anti-Muslim violence in the state of Gujarat, where Modi was the Chief-Minister, demonstrated one such collaboration. Following the burning of a train in Godhra that killed 59 Hindus, Modi declared the event, without proof, a terrorist attack by Pakistan's intelligence agency and local Muslims. During the next three days, anti-Muslim pogroms took the lives of 2,000 people according to independent tallies. As in many other riots, the attacks were carried out by Hindu militants from the *Bajrang Dal*, the VHP, RSS and others, and there is evidence to suggest that the police and BJP officials cooperated in the killings (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012).

Modi: "King of Hindus' Hearts"

Complementing *Sangh Parivar*, the personalized political communication tools around Modi himself deserve attention as a permanent mobilizing structure. To be sure, Modi is not India's first populist politician—that title is credited to Indira Gandhi. Moreover, religio-national-populist rhetoric was inherent to *hindutva* since its inception. Yet it was Modi "who most powerfully refined and embodied a repertoire of *hindutva* populism as a political strategy, first in his state of Gujarat and then at the national level … Modi rearranged the politics of the BJP in particular and that of Hindu nationalism in general around his person" (Jaffrelot and Tillin 2017: 184). In other words, Modi did not make *hindutva* populist, but he elevated the movement to its most forceful populist moment. Starting in 1971, Modi served as a full-time RSS *pracharak* for 14 years before being assigned to the BJP in 1985. Rising quickly within the party, Modi, branded as "the defender of the Hindu faith", was appointed Chief-Minister of Gujarat in 2001 (as the previous Chief-Minister had health issues). In the state elections that took place months after the 2002 pogrom, Modi's campaign leaned extensively on Hindu nationalist and anti-Muslim overtones, with one slogan casting him as *Hindu hriday samrat* (King of Hindus' Hearts). He won the elections and was reappointed with ten additional BJP seats in the state legislature.

As Chief-Minister in Gujarat (2001-2014), Modi hired an American public relations company to carefully construct a self-image as the champion of Hinduism, a man of "the people" who can identify with lower castes and classes, and a pragmatic leader with a miracle economic recipe—the so-called "Gujarat model". Via digital technology, Modi gradually bypassed the mainstream media (and to a certain extent, his party structure) to communicate directly with the people through emails, SMS, MMS, WhatsApp, his own TV channel (NaMo), and 3D holograms to simultaneously replicate his rallies in multiple locations. Such strategies were perfected at the national level during the election campaign of 2013-4, which held a "360-degree" approach—"whichever way you turned and wherever you looked, you would see Modi" (Price 2015: 213). The campaign also brought forth "vote mobilizers", thousands of devout volunteers functioning parallel to the BJP organization, paying direct allegiance to Modi himself (Pradeep and Ostermann 2014). With his mobilizers, various communication channels, the RSS support, and a billion-dollar campaign budget, Modi embarked on a high-tech campaign to saturate the public scene.

As Prime Minister, Modi quickly overwhelmed the media. In 2014, he started a monthly radio show titled "From the Heart", diffused in 18 languages by the national broadcaster All-India Radio. India's private media conglomerates are either owned BJP supporters or financially reliant on the government. The Prime Minister rarely makes a public appearance without prior orchestration, nor does he hold press conferences or allow journalists to travel with him. Instead, he actively uses social media: as of July 2019, he had about 50 million followers on Twitter, and 44 million and 25 million on Facebook and Instagram, respectively. The "Modi selfie" became the signature of the leader promoted by his social media team. In what Rao (2018: 166) calls "selfie nationalism", Modi's deified image is centred around a "belief in right-wing Hinduism, a relentless advocacy for business, his presentation of himself as both a global leader and a commoner … and his silence on minority rights, poverty, free press, judiciary and legislative processes, and India's plural religious traditions". Modi proves to be a mobilizing structure in his own right.

Religio-Populist Framing: Secular Congress against "the People"

Corroborating Brubaker's (2017, 2019) two-dimensional model, the BJP's core framing task rests on a national-populist platform where the two meanings of "the people" as an ethno-culturally defined "nation" and as a non-elite "underdog" merge in inseparable ways. Vertical opposition to Congress (on top) and non-Hindu

minorities (on the bottom) is tightly interwoven with the horizontal characterization of these groups as "internal outsiders" to the nation, who supposedly collaborate with "external outsiders"—primarily Pakistan. Congress is to blame for all ills. A comparative study of Modi's Twitter activity found "group insults" as a prevalent communication style, mostly directed at Congress (Gonawela et al. 2018: 314). Modi calls Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, the grandson of Indira Gandhi, a "shahzada" (princeling) of the "Delhi Sultanate". With such Islamic references, he not only characterizes Gandhi as "the elite", but also implies his affiliation with "the others". In contrast, Modi stresses his own "underdog" background as a *chaiwala* (tea seller) who rose from "pariah to PM", and wears his iconic short-sleeved "Modi kurta" and saffron colours as a humble yet anointed Hindu leader (Sen 2016). In some posters, he is even sacralised "with a halo indicating Hindu symbolism of gods who glow like *surya* (the sun god)" (Rao 2018: 177). Overall, Modi personally embodies the affective promotion of *hindutva* in India with his attire, language, and exclusive participation to Hindu ceremonies and sacred sites. In the process, he appropriates the symbolic power of Hinduism to portray himself as a sanctified leader of "the people".

Equation of "the people" to Hinduism is manifested abundantly in the messages of *hindutva* leaders. "All people living in India are Hindu by identity and nationality" is one such pronouncement by Mohan Bhagwat, the leader of RSS (Hindustan Times 19 September 2018). Another statement was on the slogan *Bharat Mata Ki Jai* (hail mother India), which personifies the country as a Hindu goddess. Devendra Fadnavis, BJP's Chief Minister of Maharashtra, uttered that "those who refuse to say the slogan have no right to stay in India" (The Hindu 4 April 2016). Modi begins each rally with *Bharat Mata Ki Jai*. In December 2018, when Gandhi reproached him for exploiting the slogan, Modi retorted that despite Congress's "fatwa" (once again, an Islamic reference), he would recite it "ten times" (Economic Times 4 December 2018). In another comment, Modi charged Congress for "slaughtering calves … and eating beef" to insult the Hindu tradition (India Today 19 November 2018). Such gestures entrench the scapegoating of the secular Congress as inherently anti-Hindu.

Written under Nehru's leadership, the Indian Constitution of 1950 was built on secular principles. It declared no state religion, guaranteed religious freedoms, banned discrimination on the basis of religion and caste, and abolished "untouchability" as a socio-religious practice. In 1976, Indira Gandhi amended the Constitution to declare the Republic "secular". *Hindutva* condemned secularism as an elite conspiracy since the beginning, "imposed from above" by Congress to undermine "the religious sensibilities of the Hindu masses from below" (Soper and Fetzer 2018: 186). The RSS website complains of the "erosion of the nation's integrity in the name of secularism", arguing that "it would have been logical for our post-1947 rulers to restructure the national life in keeping with our culture" (RSS 2019). Pro-*hindutva* intellectuals like to talk of Congress' "pseudo-secularism" as a manipulation device to appease minorities and harm Hindus. In the words of one such writer, "behind the secular smokescreen … every anti-Hindu fanaticism of non-Hindus was respected as their 'minority identity' … while the Hindu was supposed to have no identity at all" (Chitkara 2004: 160). The pseudo-secularism discourse tackles what it considers as non-Hindu favouritism in three main policy issues: the absence of a common civil code (as witnessed in the 1985 Shah Bano Affair), reservations (a form of affirmative action) for religious minorities, and the Article 370 of the Constitution granting autonomous status to the Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir (which was revoked by the government in August 2019 as the final version of this article was prepared). In line with its credo "justice for all, appeasement of none", the BJP has wowed to reverse these policies in election manifestos, because as Modi once put it, Congress should stop hiding behind the "burqa of secularism" (Times of India 14 July 2013).

The systematic rewriting of history is central to the BJP's framing practices. Since the party took power in some states and later nationally in the 1990s, school textbooks were overhauled. Focusing on India's ancient past, *hindutva* historians intentionally conflate the Vedic period with the Indus Valley Civilization to claim that all Hindus come from a pure Aryan ancestry. This narrative mixes history and religious myth to imply that non-Hindus, "especially the Muslim minority", are foreign to the national body (Thapar 2005: 200). Post-8th century Indian history is thus recounted as an eternal religious battle between Hindus and Muslims. Fittingly, the BJP website depicts India's history as a heroic saga, where the nation "resisted external oppression" to protect "its *intrinsic* identity"—"Hindu identity … being the mainstay of the Indian nation" (BJP 2019). In 2017, the government appointed a 14-person special committee to "prove" its historical outlook via archaeological finds and DNA records to further alter textbooks (Reuters 6 March 2018).

The BJP also consistently reframes the 20th century Indian experience to conform to the *hindutva* worldview, which tells a story of national unity betrayed by Congress and Muslims. Although the RSS did not join the independence movement, its advocates today falsely claim that it has courageously taken part in it, while some school textbooks deleted references to Nehru, omitted Gandhi's assassination by a former RSS member, and referred to Congress as a "nurtured baby" of the British (Hindustan Times 25 July 2017). Meanwhile, Hindu nationalist Sardar Patel is refurbished via the world's biggest statue, a national holiday, and an annual award in his name. Modi stated that if Patel had been Prime Minister instead of Nehru, the partition would have never occurred (The Hindu 7 February 2018). Vinay Katiyar, a BJP MP, further claimed that since Muslims "were responsible for the partition, there was no need for them to stay in India … They should settle in Bangladesh and Pakistan" (Economic Times 7 February 2018). The rewriting of history caters directly to the BJP's framing, where the secular Congress and Muslims are working against the interest of the "the people"—the Hindu majority.

Conclusions

According to Jaffrelot and Tillin (2017: 188), "the Hindu nationalist variant of populism poses a threat to India's democracy because of its exclusivist overtone" and a majoritarian understanding of politics, and religious "minorities may end up as second-class citizens". The BJP's religious populism is indeed beginning to indicate grave consequences: between 2014 and 2017, communal violence in India increased by 28%, where Muslims were most often the victims, and Hindus the perpetrators (The Washington Post 31 October 2018). Many of these events comprised a rising new phenomenon called "cow vigilantism", involving individuals suspected of slaughtering or trafficking cattle being lynched by mobs. Since 2017, the government doubled down on anti-conversion laws in BJP-controlled states to prevent Christian and Muslim proselytizing, with occasional debates to make it a national law. It is thus of no surprise that the 2018 *Report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom* (2018: 162) designated India as a country where violations of religious freedoms are "systematic, ongoing, and egregious", and found that communal violence is "often caused by inflammatory speeches delivered by leaders of Modi's party". The BJP's victorious reelection in spring 2019, where Modi escalated military tensions with Pakistan throughout the campaign, is likely to exacerbate these tendencies in the party's new term in power.

The Indian case offers ample evidence to suggest that religion can emerge as a central cultural theme for contemporary populisms, despite the lack of sufficient attention accorded to it in the literature. One reason for the understating of religion in the populism canon may be its primarily Western focus, where Christianity arguably gets articulated in a more "covert" fashion (Zúquete 2017). For North Atlantic populists, as Marzouki et al. (2016) demonstrate, while Christianity is

certainly employed as a discriminatory civilizational identity against (mostly Muslim) immigrants, the association with religious content or congregations/institutions is weaker than the case of *hindutva*. None of the Western examples seem to possess the same level of "overt" discursive, organizational, and strategic entanglement with the majority religion as do the Hindu populists.

To demonstrate the religion-populism nexus in a non-Western example, this article drew on the social movements literature to study the framing practices, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities of *hindutva*. Each of these mechanisms shows that Hinduism constitutes a key building block of the BJP's national-populist programme: not only in the framing of "the people" versus the rest in identity and memory, but also mobilization through a religiously motivated network and a quasi-sacralised Hindu leader, and the active manipulation of sectarian violence for political advancement. The *hindutva* example further confirms the suggestion (Aslanidis 2017, Jansen 2015, Roberts 2015) that a social movements perspective can enrich the study of populism as a dynamic and historically embedded phenomenon involving grassroots mobilization. Further empirical case studies and cross-religious and cross-regional comparisons involving Western and non-Western polities would help refine the theoretical framework on the variegated and culturally/geographically specific ways in which national-populist movements interact with religions in the 21st century.

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Under the Shadow of Civilizationist Populist Discourses: Political Debates on Refugees in Turkey

by Zeynep Yanaşmayan (Department of Law and Anthropology, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle), Ayşen Üstübici (Koç University, Istanbul) and Zeynep Kaşlı (Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam)

Abstract

This article explores the extent and limits of anti-immigration discourse in recent political debates in Turkey. Anti-immigrant discourses have been at the heart of exclusionary populisms, where right-wing political actors present immigrants as economic, social and security threats. It is remarkable that this is not yet the case in Turkey, one of the world's major refugee-receiving countries. Using an original dataset, composed of party programmes, parliamentary records and public statements by presidential candidates in the last two rounds of general and presidential elections between 2014 and 2018, we argue that politicians from both incumbent and opposition parties in Turkey have used the 'refugee card' to appeal to the growing social, economic and cultural grievances of their voters but in a rather limited and divergent manner. Debates over migration have oscillated between the Western European right-wing populist perception of 'threat' and the pro-Syrian and civilizationist populism of the ruling party that relies on a transnational notion of 'ummah'.

Introduction

The rise of right-wing populism has widely been seen as a threat to diversity. Anti-immigrant discourses have been at the heart of the 'populist turn' in Europe and the US and served to enlarge the voting base of far-right political parties (Rydgren 2005; Stockeemer 2016). At the same time, empirical research reveals that support for right-wing populism has little to do with the actual volume of migration (Stockeemer 2016) and that the xenophobic language of populists is contagious (Rydgren 2005). In this regard, Hogan and Haltinner (2015) talk about a 'transnational populist playbook' that has diffused across the Western world and consistently construed immigrants within overlapping themes of economic, security and identity threats (Hogan and Haltinner 2015). In this paper, we are interested in uncovering the extent to which anti-immigration populist rhetoric is translated into non-western contexts such as Turkey, which is hosting an unprecedented number of refugees and where the government is held by an Islamist party that (selectively) utilizes a civilizationist populist discourse at home and abroad.

Turkey is a major refugee recipient country, with over 3.5 million Syrian refugees under temporary protection as well as 300,000 refugees mainly from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran. From the first day of the Syrian crisis, in 2011, Turkey, thanks to its initial open-door policy, received Syrians fleeing civil war; these individuals are often referred to as 'guests', not 'refugees' or 'asylum seekers', even though this term has no equivalence in international law. 'Guests', as used by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), is framed in reference to the notion of hospitality, justified through religious fraternity, and indicates an expectation of temporary stay (İçduygu

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et al. 2017: 460). It was not until 2014 that the Turkish government introduced the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR), which provides the basis for Syrians to access education, health services and vocational training; this is considerably more than other asylum seekers in Turkey, who have neither access to protection nor such services (See Baban, Ilgan and Rygiel 2017 for a critical evaluation).

Despite the welcoming attitude of the government, the presence of Syrians is far from being truly embraced at the societal level. Recent studies show a rise in negative views toward immigration regardless of party affiliation (Erdoğan 2017; Kaya et al. 2019). Occasionally, hashtags such as #IdonotwantSyriansinmycountry also become trending topics on Twitter in Turkey. One recent instance that created backlash was the aftermath of a video showing young Syrian men carrying the Free Syrian Army flag, celebrating New Year's Eve 2018 in Istanbul's Taksim Square. In this particular instance, the Ministry of the Interior was quick to respond to the outrage, giving an extensive interview on the situation of Syrians in Turkey and emphasizing the religious brotherhood between Turks and Syrians, as well as their shared Ottoman past.[1] Even though identity politics is a prevalent feature of Turkish elections, it is remarkable and equally puzzling that, unlike political campaigns in Europe or the US during the same period, the refugee question was not central to the presidential or parliamentary election campaigns from 2014 through 2018 and has been only marginally extended to party politics in general.

Following Gidron and Bonikowski's (2013: 27) call for empirically grounded analyses of populism, and incorporating a broad corpus of political texts targeting the general public into the analysis, we will unpack the puzzle of this relative absence of immigration debates in electoral politics in Turkey, making use of an original dataset consisting of party programmes, parliamentary records and public statements by presidential candidates in the two rounds of general and presidential elections since 2014. While recent research on anti-immigration discourse in Turkey focuses on media coverage (IGAM 2019; Sunata and Yildiz 2018), fewer studies analyse statements by political actors (e.g., Ilgıt and Memişoğlu 2018, İçduygu et al. 2017). Moreover, focusing on the parliamentary debates and not only on the discourses of populist leaders or parties opens up the analysis to a diversity of views on the subject, reasoned through different ideological positions (Fletcher 2008).

The data on parliamentary records was gathered by examining specific periods around election times and two key events. The time frames are three months before the August 2014 presidential elections, June 2015 and November 2015 general elections, and June 2018 presidential and general elections. The time frames surrounding the key events are defined as 1-30 March 2016 and 1-15 July 2016, which, respectively, coincide with the signing of the Turkey-EU deal and Erdoğan's statement on granting citizenship to Syrian refugees. With the help of two research assistants, we went through the minutes of General Assembly meetings during the designated time frames and compiled all statements containing the keywords 'refugee', 'asylum seeker', 'migrant', 'temporary protection', 'Syrian' or 'Syria'. These statements were then coded based on a predefined code list, and codes were stretched or changed in a grounded fashion. Overall, we read and coded party manifestos of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Republican People's Party (CHP), Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), People's Democratic Party (HDP) and Good Party (IYI Party), in addition to 408 individual statements from members of the General Assembly.[2]

[1] Interview with Minister of the Interior Süleyman Soylu, 07.01.2019, *Habertürk* **https://www.haberturk.com/icisleri-bakani-suleyman-soylu-turkiye-deki-suriyelilerin-cogu-misak-i-milli-sinirlari-icinden-2283766#** (accessed January 7, 2019)

[2] Of these individual statements194 were related to the conflict in Syria; all others regarded Syrian refugees in Turkey.

The article first provides a review of the literature, in which populist politics in Turkey is situated within two global trends: the rise of anti-immigrant populism in Western countries and Islamic populism in predominantly Muslim countries. Following Kaya et al. (2019) and, to a certain extent, Brubaker (2017), these could be conceptualized as opposite camps within the civilizationist paradigm. Against this background, the main part of the article explores the extent and limits of anti-immigration discourse in recent political debates in Turkey. Our analysis reveals that both incumbent and opposition parties in Turkey have used the 'refugee card' to appeal to the growing social, economic and cultural grievances of their voters, but in a rather selective and limited manner. While AKP's civilizationist populism has grown, contrasting with the European example by rhetorically including Syrian refugees in the definition of 'the people', the article also points out its perils in fuelling existing discontent and societal cleavages, especially in the absence (or silencing) of rights-based discourses recognizing existing ethnic and religious diversity in Turkey. In the light of our findings, in the final section, we discuss why politicians' use of anti-immigration discourse has so far remained limited in Turkey.

Diversity of populisms, anti-immigration rhetoric and Turkey

While there is general acceptance of the fact that populism inevitably entails a moral counter-position of 'the people' vs. 'the elite' (e.g., Mudde 2004), there is considerable disagreement about its further characterizing features and its inclusionary and exclusionary variations. One important contestation, as aptly put by Brubaker (2019), remains between nationalism and populism—at both the conceptual and empirical level—not the least due to the intertwinement and success of populist and anti-immigrant discourses empirically observed across Europe in the last decade. More importantly, however, Brubaker (2019: 13) underlines that such conceptual ambiguity is integral to and constitutive of populism since 'populist claims-making is located at the juncture of the *politics of inequality* and the *politics of identity*, where questions about *who gets what* are constitutively intertwined with questions about *who is what*' (emphasis original). Such exclusionary populist narratives target 'elites', who are perceived simultaneously as being at the top of society and as outsider to a given society. Therefore, following Brubaker (2017, 2019) and other scholars (e.g., Arditi 2007; Müller 2016), we understand populist discourses as inherently anti-pluralist and majoritarian discourses that construe diversity as a threat to social cohesion and constantly create demonized out-groups: minorities, migrants, dissidents and opposition parties and politicians (Filc 2009 cited in Yabanci 2016). Therefore, our definition aligns more with what Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) identified as 'exclusionary populism' that is most prevalent in Europe. However, our focus is on discourses and the extent to which political parties in Turkey employ the populist card against refugees, which is regardless of whether or not the political parties themselves are characterized as populist *per se*.

The conceptual and empirical ambiguity of the term 'populism' has led to intense debates about the line separating populist anti-immigrant and far-right parties, which has proven hard to draw. While van Spanje (2011) demonstrates that these are not identical in Western Europe, and Stavrakakis et al. (2017: 421) describe the most-well known examples—such as the National Front in France—as nationalist and only *secondarily* as 'populist', others treat right-wing or radical-right populist parties as quintessentially nativist and thereby anti-immigrant and/or anti-minority (e.g., Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn 2016; Mudde 2013). Moreover, significant diffusion effects have been noted as they borrow from each other's master frames (Rydgren 2005). According to Hogan and Haltinner (2015), similarities in the immigration threat narratives of right-wing political parties and social movements, especially in Western democracies, indicate a shared 'transnational populist playbook'

in which, regardless of the volume of immigration, immigrants are represented as economic and social threats, blamed as the main reason for crime, and demonized as the 'enemy Other'. For Brubaker (2017), this is a particularly Northern and Western European populist moment, distinctive in the sense that the opposition between the self and the other is defined not in narrow national but in broader civilizational terms as a liberal defence against the threat of Islam (see also Akkerman 2005; Betz and Meret 2009).

While it is important to record the rise of anti-immigration position in the West, which is very much infused with anti-Islamic discourse, studies examining various faces of populism in different parts of the world hint at deep-seated anxieties about the negative social and economic effects of globalization (see, for example, Aytac and Onis 2014; Hadiz and Chrysseogelos 2017). In his comparative study of three Muslim-majority societies, namely Indonesia, Egypt and Turkey, Hadiz shows how such grievances can be rebranded under what he calls 'Islamic populism' (Hadiz 2016: 28). He demonstrates that in Muslim-majority societies, the combination of post-Cold War era social conflicts, post-9/11 context and post-Arab Spring political conflicts has led to the concept of the 'ummah' (community of believers) being increasingly defined in national terms and a substitute for the notion of 'the people' united against 'social orders that are perceived to be inherently exclusionary, unjust and therefore simultaneously immoral' (Hadiz 2016: 12). As Kaya et al. (2019) argue, this can be partly seen as the flip side of the same civilizationist populist discourse found in the West.

Over the course of its uninterrupted single-party rule since 2002, the AKP has capitalized on 'the people vs. Kemalist elite/establishment dichotomy' at home and the rising anti-Islamist civilizationist narratives abroad. While populism is not a new phenomenon in Turkish politics (see Baykan 2014 for a history of the concept), the AKP has managed to sustain a hegemonic populism by not only creatively re-producing its character as the guardian of 'the people' but also through consecutive election wins (Çınar 2015; Dincsahin 2012; Hadiz 2016; Yabanci 2016). Since the 2010s, when AKP's 'conquest of the state' (Somer 2017) left it with no establishment actors to blame, its populist strategy continued targeting the CHP—the main opposition party—and, increasingly, Western actors (Aytaç and Elçi 2019; Elçi 2019). Therefore, the AKP's populist discourse has decidedly moved into a civilizationist discourse that revitalizes and instrumentalizes Turkey's Ottoman heritage and takes its strength from the claim of being 'the center of the Muslim *ummah*' (Kaya et al. 2019: 6). In the face of the mass migration of majority Sunni Syrians fleeing from Assad's suppression, this civilizationist populist style has manifested itself in religious brotherhood narratives that pit Turkey's hospitality against the indifference of the West. Critiques of the AKP's open-door policy have developed as part and parcel of this hegemonic civilizationist populist style, taking different forms depending on the ideological distance between the incumbent AKP and opposition parties.

When it comes to anti-immigrant populist discourses in Turkey, our knowledge is still limited. The literature on attitudes toward migration-related issues is rather new and overwhelmingly focuses on public opinion and media representation. Erdoğan's (2017) longitudinal data on public attitudes towards Syrians shows increasing levels of 'othering' against Syrians. Even though both the media (Sunata and Yıldız 2018) and public continue to define Syrians as victims, the distance between the citizens and refugees has grown from welcoming guests towards a 'reluctant acceptance' (Erdoğan 2017). Most recent media reports emphasize an increase in the use of criminalizing language (IGAM 2019). Kaya et al. (2019) also show that even AKP voters who otherwise endorsed its revitalization of Ottoman heritage were critical of the Syrian presence out of fear of radicalization and socio-economic competition. Ilgıt and Memisoglu's (2018) contribution provides a broad description of how the opposition parties in Turkey approach Syrian

refugees either as rival victim group with unfair access to public services, or a demographic threat.

Here, we examine what happens to anti-immigrant rhetoric across the political spectrum when the incumbent party itself follows a civilizationist populist style which, contrary to the European context, selectively includes refugees in its definition of 'the people' yet reproduces existing ethno-religious cleavages and shies away from any rights-based discourses. Most of the opposition parties remain incapable of challenging AKP's hegemonic populism since they are not against maintaining kinship ties with populations in the old Ottoman territories. Their critique of the AKP's badly managed open-door policy does not go beyond accusing the incumbent AKP of populist and instrumental use of Syrian refugees against the West without calculating its costs on Turkey's economy. Our analysis, therefore, reveals that the dominant rhetoric of the incumbent AKP—based on an understanding of religious nationhood and Ottoman heritage that is difficult for opposition parties to challenge—offers plausible explanations for the relatively low degree of anti-immigration discourse and its corresponding salience in electoral politics in Turkey.

Refugees as part of election campaigns: Limited to no populism

While immigration has arguably not yet been at the centre of political debates in Turkey, the arrival of over 3.5 million Syrians over a short period has prompted emerging debates on the issue. A comparison of the party manifestos that appeared prior to the 2015 parliamentary elections and 2018 parliamentary and presidential elections demonstrated increasing space dedicated to refugees/asylum seekers and exposed its heightened significance in domestic politics. However, this growth in attention does not necessarily mean that refugees are cast in a more positive light, nor that more durable measures are being proposed. Instead, compared to 2015, manifestos from across the political spectrum in 2018—with the important exception of HDP—put much more emphasis on return to Syria as a longer-term solution.

As mentioned above, here we analyse statements of both members of the ruling AKP and opposition parties represented in the parliament. The CHP is the main opposition party, with a secular and modernist stance. The MHP is a right-wing nationalist party, with a statist and pan-Turkist approach. Although the party is not in the government, it has recently moved from opposition to a de facto alliance with the ruling party in the aftermath of the coup attempt in July 2016. The IYI Party has been newly founded by former MHP members and takes a clear anti-government stance while maintaining the nationalist agenda. The HDP represents the Kurdish movement but also has a close alliance with smaller factions of socialist and green movements in Turkey.

As the Syrian conflict has continued and the number of arrivals has increased, we observe that the CHP strikingly changed its position of 'contemporary hospitality' (*çağdaş evsahipliği*) from the 2015 general election manifesto. The 2015 manifesto entailed several measures for improving access to education, healthcare, and housing of Syrian refugees, albeit keeping in mind an eventual return. Instead, in 2018, the CHP promised a 'voluntary, gradual and safe return process of Syrians under temporary protection'. Similarly, the IYI Party, under the motto 'everyone is happy in his/her homeland', exclusively focused on issues of return and measures to ensure the temporariness of the refugee presence in Turkey, such as an immediate halt of protection statuses, cooperation with the Syrian state for repatriation and establishment of camps in Syria.

Moreover, in 2018, the presidential candidates of both parties addressed the return issue in their electoral campaigns. CHP candidate Muharrem Ince, in a rare televised interview, stated that if he were to be elected, he would close the door to Syrian refugees who returned to Syria for Eid: 'If you can go back for ten days, why do you come to Turkey? Is it a soup kitchen here? My citizens

are unemployed'.[3] Similarly, during a rally in Mersin, IYI Party candidate Meral Akşener proclaimed: 'Today 200,000 refugees live in Mersin. Our standard of living has declined. I promise you that we will be breaking the fast during Ramadan in 2019 in Syria'.[4] Especially in public statements that take a more accusatory tone towards the AKP, the return of refugees—which in and of itself positions them outside 'the people'—is more clearly linked to concerns with welfare and the economy. This is very much in line with the 'transnational populist playbook' (Hogan and Haltinner 2015), according to which populist discourses construct migrants as economic threats, among others.

When it comes to the ruling AKP, it can be noted that the party devoted significantly more space to the migration theme in 2018 than in 2015.[5] In line with the rest of its 2018 manifesto, the section on migration served the dual purpose of presenting AKP achievements, most notably the steps they have taken to improve the legal and socio-economic status of Syrians, and promises for the future. It contained a lengthy discussion about services provided to refugees, including cash transfers, without mentioning that the latter is funded by the EU or any reference to the EU-Turkey deal. While the 2018 manifesto vaguely mentioned measures for Syrians and integration policies referred to as 'harmonization' (*uyum*) by the Turkish bureaucracy, it suggested more concrete measures for voluntary returns and deportations. It, for instance, announced the establishment of a national mechanism for voluntary return that literally translates as the 'National Voluntary Return Mechanism' ('*Milli Gönüllü Geri Dönüş Mekanizması*'), which at least discursively distinguishes it from International Organization for Migration-led 'assisted voluntary returns'. Moreover, the safe return of a considerable number of migrants currently under temporary protection at the end of their stay was presented as the fundamental aim.

The nationalist right-wing MHP, which participated in an alliance with the AKP in the June 2018 elections, had barely anything on migration in its manifesto. This was a drastic shift when compared to its 2015 manifesto, which strongly emphasized not only repatriation of asylum seekers but also offered a very criminalized image that associated migrants with societal problems such as theft, drug dealing, prostitution, etc. As a newcomer to the game, the IYI Party was much more eager to capitalize on the societal cleavages and discontent that Turkish citizens are reportedly experiencing with the Syrian population, emphasizing the 'burden' refugees put on the Turkish economy, and promised to embrace non-arrival policies and not accept new refugees. The CHP, along with voluntary return, had an explicit focus on the integration and wellbeing of migrants, particularly on issues of exploitation and child labour. The party programme also promised to ensure transparency and accountability in the aid channelled to Syrian refugees. At the opposite end of the spectrum stands the HDP which, in both the 2015 and 2018 manifestos, consistently raised a pro-migrant voice. The HDP called for lifting the geographical limitation reservation applied to the Geneva Convention by Turkey, instituting equal citizenship, and the right to education in the mother tongue. The HDP manifesto is also the only one to point out the increasing level of hate speech and violent attacks against refugees in Turkey.

[3] 'Muharrem İnce: Suriyelilere kapıyı kapatacağım' ('Muharrem Ince: I am going to close the door to Syrians'), *Haber 7*, 25.05.2018 **http://www.haber7.com/siyaset/haber/2633477-muharrem-ince-suriyelilere-kapiyi-kapatacagim** (accessed February 19, 2019).

[4] 'Akşener, 2019'a kadar mültecileri göndereceğini söyledi' ('Akşener said she would return Syrians by 2019'). *Siyasi Haber*, 05.06.2018 **http://siyasihaber4.org/aksener-2019a-kadar-multecileri-gonderecegini-soyledi** (accessed February 19, 2019).

[5] All party manifestos are available in Turkish.
For the AKP 2018 manifesto, see **https://www.trthaber.com/pdf/Beyanname23Mays18_icSayfalar.pdf**
For the MHP, see **https://www.mhp.org.tr/usr_img/mhpweb/1kasimsecimleri/beyanname_1kasim2015.pdf**
For the CHP, see **http://secim2018.chp.org.tr/files/CHP-SecimBildirgesi-2018-icerik.pdf**
For the İYİ Party, see **https://iyiparti.org.tr/assets/pdf/secim_beyani.pdf**

What is also important to note across different party manifestos is the choice of terms used in reference to the Syrian population in Turkey; this is also emblematic of the parties' definitions of 'the people'. The AKP, very much in line with its neo-Ottomanist aspirations and strategic use of Islamic populist tools, almost unequivocally used 'asylum seeker brothers' or 'Syrian brothers'. These designations clearly target domestic politics but seem to find more resonance among Syrians, who consider themselves to be culturally similar to Turkish citizens, than among Turkish citizens, who rarely consider Syrians culturally similar (Erdoğan 2017). The AKP manifesto, at times, used the alternative of 'Syrian guests', ironically more so in the section on foreign policy, which has 'refugees' in its subtitle. All other parties refrained from using the term 'refugee', instead preferring 'asylum seekers', 'Syrians under temporary protection', or 'our Syrian guests' in the case of the IYI Party. HDP was the only party that talked about 'refugees' and openly challenged the 'guest' terminology.

AKP's hegemonic populist discourse, different from the Western-type populist discourse, does not have the effect of discrediting or criminalizing entire populations of migrants but instead selectively includes and excludes migrants based on existing societal cleavages. Despite the deliberately furthered 'guest' terminology and emphasis on return, the 2018 parliamentary elections were exceptional; a Syrian-origin Turkish businessman who entertains good relations with Saudi Arabian investors became a candidate through the AKP ranks in Bursa.[6] The AKP choice of such a candidate is indicative of its self-assigned leadership role in the *ummah* and selective inclusion of refugees in 'the people'. Devoid of a genuine rights-based approach, humanitarianism remains dominant at the discursive level for the AKP, but this does not lend itself to concrete measures for the integration of all newcomers. The AKP has consistently continued to employ the strategic tools of Islamic/civilizationist hegemonic populism, not only presenting the refugees as brothers (read as Sunni brothers) but also itself as a patriarchal figure and the only one capable of extending protection. The IYI Party in 2018 and MHP in 2015, at both the party and leadership level, can be considered to have had recourse to the anti-immigrant sentiments observed in the 'transnational populist playbook', resorting to the widespread 'threat narratives' (Hogan and Halttiner 2015) found in the West, particularly that of 'economic burden'. Their definitions of 'the people' were more in national than civilizationist terms. While the CHP presidential candidate also briefly played the anti-immigrant card, both the party's manifestos and leader's statements repeatedly reflected concerns about integration, an emphasis on the possibility of voluntary return and a critique of the AKP-led civilizationist populist discourse. The only political party that maintained an inclusionary approach towards immigration in line with its pluralist understanding of 'the people' was the HDP. The plural use of 'we' in the party slogan for the June 2015 elections, 'We(s) are headed to the parliament!' ('*Biz'ler meclise!*'), was a clear counter-discourse to the 'us versus them' language of AKP's hegemonic populism.

Refugees in the general assembly agenda

Plurality of populist discourses

It should be noted that policies concerning refugees have been introduced by the government at the level of decrees and regulations. Therefore, in most cases, parliamentary debates do not revolve around immigration policies. Rather, general discussions on various issues on the agenda of the parliament are infused with concerns over refugees. The debates remain overwhelmingly concentrated on two key points: a) either critique or praise of AKP-led foreign policy, b) whether and how refugees would (not) be welcome depending on the politicians' take on the existing societal cleavages and kinship ties.

[6] 'Suriyeli İş Adamı AK Parti'den Milletvekili Adayı Oldu' ('Syrian businessman is an MP candidate for AK Party'), 22.05.2018, **https://www.haberler.com/suriyeli-is-adami-ak-parti-den-milletvekili-adayi-10876208-haberi/** (accessed February 19, 2019).

This is followed by an emphasis on security and criminalization issues; there is a slight increase in emphasis on return, not only from opposition parties but also from the government. Discussions on the integration of Syrian refugees, on the other hand, are close to non-existent and did not significantly increase over time, despite empirical evidence that a considerable portion of Syrian refugees in Turkey, especially the youth, are likely to stay rather than return to Syria (Erdoğan 2017).

During parliamentary discussions, representatives of opposition parties usually depict Syrian refugees as security and social threats, a threat to public health due to the rise in certain contagious diseases, an economic burden and source of rising unemployment and, related to that, a source of crime with a high potential for committing criminal offenses. MPs from all opposition parties allude to Syrians' presence in the country as being 'out of control', 'costly', a 'demographic threat', or 'turning the country into a huge refugee camp'. 'You filled Turkey with 2.5 million Syrians; 600,000 of them live in Gaziantep. You turned upside down our country, our city, our balance, dear friends', says Akif Ekici, CHP MP from Gaziantep, a major refugee recipient city in the South-eastern part of Turkey, near the Syrian border.[7] Even HDP MPs, particularly the ones with constituencies in the border regions, have, in time, echoed the economic and social threat arguments of other opposition parties.

Refugees are also often portrayed as a security threat and subjected to criminalizing discourses, which have taken the form of being blamed for criminal offences such as theft[8] or drug dealing.[9] Additionally, they are often associated with terrorist groups, mainly because the government's open-door policy, coupled with a lack of proper registration, allowed the entry of an unidentifiable population where it is not possible to distinguish between 'real asylum seekers' and 'terrorists with blood on their hands'.[10] Echoing debates on the radicalization of Muslim minority youth in Western Europe, a CHP MP from the eastern province of Tunceli raised concerns that 'Syrians have become a natural human resource within the reach of all terrorist groups in Turkey'.[11] Criminalizing statements that inculpate refugees for terrorist attacks have been more prevalent after triggering events in 2016, such as the Atatürk airport bombing in Istanbul and the failed bomb attack in Reyhanli, which had already been hit in May 2013 by a deadly ISIS attack. During discussions following President Erdoğan's announcement of the government's plan to grant citizenship to Syrians, a CHP MP draws attention to cases of homicide, blames *all* Syrians for several ISIS-related terrorist attacks, and reminds parliament that 'it is again those from Syria who caused the killing of our 44 citizens at Atatürk airport'.[12]

Despite such clear critiques towards the implementation of the AKP's open-door policy and its implications, members of opposition parties also commonly refer to Syrians as 'brothers' or 'fellow Muslims' and to hospitality as a quality of the Turkish nation. This rhetoric of selective humanitarianism, based on shared culture and religion, was initiated by the governing party (İçduygu et al. 2017); but the opposition has also embraced it in different ways, depending on their definitions of 'the people'. Along with religious identity, ongoing kinship ties in the region prevents people fleeing from Syria being seen as 'the ultimate other'. MHP MPs, in particular, underline

[7] TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 49, 01.03.2016. **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil1/ham/b04901h.htm**. All statements are translated from Turkish by the authors.

[8] Kadir Gökmen Öğüt (CHP), TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 117, 16.07.2014. **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem24/yil4/ham/b11701h.htm**

[9] Mehmet Erdoğan (MHP), TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 50, 02.03.2016. **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil1/ham/b05001h.htm**

[10] Hilmi Yarayıcı (CHP), TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 111, 12.07.2016. **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil1/ham/b11101h.htm**

[11] Gürsel Erol (CHP). TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 50, 02.03.2016. **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil1/ham/b05001h.htm**

[12] Özkan Yalım, TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 111, 12.07.2016. **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil1/ham/b11101h.htm**

the organic unity between Turkmens and Turks, showing discomfort with the differential treatment received by Syrian Arabs at the border and not extended to Syrian Turkmens. For instance, MHP MP Sinan Oğan, in a heated exchange, asks provocatively: 'Why do you close the border to Turkmens? What is their fault? Being Turkmen? If they were Arabs, you would have opened the border immediately […] They would not be a burden; do not worry, the AKP might not take care of them, but the Turkish nation would'.[13] Similarly, HDP MPs are concerned with the protection and rights of Syrian Kurds as part of 'the people', although they try to frame the issue as more multicultural, using inclusionary language. HDP MP Erol Dora, for instance, drew attention to the provision of education in the mother tongue that is provided to Sunni Arab children in camps but not to children from Kurdish, Assyrian, and Yezidi backgrounds.[14]

A more often employed Western-style anti-immigrant populist frame flirting with nativism is the 'privileged' treatment of Syrians vis-a-vis Turkish citizens. Here, critiques from opposition parties either emphasize the budget spent on the reception of Syrian refugees or the rights granted to them. They all imply that scarce resources should be devoted to the country's 'own citizens' rather than spent on the refugees, as the former are also in precarious situations. CHP MP Kazım Arslan, for instance, states that the 10-billion-dollar budget spent on asylum seekers could have been invested in establishing a manufacturing site employing 5,000 people. 'How much more are we going to spend on Syrians?', he continues, 'How much more money that could have been spent on factories will vanish?'[15] During the intense debate on granting citizenship, opposition MPs criticized the allocation of TOKI, Turkish government-supported housing, to Syrian refugees. While CHP MP Tur Yıldız Biçer asserts that such aid 'hit a nerve' with the poor and disadvantaged sections of society, MHP MP Baki Şimşek urges the government to prioritize the families and relatives of the martyrs rather than Syrians.[16]

Aside from such financial costs of the AKP's open-door policy, the alleged preferential access of Syrians with Temporary Protection Status (TPS) to public services has also become a matter of contention. CHP MP Refik Eryılmaz, for instance, is very critical of the government policy allegedly providing Syrian students access to higher education with scholarships and without any prior requirements, whereas it is costly for Turkish citizens to prepare for the entrance exams. 'Their [Syrian students'] accommodation, school fees and all costs are paid by the government. The common citizen would ask then', he continues, 'why do you discriminate? If young people coming from abroad are given such an opportunity, our own citizens should have it too'.[17] In these latter examples, we see even more clearly the intertwinement of the politics of inequality and the politics of identity (Brubaker 2019) that lies at the very heart of the populist rhetoric. 'The people' are not only invoked as a nationally-bounded community but also as plebs who suffer under the unequal redistribution policies of the ruling party.

In addition to the use of populist rhetoric, opposition MPs also show a readiness to utilize plebiscitary tools such as referenda, a strategy that is by now part and parcel of the AKP's populist reign, which dismantle horizontal checks in favour of direct communication with 'the people' (Aytac and Elci 2019; Castaldo 2018). CHP and MHP MPs openly call for a referendum soon after President Erdoğan unveils his plan to grant

[13] TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 128, 04.08.2014, **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem24/yil4/ham/b12801h.htm**

[14] TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 83, 24.03.2015 **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem24/yil4/ham/b11001h.htm**

[15] TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 55, 07.03.2016. **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil1/ham/b05501h.htm**

[16] TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 111, 12.07.2016, **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil1/ham/b11101h.htm**

[17] TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 80, 19.03.2015 **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem24/yil5/ham/b08001h.htm**

citizenship to Syrians. After claiming that 'Syrians are into crime, they are low-educated and the country does not need an immigrant labour force', CHP MP Özkan Yalım proclaims: 'Let's ask our people and go to a referendum without any hesitation or fear so that the citizens of the Turkish Republic can choose the people to live with.'[18]

Limits to anti-immigrant populist discourses

As portrayed so far, unlike the AKP representation of Syrian refugees as part of the same *ummah*, opposition MPs' critiques often reflect widely differing understandings of 'the people' as well as public (mis)perceptions of refugees that feed into concerns regarding public safety, security and financial costs. On the other hand, some MPs from across the political spectrum show awareness of the danger of further triggering anti-immigration sentiments among the population. Their concerns are well-founded, as the latest results of public opinion and media research cited above show the fragility of this living together arrangement. They perceive the debate over granting citizenship as potentially explosive and a source of already-reported societal clashes in different cities within Turkey. CHP MP Özgür Özel claims that emphasis on the rivalry over resources between citizens and Syrians invites hostility, 'polarization' and a 'lynch culture'. While calling on everyone to be cautious about such statements, Özel also underlines that it is foremost the responsibility of the government to avoid such tensions.[19] MHP MP Ruhi Ersoy stresses that, because of the way it was brought up by the president and the government, such a citizenship debate carries the risk of creating anti-Syrian attitudes among 'the citizens who have thus far, with love and tolerance, tried to help Syrians, thinking that they will one day return to their homeland'.[20] Similarly, HDP MP Idris Baluken criticizes the AKP move of making Syrians part of the existing political polarization, which could potentially increase the number of assaults. Unlike other opposition MPs, however, he references international law and states that the first move should be the granting of refugee status to prove that the government is not again instrumentalizing Syrians as they did against the EU.[21]

The opposition MPs' critique of the government's reception policy is overwhelmingly mixed with their discontent with AKP errors in foreign policy, especially in the early years of the Syrian conflict. Similarly, the use of Syrians as a bargaining chip against the EU is overtly criticized by opposition MPs from all parties. At the time when the EU-Turkey deal came into effect, CHP MP Faik Öztrak draws attention to the link between the deal and Turkey's foreign policy mistakes when he says, 'the then-prime minister said "I will conduct my prayer in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus." He could not pray in Damascus, but the yard of every mosque of Turkey's 81 cities is full of Syrian refugees.[22] Similarly, HDP MP Garo Paylan criticizes AKP sectarianism in the Syrian conflict, an important display of its civilizationist approach, by saying 'the government did the only thing they know […], sending arms to only those from their own sect. But, what did we get in return? Only blood and tears, and 3 million migrants, and we used those 3 million migrants for blackmail'.[23] Several MPs from across the political spectrum discredit the deal as a 'Faustian bargain' (*at, koyun, Kayseri pazarlığı*)[24] and blame the government for acting like a 'night watchman' for refugees making sure they remain in Turkish territory in exchange for money. In that sense, the main critique of the opposition lies

[18] TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 111, 12.07.2016 **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil1/ham/b11101h.htm**
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 57, 09.03.2016 **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil1/ham/b05701h.htm**
[23] TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 51, 03.03.2016 **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil1/ham/b05101h.htm**
[24] Literally translates as "horse, sheep, Kayseri bargain".

in foreign policy choices, and refugees are perceived mainly as the victims of external relations vis-a-vis the Syrian conflict and the West.

During the parliamentary debates on the approval of the EU-Turkey readmission deal, in order to rebut the critiques mentioned above, several AKP MPs intervene to say 'May God keep anyone [in need of help] away from your door' and display their understanding of the motivations of refugees by saying 'no one would want to leave their home'.[25] While this pro-immigrant discourse complements the government's open-door policy towards Syrians at the time, it is also used to avoid addressing the main critique, namely employing a selective pro-immigrant policy that is part and parcel of AKP's civilizationist populist discourse. While the open-door policy has come to a halt, from the November 2015 election period onward, AKP MPs have repeatedly glorified the refugee policy and the hospitality of the Turkish nation, emphasizing the moral superiority of Turkey over the Western world. During the opening of the second half of the 25th legislative year in 2015, President Erdoğan underlines that 'for the last four years, by adopting over 2 million Syrian and Iraqi brothers, Turkey has gone beyond doing her neighbourly duties and saved the honour of humanity'.[26] Such references to religious brotherhood and celebration of the government's hospitality as an attribute of the Turkish nation also indicate a core component of its civilizationist populism, underscoring the contrast between the 'generous us' and the 'immoral, xenophobic other', especially with reference to Western European countries. A recent example of this is AKP MP Şahap Kavcıoğlu's response to opposition MPs: 'Instead of being proud of, you fling dirt at a country that earns the appreciation of the world by providing 4 million refugees with all kinds of needs, maintenance and lodging [in Turkey], and sends the highest amount of social aid across the world'.[27]

Despite this rhetoric of benevolence and moral superiority, debates on the current situation of Syrians in Turkey are centred on their temporariness and return options. In 2015, integration was brought up as a possible next step by a few CHP and HDP MPs; this idea has slowly faded away, ceding ground to a sound return policy that has also been gradually picked up by incumbent AKP MPs. Strikingly, the ruling AKP has centred its return discourse on the success of Turkish military operations in Syria that have allegedly created 'safe zones' where people may return.[28] AKP MP Çiğdem Karaaslan proudly announces: 'with the Olive Branch Operation that we initiated on 20 January 2018, we cleansed Afrin of terrorists on the 103rd anniversary of the Çanakkale triumph. Our Syrian brothers who had to leave their homes and homelands have now begun to return in peace and security'.[29] The resolution allowing military interventions has been accepted and extended in the assembly with the support of the AKP, MHP, and CHP.[30] Once again, effectively blending the issue with existing societal cleavages [i.e., the long-lasting conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and nationalist pride as in the reference to the Independence War], the AKP has taken hold of the discursive upper hand with little opposition.

In other words, while opposition MPs often criticize the government's use of the refugee card for political gain at home and abroad, the incumbent AKP rebuts any criticism through a

[25] TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 108, 25.06.2014. **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem24/yil4/ham/b10801h.htm**

[26] TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 1, 01.10.2015 **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem25/yil2/ham/b00101h.htm**

[27] TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 80, 03.04.2018 **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil3/ham/b08001h.htm**

[28] "Over 300,000 Syrians returned home after Turkey's operations, interior minister says" Daily Sabah, 10.02.2019 **https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2019/02/18/over-300000-syrians-returned-home-after-turkeys-operations-interior-minister-says** (accessed February 19, 2019).

[29] TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Session 87, 18.04.2018 **https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanak/donem26/yil3/ham/b08701h.htm**

[30] Operation Euphrates Shield between 24 August 2016 and 27 March 2017, the ongoing Olive Branch Operation since January 2018.

civilizationist populist discourse that selectively extends the boundaries of 'the people'. This operates as a hegemonic populism that justifies AKP policies towards Syrians and foreign policy towards Syria through a discourse of brotherhood and references to a shared Ottoman legacy. It is a hegemonic populism maintained by claiming the moral superiority of Turkey over the West, which has long turned a blind eye to the human costs of the Syrian crisis and the pressing needs of forcibly displaced Syrians.

Conclusion

This article has provided an overview of the debates on immigration in electoral politics in Turkey and assessed the extent to which discourses on immigration in the context of the Syrian conflict have followed a populist line, as has been the case in the Western world. Through the analysis of an original dataset of political statements between 2014 and 2018, our findings demonstrate that refugees have not been a big part of public policy and electoral debates, despite the increasing societal discontent, mediatization, and politicization around the presence of refugees, particularly Syrians, in Turkey. The anti-immigration rhetoric of political actors only partially subscribes to the transnational populist playbook of right-wing parties in Western democracies. Refugee reception policies are often criticized by the opposition in relation to political parties' take on key foreign policy issues, namely the EU-Turkey migration diplomacy and AKP's Syria policy, within which security and criminalizing discourses are enmeshed. Opposition MPs only resorted to economic threat discourses with a nativist populist tone when Syrians were seen as rivals in competition over scarce resources. However, even for more contested issues, such as granting citizenship to Syrians, opposition MPs warned about the hostility and violence that might target refugees, and hence refrained from going too far. As we show in this paper, the key reason for the selective use of anti-immigration rhetoric is because the predominantly Sunni Muslim Syrian refugees constitute 'the ultimate other' for neither the Turkish public nor political actors. Refugees were instead seen as victims of the conflict but mostly of the wrong policy choices of the government.

Our findings indicate that even though a populist anti-immigrant discourse could be observed in Turkey, it did not dominate the political opposition. The relative weakness of such discourse, however, did not necessarily translate into discussions on integration and social cohesion but fostered more discussions on return policies. More importantly, we detected a civilizationist populism competing with and countering the Western-style anti-immigrant discourse. The AKP MPs counter critiques of their refugee policies with populist discourse that has an Islamic tone and is premised on moral superiority vis-a-vis the anti-immigrant West. Political opposition to the ruling party's migration policies did little to challenge this moral superiority discourse; on the contrary, as many MHP and CHP MPs' statements indicate, they at times affirmed it.

With its uninterrupted single-party rule for almost 17 years now, AKP's civilizationist populism has established a hegemonic populist discourse that keeps the main opposition parties at bay and seems resilient to rights-based immigration discourse. This is a slippery slope for refugee rights, as it leaves the fate of the refugee population to the discretion of the ruling party and is highly contingent on the AKP's definition of 'the people' that, for the moment, selectively includes Syrian refugees. Yet, it has been able to define the parameters of political debates by marginalizing rights-based approaches to immigration, which have only been embraced by HDP cadres and a few CHP MPs. In this context, there is always the danger of rights violations, including of the minimum right to *non-refoulement*[31] that Syrian refugees have been enjoying, if the

[31] Non-refoulement is a fundamental international law principle that prohibits states from returning people seeking international protection to a country in which they would be in likely danger of facing persecution.

political cost of hosting refugees prevails in the eyes of the government.[32]

Therefore, even though our findings are in line with the literature which shows that a dominant anti-immigrant discourse is independent of the actual number of migrants in a country, it also indicates that there might be other dynamics and forms of populism behind the absence of such rhetoric. Our discussion reveals that populist political discourse may even seemingly be more inclusive towards *certain* migrants depending on the definition of 'the people'. This does not mean, however, that the populism and imagery of 'the people' mobilized by the AKP is pluralist *per se*, since it builds on the existing denial of the religious and ethnic diversity of Turkey, privileging the dominant religious identity over others. Hence, the Turkish case calls for more research on political debates regarding immigration in non-Western contexts receiving a relatively high level of migrants and/or refugees and that are already highly diverse. Such an endeavour would potentially contribute to conceptualizing the diversity of populisms, particularly its exclusionary and inclusionary features, and plurality of 'the people' around the issue of immigration that builds on existing ethno-religious cleavages.

[32] Recent crackdown on Syrians living in Istanbul proves the slippery ground of rights-based approaches to international protection in Turkey: On July, 22 2019, the Istanbul Governorate issued a statement and required Syrian nationals not registered in Istanbul returning to their province of registration saying that those have not been registered will be transferred to provinces determined by the Interior Ministry. The statement coupled with reports on recent detention and deportation practices of Turkey, fostered debates on the extent to which ongoing "voluntary returns to Syria" are indeed voluntary or forced. See for instance Turkey Forcibly Returning Syrians to Danger, Human Rights Watch, 26.07.2019 **https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/26/turkey-forcibly-returning-syrians-danger** (access date 01.10.2019).

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Populist Politics in the New Malaysia

by SHANON SHAH (King's College London)

Abstract

This article investigates the role of religion in populist politics by focusing on the nascent democratic transition in Malaysia, where a decades-old authoritarian regime was unseated in the 2018 general election. I propose that this result can partly be explained by analysing the moral and populist battle between political rivals, given the dominance of ethno-religious identity politics amid Malaysia's diverse population. I argue that the nationalist claims of the incumbent regime were overcome by more inclusive claims based on economic justice employed by its political opponents. To illustrate the workings of these competing moral claims, the article briefly examines the debates on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) rights during this political transition. I suggest that public attitudes towards LGBT+ rights provide one clear example of the larger moral and populist contest that forms part of the confrontation between the erstwhile ethno-religious nationalist regime and the new government. This perspective contributes vital insights on the role of religion and morality in populist politics, especially in authoritarian or newly democratising contexts which are also highly diverse. The article is primarily based on public statements made by Malaysian politicians before and during the election campaign.

Introduction: The Landmark 2018 Elections

What influence does religion have in populist politics, specifically in constructions of the notion of a virtuous 'people' standing against villainous 'elites' and 'others'? This article addresses this question by focusing on the 2018 Malaysian general elections, in which the incumbent *Barisan Nasional* (National Front, [BN]) coalition was defeated for the first time in the country's sixty-one-year modern history. This was despite the BN's escalation of repressive tactics leading up to the polls, from last-minute gerrymandering and voter malapportionment to silencing political opponents and civil society activists (Hutchinson 2018: 594-95). Several observers of Malaysian politics predicted that the BN would retain government – with some convinced that it could actually increase its majority – despite popular discontent with its corruption and misrule (Hutchinson 2018: 582, Welsh 2018: 86). The *Pakatan Harapan* (Alliance of Hope, [PH]) coalition defied these forecasts through what international headlines described as a 'shocking' victory, securing 113 seats out of 222 in the federal Parliament compared to the BN's seventy-nine seats. An alliance with *Parti Warisan Sabah* (the Sabah Heritage Party) in East Malaysia and one independent candidate increased the PH's aggregate number of seats to 122 (Hutchinson 2018: 597).

Significantly, eighteen seats were won by the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), which was part of the PH's predecessor coalition, the *Pakatan Rakyat* (People's Pact, [PR]). Yet PAS's insistence on expanding the imposition of Islamic criminal legislation catalysed conflict with its coalition partners – especially the secularist, centre-left Democratic Action Party (DAP) – resulting in the breakup of PR in 2015 (Hutchinson 2018: 592-93). In 2018, the PH garnered forty-eight per cent of the popular vote, compared to the BN's

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thirty-four per cent and PAS's seventeen per cent. In the previous, also tensely contested election in 2013, the PR won the popular vote by fifty-one per cent against the BN's forty-seven per cent. However, because of the impacts of malapportionment and gerrymandering in the country's first-past-the-post electoral system, the BN still managed to retain Parliament with 133 seats compared to the PR's 89 seats (Hutchinson 2018: 588).

The 2018 election results were also historic because of abrupt changes in the ways that different political parties and coalitions could claim to represent the interests of the electorate. Historically, the BN government had to balance two contradictory narratives – first, that Malaysia is primarily a Malay and Muslim nation and, second, that it is a multicultural utopia. This is because the BN's three main component parties were established to defend specific communal interests – Malay, Chinese, and Indian – but the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), being the dominant partner, was always able to assert the primacy of its Malay nationalist agenda. In other words, 'the people,' according to the BN's governing logic, was at once an exclusive and inclusive concept. The coexistence – and political effectiveness – of these incongruent narratives can be explained by the fact that the Federal Constitution defines Malays as Muslims, effectively fusing the ethnic and religious identity of a numeric majority of Malaysians within a religiously and ethnically diverse electorate.[1] The BN also historically used its advantage of incumbency and executive dominance to cultivate its patronage of well-connected business leaders – Malays and non-Malays – as part of its Malay nationalism and multicultural tokenism (Gomez and Jomo 1999: 4).

This is why, in the past, it was largely taken for granted that the BN's dominance was virtually unchallengeable. Furthermore, to bolster its nationalist appeal, UMNO would not hesitate to demonise various minority groups whom it portrayed as proxies of the monolithically 'liberal' (and by association 'Islamophobic') West, including Christians, ethnic Chinese, Shi'a Muslims (since Malaysia's official religion is Sunni Islam), human rights activists, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) people.

In the 2008 general election, however, the BN maintained power but lost its supermajority (control of more than two-thirds of Parliament). The PR started posing a serious threat to the BN but was hampered by its own internal contradictions. From its inception, the coalition was dogged by PAS's exclusivist focus on Muslims and Islam at the expense of its more multiracial and multireligious coalition partners, the DAP and PKR. Amid this backdrop, the BN and the PR began escalating populist elements in their political rivalry by promising financial aid, subsidies, and (in the case of the BN) cash handouts to entice voters in their budgets and shadow budgets (Welsh 2018: 94). For example, the BN introduced a cash transfer system, Bantuan Rakyat Satu Malaysia (BR1M) in 2012 to offset cost of living issues but this failed to neutralise the PR's opposition to the BN's imposition of the unpopular Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2015 (Hutchinson 2018: 589).

Historically, the UMNO-led BN's brand of Malay nationalism was a way of competing with PAS for core Malay votes. Since the 2013 elections, however, PAS and UMNO had to contend with bitter in-fighting which resulted in the formation of two splinter parties – *Parti Amanah Negara* (the National Trust Party, henceforth '*Amanah*') out of PAS and *Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia* (the Malaysian United Indigenous Party, henceforth '*Bersatu*') out of UMNO – both of which swiftly joined the PH coalition (Hutchinson 2018: 593). This fragmentation of Malay party politics accelerated UMNO's decline while also

[1] Muslims comprise 61.3 percent of the Malaysian population of 28 million, while 19.8 percent are Buddhist, 9.2 percent are Christian and 6.3 percent are Hindu. In terms of ethnicity, 67.4 percent are categorised as Bumiputera (a state-created term comprising ethnic Malays and other indigenous peoples, mostly in Malaysian Borneo, who may or may not be Muslim), 24.6 percent are Chinese, 7.3 percent are Indian, and 0.7 percent are classified as 'Other' (Department of Statistics, Malaysia 2011).

transforming the relationship between expressions of Islam, nationalism, and the different parties' moral claims on political legitimacy.

This detailed background underscores this article's main argument, which is that, in the 2018 elections, the PH successfully countered the BN's explicit ethno-religious nationalism and tokenistic multiculturalism by mobilising a different moral narrative. I maintain that the PH primarily focused upon economic grievances to calibrate the moral claims that contributed to its populist appeal. Yet I also critically examine the limits of the PH's more inclusive narrative by exploring a controversy that rocked the PH government after the election, when UMNO and PAS supporters closed ranks to decry the new administration's alleged permissiveness on LGBT+ rights. The new UMNO-PAS alliance and the PH government's ambivalent responses on LGBT+ rights are, I contend, a valuable way of discerning the complex role of religion in the construction of 'the people,' the 'elites' and 'others' in populist politics.

The article begins with a brief review of recent definitions of populism and draws upon some key aspects to guide an analysis of the Malaysian context. It then provides a summary of Malaysian politics in the decades before the 2018 election. In what follows, the article systematically compares the political rhetoric of the PH and the BN by drawing upon key aspects of the definitions of populism highlighted. It concludes by briefly exploring the attacks by Malay and Islamist nationalists against the PH government's allegedly pro-LGBT+ sympathies to illuminate the competing moral claims underpinning populist politics in contemporary Malaysia.

Conceptualising populism in diverse societies

Populism is a contested concept that has been analysed as an 'ideology, a discursive style, and a form of political mobilization' (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013: 1, 5). Drawing upon the framework offered by Rogers Brubaker (2017: 362), Daniel DeHanas and Marat Shterin (2018: 180) define populism as 'a political style that sets "sacred" people against two enemies: "elites" and "others."' DeHanas and Shterin (2018: 182) contend that the notion of 'the people' (who need to be defended against the twin threats posed by 'the elite' and 'outsiders') can be sacralised by populist politicians drawing upon religious 'symbols, tropes, and ideas, and the feelings of belonging, difference and entitlement they reinforce or even generate.' Bearing this in mind, this article does not prescribe a particular definition of populism but approaches it as a form of 'moral politics' (Gidron and Bonikowski 2018: 3). In doing so, it focuses on the role of religion as a resource for the construction of a 'sacred people' in Malaysia's political trajectory in the 2018 elections.

The role of religion in populist politics should also be contextualised by comparing it with nationalism as a parallel phenomenon in which the idea of the 'people' can be made sacred. This is because religion is not the only resource that populist politicians can utilise to construct the notion of a 'sacred' people. This comparison is also instructive because much commentary on far-right politics in Western Europe tends to conflate populism and nationalism. Yet as Benjamin De Cleen and Yannis Stavrakakis (2017: 302) argue, it is analytically vital to distinguish between populism and nationalism as 'different ways of discursively constructing and claiming to represent "the people," as underdog and as nation respectively.' Using a spatial metaphor, they contend that the social antagonism that is characteristic of populist politics works on a vertical or 'down/up' axis (hence the 'underdog' taking on the 'elite'). Nationalism, on the other hand, primarily works on a horizontal or 'in/out' axis – hence the 'pure' or 'rightful' members of the nation pitting themselves against outsiders and internal enemies who sully national purity, including migrants and ethnic or religious minorities.

This article acknowledges this rejoinder by De Cleen and Stavrakakis, especially since Malaysia's diversity raises complex questions about the very concept of 'nation.' Can there be a multiethnic nation of Malaysians? Or, is the country primarily a Malay (and therefore Muslim) nation

Table 1: Political parties in the 222-seat Malaysian Federal Parliament, from the 2008 general election until the breakup of the *Pakatan Rakyat* coalition in 2015

Role	Coalition	Component Parties	Orientation	Number of seats (2008-2018)	Number of seats (2013-2015)
Government	*Barisan Nasional* (National Front)	United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)	Malay nationalist	79	88
		Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA)	Chinese nationalist	15	7
		Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC)	Indian nationalist	3	4
		Other junior component parties, including from Sabah and Sarawak (in Malaysian Borneo)		43	34
Total				140	133
Opposition	*Pakatan Rakyat* (People's Pact)	Democratic Action Party (DAP)	Centre-left and secularist; multiracial/ multireligious (albeit majority Chinese)	28	38
		People's Justice Party (PKR)	Centrist; multiracial/ multireligious	30	29
		Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS)	Islamist	23	21
	Not formally part of the *Pakatan Rakyat*	Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM)	Socialist and secularist; multiracial/ multireligious	1	1
Total				82	89

Sources: Compiled and summarised from *Malaysiakini* archives (malaysiakini.com) and other citations within this article.

Table 2: Political parties in 222-seat Malaysian Federal Parliament after the May 2018 general election

Role	Coalition	Major Component Parties	Post-2015 splintering	Orientation	Number of seats
Government	*Pakatan Harapan* (Alliance of Hope)	DAP	N.a.	Centre-left and secularist	42
		PKR	N.a.	Centrist	47
		National Trust Party (*Amanah*)	From PAS	Soft Islamist	13
		Malaysian United Indigenous Party (*Bersatu*)	From UMNO	Soft Malay nationalist	11
	Subtotal				113
	Informal PH allies	Sabah Heritage Party (*Warisan*)	From UMNO	Sabahan nationalist; multiracial/ multireligious	8
		Independent candidate			1
Total					122
Opposition	*Barisan Nasional*	UMNO	Into *Bersatu* and *Warisan*	Malay nationalist	54
		MCA	N.a.	Chinese nationalist	1
		MIC	N.a.	Indian nationalist	2
		Junior component parties			22
	Subtotal				79
	Gagasan Sejahtera (Ideas of Prosperity)	PAS	Into *Amanah*	Islamist	18
	Other parties and independents				3
Total					100

Sources: Compiled and summarised from *Malaysiakini* archives (malaysiakini.com) and other citations within this article

that merely tolerates the presence of non-Malays and non-Muslims? This question goes to the heart of Malaysian politics, which has been described as a hierarchical form of ethno-religious consociationalism – in other words, involving constant compromise between the elites of different communities, with Malays accorded political dominance (Hutchinson 2018: 584-85). It also clarifies this article's analysis – some of the examples provided later could be interpreted as straightforward examples of nationalism, but in discussing them I suggest that the picture is more complicated and that they also illustrate the subtle workings of moral and populist politics. In particular, I suggest that the former BN regime's strong ethno-religious nationalist rhetoric gave the opportunity for the inchoate PH coalition to respond with a moral outrage that activated their successful populist campaign. To flesh out this contention, the next section summarises a recent history of authoritarianism and ethno-religious nationalism in Malaysia prior to the 2018 elections.

Authoritarianism and populism in Malaysia before 2018

Under the charismatic leadership of Mahathir Mohamad, who first became prime minister in 1981 until his resignation in 2003, the BN employed populist strategies to cement its popularity. For example, in a highly symbolic and visible move soon after he came into power in 1981, Mahathir[2] introduced punch-cards and name-tags for civil servants – which he and members of his cabinet adopted by example – to reduce the civil service's elitist aura and to enable members of the public to make complaints against 'rude or indolent' officers by name (Rehman 2006: 171). Mahathir's combination of populism and authoritarianism was boosted when the charismatic student leader and Muslim activist Anwar Ibrahim, hitherto staunchly anti-UMNO, joined the party soon after Mahathir became premier.

The Mahathir-Anwar duo provided a new combination of nationalist and religious legitimacy that gave UMNO, and thus BN, the upper hand. Yet the attempts by PAS and UMNO to out-Islamise each other increasingly overshadowed the country's historical multicultural consociationalism. It also coincided with increasing authoritarianism under BN rule, culminating in a crackdown on the independent media, the courts, and civil society in the late 1980s. Particularly sinister was the detention without trial and torture of 106 activists, including feminists and environmentalists, and members of the political opposition, including secular leftists and Islamists, under the Internal Security Act (ISA) in 1987.[3]

Whilst the BN emerged stronger in the early 1990s, it was severely weakened by the regional economic crisis in the late 1990s which triggered a political crisis. Mahathir's sacking of Anwar, who was by this time Deputy Prime Minister, on charges of corruption and sodomy in 1998 catalysed a democratic reform movement (dubbed '*Reformasi*') which failed to dislodge the BN in elections the following year. The treatment of Anwar introduced an unprecedented intra-Malay, intra-Muslim moral contest between UMNO and its Malay critics – in this case, with UMNO painting Anwar as a traitor based on his alleged sexual proclivities. However, the collapse of the opposition coalition post-1999 paved the way for the BN's comeback, this time riding upon a popular wave of 'moderate' Islam under Mahathir's successor, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who took office in 2004.

Political and economic mismanagement under Abdullah's administration led to another surge of anti-regime protests which weakened but failed to unseat the BN in the 2008 election. These campaigns entrenched the moral dimensions of the rivalry between the BN and its opponents. This new phase of rivalry was precipitated by two mass demonstrations in November 2007

[2] Full Malay names are patronymic, hence my citing first names upon subsequent mentions.

[3] Francis Hutchinson (2018: 587-88) provides an efficient summary of the BN's other repressive measures, which space does not permit me to elaborate at length.

that attracted tens of thousands of protesters (huge by Malaysian standards) – the first organised by the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH) and the second by the Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) (Lee et al. 2010: 294-95). BERSIH demanded democratic reforms in the country's electoral system, managing to widen its multiracial appeal and support base in subsequent mass actions in 2011, 2012, 2015 and 2016. Meanwhile, HINDRAF sought reparations for Malaysians of Indian descent, characterised as innocent victims of exploitation by the British colonial government – a case of the 'underdog' facing down a rapacious 'elite.'

The goals of BERSIH, and to a lesser extent the short-lived HINDRAF, were supported by several PR leaders, which contributed to its populist appeal as a coalition defending the interests of the '*rakyat*' ('citizens' or 'people') against exploitation by out-of-touch BN elites after the 2008 election. The BN responded by initiating superficial reforms, for example, repealing the ISA, which allowed for detention without trial for up to 60 days. Yet such reforms meant nothing – the BN merely replaced the ISA with the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 which, although reducing the maximum period of detention without trial to 28 days, provided a wider and more ambiguous definition of 'security offences.' As an example of 'moral politics' that is relevant to this article, the BN also sought to discredit Ambiga Sreenevasan, the previous chair of BERSIH 2.0 in 2011, for her support of the LGBT+ rights initiative *Seksualiti Merdeka*. BERSIH, however, continued to respond to the BN's repression through highly successful public demonstrations which served to enhance support for the PR to the extent that the BN was very nearly ousted in the 2013 election.

After 2013, the BN government became mired in a corruption scandal involving 1MDB, a state-created sovereign wealth fund, unleashing exceptional levels of public discontent[4]. However, the BN strengthened its grip by manipulating Islamic and Malay nationalist sentiments (including by making overtures to PAS); passing even more restrictive legislation against the media; and harassing its political opponents (Hutchinson 2018: 594-95). The regime also intensified ethno-religious nationalist rhetoric against a range of 'others,' including LGBT+ people, Christians, Shi'a Muslims, and the values of liberalism, secularism and human rights. Against this backdrop, the splintering of UMNO and PAS (into *Bersatu* and *Amanah*, respectively) significantly realigned Malaysia's political landscape. The détente between the scandal-plagued Prime Minister Najib Razak and PAS exacerbated the moral rivalry in an already polarised environment – the new BN-PAS alignment targeted 'conservative' supporters of the Malay-Muslim status quo, whilst the nascent PR became the party of choice for 'liberals' and other voters who were enraged by the 1MDB scandal (Welsh 2018: 91-92). The significance of the 2018 election was that the PH, as an untested new coalition, successfully mobilised a different, populist moral narrative – largely based on economic grievances – that triumphed over the BN's explicit ethno-religious nationalism and tokenistic multiculturalism.

Comparing populist claims: *Barisan Nasional* and *Pakatan Harapan*

In this section, I systematically compare the moral rhetoric adopted by the BN and the PH as part of their populist electoral campaigns. This comparison of moral politics, I suggest, illustrates the direct and indirect ways that religion influences populist politics amongst Malaysia's diverse electorate. The timeline of events is crucial. Parliament was dissolved on 7 April 2018, followed by the announcement of candidate nominations on 28 April and polling on 9 May. At 11 days, the official campaigning period was set at the legally allowed minimum (Hutchinson 2018: 595). Yet the BN and PH had been on high alert to contest

[4] The 1MDB case dwarfed other significant corruption scandals faced by Najib's administration – Hutchinson (2018, 590-94) again provides a clear and useful summary.

in potential snap elections for months beforehand, since the election was forecasted to be held in late 2017 (Hutchinson 2018: 594). The excerpts I include in this section therefore do not strictly fall within the official campaigning period.

Instead, I focus on verbatim quotes reported in the mass media in three distinct periods – the months before the official campaigning period (1 January to 28 April 2018), the election campaign (28 April to 9 May), and post-election quotes in relation to LGBT+ rights, namely in July-August 2018 and August 2019. I have selected quotes from *Malaysiakini*, the country's most widely read online news site, which is free from government ownership and political control.[5] As an exception, the introductory quote on the LGBT+ issue comes from the Malay-language, BN-controlled news site *MStar*. My purpose is to analyse the general contours of the PH's and BN's political styles rather than detailed critical discourse analysis, which is beyond the scope of this article.

BN: Ethno-religious nationalism vs unanticipated social changes

Building up to the 2018 general election, UMNO's Malay nationalist and pseudo-Islamist agenda became more strident. Whilst the economic dimension was not completely absent from BN's overall rhetoric, the coalition increasingly focused on ethno-religious sentiments especially in response to its own internal political woes. This is what intensified UMNO-BN's characterisation of the 'sacred people' and the 'other.' For example, Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor, a former UMNO cabinet minister, described the DAP, a PH component party, as follows (Alyaa in *Malaysiakini*, 14 April 2018):

> We are facing the most obvious challenge – there is a coalition whose backbone is the DAP – a chauvinist party where most of its leaders are evangelists. If they are Catholics, I would believe them, but when they are evangelists, new Christians, this is the problem. This is what DAP really is, and it is *Pakatan Harapan*'s backbone so you must be careful.

This statement suggests a nominal recognition of religions other than Islam, but in a manner that effectively reinforces Christianity as a disruptive 'other.' Yet this perspective also distinguishes the 'good' minority apples – quietist Catholics – from 'bad' Malaysian Christians – politicised, power-seeking, anti-BN Evangelicals. Thus, Tengku Adnan's tribute to the role of Islam in contributing to Malaysia's growth and sovereignty came with a warning: 'But all these will be destroyed if we are not careful. It's the same with the special rights of the Malays, our language and many others which could be destroyed because these people do not like what we have achieved' (Alyaa in *Malaysiakini*, 14 April 2018).

Tengku Adnan's sentiment is merely one example of how UMNO's – and by association the BN's – idea of the 'sacred people' revolved around Malay privileges and identity. This religiously framed nationalism informs an explicit moral position that can be discerned through the litany of 'others' who have been cast as enemies by UMNO, including LGBT+ people. One illustration is the following sentiment expressed by former Deputy Prime Minister and current Leader of the Opposition, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, commenting on 'deviationist' groups operating within the country: 'The attack on the Muslim mind also comes through action by certain parties which uphold…pluralism…and activities that celebrate the rights of the so-called discriminated groups such as the lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders (LGBT)' (Bernama in *Malaysiakini*, 9 January 2018).

These moral and nationalist ingredients in the BN's political arsenal are not clear-cut examples of populist politics. They also failed to produce electoral success for the coalition in 2018. Instead, they suggest that the BN severely underestimated the institutional and demographic changes which unleashed the PH's highly successful 'saviour politics' (Welsh 2018: 86) within a political milieu that was increasingly polarised and populated by populist politicians. This was

[5] Until election day, the BN-controlled media were severely muzzled in their reporting.

most clearly seen in Mahathir's decision to return to politics as the founder of *Bersatu*, which splintered from UMNO, and then to lead the PH's political crusade to 'Save Malaysia' from Najib and his cronies. The moral and populist dimensions of the PH's 'saviour politics' were most evident during the election campaign, for example, when Mahathir addressed the '*Tsunami Rakyat*' ('Citizens' Tsunami') rally with his recurring campaign motif: 'We want to topple this thief's government.' (*Malaysiakini*, 6 May 2018).

The moral dimensions of this 'saviour politics,' however, were complicated by the fragmentation of the Malay political landscape. The formation of PAS splinter party *Amanah* in 2015 and *Bersatu* (from UMNO) in 2016 meant that there were now four rather than two major Malay-Muslim political parties vying for Malay-Muslim support. The rapprochement between Mahathir and Anwar – who at this point was imprisoned yet again, for a second sodomy conviction – also grabbed the headlines.[6]

By most predictions, *Amanah* and *Bersatu* were unlikely to make inroads by 2018, especially when PAS withdrew from the PH's predecessor political pact and appeared to welcome UMNO's overtures under the guise of Malay-Muslim unity. Yet the BN's share of the vote collapsed and support for PAS also decreased slightly due to swings towards *Amanah* and *Bersatu* during the general election. This benefited PH on the whole, as the DAP and the centrist, multi-ethnic *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (National Justice Party, [PKR]) also won more parliamentary seats compared to 2013.

[6] Anwar was first convicted of sodomy and corruption in 1999, during Mahathir's administration; this sentence was overturned by the Federal Court in 2004 under the administration of Mahathir's successor, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (Shah 2018: 129-133). A second, separate sodomy allegation emerged immediately after the 2008 general election, when Anwar provided *de facto* leadership that galvanised the inchoate PR's populist surge against the BN. After a complicated legal process, he was sentenced in 2014, i.e. soon after the 2013 general election, when the PR under his leadership won the popular vote but still failed to dislodge the BN. Anwar received a royal pardon in May 2018, a week after the PH's electoral victory.

PH: Anti-corruption, good governance, and populist moral retaliation

Religious and ethnic nationalist sentiments were not completely absent from the political style of the PH. Yet many of these sentiments were used by ex-UMNO defectors to undermine the party's official rhetoric, as exemplified in the following quote by a former UMNO cabinet minister turned critic, Rais Yatim (*Malaysiakini*, 8 May 2018):

> There are four Chinese component parties in BN, but in *Harapan*, there is only one (DAP). DAP may win 35 seats, out of the 54 seats it is contesting, nationwide. This is not enough to determine the future of the country. So the allegations (that voting DAP will threaten Malay rights) are to spook the Malays into not voting for *Harapan*. But the smart Malays have now wised up and changed their minds and started to think about the wrongs committed by the BN coalition. [Issues like] the rising cost of living…and the selling of the country's assets will matter more to the voters than the spectre of DAP destroying Malay rights.

This reframing of ethno-religious sentiments in economic terms is a pivotal example of how the PH primarily focused upon economic grievances to calibrate the moral claims that contributed to its populist appeal. This strategy was especially persuasive since – contrary to official indicators of economic performance – household debt, shortage of affordable housing, and inflation all worsened under the Najib administration (Hutchinson 2018: 588-89). The 1MDB scandal was therefore transformed into a Herculean moral issue that undermined the BN's simultaneous claims to be the guardian of Malaysia's material development, Islamic virtues, and multicultural values.

While PH leaders and allies did not directly refer to 'sacred people' or synonymous terms in their political rhetoric, they imbued the concept of '*rakyat*' ('citizen' or 'people') with more inclusive connotations, juxtaposing it with the concept of '*maruah*' ('pride' or 'honour'), a Malay word often used to sanctify or dignify the underdog. For example, according to the rising PKR leader, Rafizi Ramli: 'So the *rakyat* of all races are now determined to reclaim our honour. We have

lost our nation's soul under Najib' (*Malaysiakini*, 8 May 2018). Rafidah Aziz, a former UMNO cabinet minister who openly supported PH during the election campaign, said: 'Redeeming our tarnished *maruah* (pride) is what needs to be a priority. Not bribing with goodies [economic handouts] that the country can ill afford and will be more burdensome for the *rakyat* (people)' (*Malaysiakini*, 8 May 2018).

Such sentiments by former UMNO grandees and rising PH leaders indirectly sacralised the ethnic and religious inclusivity in the PH's portrayal of 'the people.' It was an effective way for PH's diverse political coalition morally to turn the tables on the BN whilst also sidestepping its own internal contradictions on Islam and Malay nationalism. This message was harnessed to appeal to urban, multicultural, middle-class voters. This tallies with observations that while middle-class Malaysians were historically supportive of the BN regime, there is a growing, multiethnic proportion that is increasingly concerned with issues of transparency, good governance, and public accountability (Saravanamuttu 2001: 110-12). Urban middle class Malaysians were therefore a natural target for the PH and the PR, its predecessor coalition.

The other side of this argument is that, since the 2008 elections, the BN's continued dominance was because of its appeal amongst rural Malay voters in Peninsula Malaysia. The BN could also rely on voter loyalty in the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak – informally referred to as its 'fixed deposits' – as a result of its entrenched system of patronage there (Hutchinson 2018: 586, 600). The 2018 elections, however, saw a minor electoral swing in Sabah and Sarawak against the BN which framed their regional and communal interests in economic terms. This was succinctly expressed during the campaign of Baru Bian, the Sarawakian PH parliamentary candidate who is now a cabinet minister: 'This is [the 14th General Election], with new social economic issues and a new political consciousness. I hope today we can move beyond racial and communal politics and look at credible, professional and courageous candidates who will speak for the *rakyat*' (Joseph in *Malaysiakini*, 26 April 2018).

The evidence of the PH's moral claims is most evident in its characterisation of UMNO-BN, and especially of Najib, as out-of-touch elites who were squandering what rightfully belonged to the people. The PH's successful use of the 1MDB scandal struck a chord with voters, despite the BN's vicious clampdown on its critics. Amid the numerous PH references to the scandal, it is worth quoting a significant portion of the open letter published by the senior DAP leader **Lim** Kit Siang (*Malaysiakini*, 7 May 2018) two days before voting took place, which illustrates the moral dimensions of the PH's saviour politics:

> On the eve of the historic 14th general election, I ask the 15 million Malaysian voters to save Malaysia and our future generations, and not to save Najib and UMNO/BN. Najib has betrayed both the Malays and Malaysians because he has turned the country into a rogue democracy, forgetting his promise in September 2011 to make Malaysia one of the best democracies in the world. And even worse, he has turned Malaysia into a global kleptocracy as a result of the 1MDB scandal, described by the US Attorney-General as 'kleptocracy at its worst.' May 9 is a 'now or never, do or die' moment for Malaysians, regardless of race, religion, region or party affiliation to set Malaysia free from corruption, abuses of power, injustices and exploitation and to reach for the 'Malaysian dream' – citizens for a united, harmonious, progressive, prosperous nation which is a model to the world of how a multiracial, multilingual, multireligious and multicultural people can succeed in turning differences and diversities into a unique national strength.

Lim's letter encapsulates some of the recurring themes already discussed in relation to saviour politics and populism – notably its appeal to a righteous, multicultural citizenry needing to redeem its honour from exploitation by a rapacious, entrenched elite (even though the words 'sacred,' 'the people,' and 'elite' are not explicitly used). Also noteworthy is that apart from this skewering of Najib and his allies, there was arguably an absence of rhetoric that systematically demonised minority identities in the PH's

campaign, compared to the BN's. Yet absence of evidence is not evidence of absence – it is too early to tell whether the PH opposes the same or different 'others' that UMNO and PAS consider anathema. Rather, the PH's populist success remains fragile because while it is more convincing about its credentials in cleaning up corruption and other forms of economic mismanagement, it has failed to neutralise sentiments that appeal to Malay-Muslim nationalists. These primarily revolve around the issue of Malay privileges and the sanctity of Islamic law, of which the matter of LGBT+ inclusion and equality is only part of a matrix of other concerns and grievances.

Populism and moral politics: the example of LGBT+ rights

The dualistic ideological and moral cleavage that emerged in these elections – with 'liberals' tending to support PH and 'conservatives' tending to support the BN and PAS – can be glimpsed in one significant development. In the euphoric aftermath of the elections, an openly gay Malay man, Numan Afifi, was appointed as a staff member in the team of the Minister of Youth and Sports, Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman, who is also Malay. The backlash against this appointment prompted Numan to resign. What angered the more socially liberal PH supporters was the response from Syed Saddiq via Twitter, addressed to Numan, which read: 'Your service has been invaluable bro since our campaigning days. Stay strong and I'll always respect your decision. You'll always be a bro.' (Kassim in *MStar*, 9 July 2018).

Liberal-minded Malaysians and social justice activists saw the Tweet as perfunctory, heterosexist and masculinist – it was interpreted as an example of Syed Saddiq's hypocrisy and implicit homophobia, since he could have stood up for Numan more boldly. At the same time, supporters of UMNO and PAS as well as proponents of the Malay-Muslim status quo within the PH began to question the government's supposed laxity on LGBT+ issues. The *de facto* Minister of Religious Affairs, Mujahid Yusof Rawa, was then compelled to outline the government's position, reiterating that homosexuality remained a crime under state law and a sin in Islam, whilst urging Malaysians to treat LGBT+ people with empathy and respect and calling for an end to the violent persecution of LGBT+ people (Tong in *Malaysiakini*, 23 July 2018):

> This means that the LGBT community's rights to lead their lifestyle are bound by the law, which does not allow it in Malaysia. Is that clear? At the same time, their human rights as Malaysian citizens will be preserved based on the Federal Constitution which places Islam as the federal religion. In other words, this community cannot be discriminated against in the workplace, and they cannot be betrayed or oppressed.

This compromise was seen as too liberal by many ethno-religious nationalists and too conservative by many liberals and progressives. It later emerged that Mujahid had also ordered that the portraits of two prominent Malaysian LGBT+ activists – Pang Khee Teik, a Chinese-Malaysian gay man, and Nisha Ayub, a trans woman of Malay and Indian descent – be removed from an exhibition in Penang State commemorating the country's independence celebrations in August. This unleashed another public furore. The Minister held a press conference with Nisha and was partially sympathetic about transgender rights, but pointedly refused to engage with any openly gay activists. This triggered another round of backlash – again, by ethno-religious nationalists who saw this balancing act as still amounting to pro-LGBT+ capitulation, and by liberals who saw it as pandering to homophobic Islamist sentiments.

The controversy escalated when the PAS-governed State of Terengganu carried out a punishment of public whipping under Islamic criminal law against two women convicted of lesbianism by a *sharia* court[7]. The federal PH government, led by Prime Minister Mahathir, condemned the

[7] The administration of Islamic criminal law falls under the jurisdiction of the State governments in the Malaysian federation and has historically been an issue of contention between PAS and UMNO.

punishment as heavy-handed and draconian. A few days later, however, Mahathir reiterated his stand that LGBT+ equality was impossible to uphold in Malaysia because of the immorality of homosexuality and transgenderism.

This yo-yoing on LGBT+ rights revealed a major fault line *within* the PH, i.e. between its desire to wrestle the moral high ground from the BN and its lack of internal consensus about personal morals. Whilst the PH successfully managed to frame the 1MDB scandal as a moral issue, it still has not formulated a coherent stance on civil liberties and human rights *vis à vis* the position of Islam and Malay privileges. This has left the vitality of UMNO's and PAS's combined religious nationalism unchallenged and, at the time of writing, they are regaining support against the PH.

Diversity, populist politics, and post-authoritarian transitions

As explained above, the 2018 elections were not the first time that a diverse collection of pro-democracy reformists in Malaysia sided with a political coalition in an attempt to oust the BN. In fact, strategic alliances between civil society and previous coalitions amongst opposition political parties severely weakened the incumbents in 2008 and 2013. These efforts, however, were hampered by numerous structural obstacles, including the BN's dominance in rural parts of West and East Malaysia, its frequent use of repressive laws, its vast networks of political patronage, and its entrenched practices of malapportionment and gerrymandering.

The BN's defeat in 2018 is thus invaluable for an analysis of the workings of populism in a diverse country such as Malaysia. This is because one of the most noteworthy features of the PH's victory is how it managed to neutralise the BN's tried-and-tested nationalism which, historically, was often sealed by a fusion of conservative Islamic morality and Malay political privileges. I have argued that, besides the unprecedented changes in the country's political landscape, the PH benefited from a populist push in which its candidates and civil society supporters successfully, albeit indirectly, redefined the idea of the 'people,' the 'elite' and, to a much lesser extent, 'others' to undermine the BN. The PH largely did this by highlighting its position as an underdog – a narrative which resonated with significant numbers of Malaysians who were fed up with the BN's stranglehold on government. As I have also argued, however, this does not mean that the PH coalition is devoid of its own ethno-religious nationalist tendencies. Rather, this article has highlighted the ways in which the two coalitions engaged in a moral battle to define the 'people,' the 'elites' and 'others' within a tensely fought election.

The 2018 Malaysian election shows why it is vital to account for the role of religion in populist politics – because of the direct and indirect ways that it informs the construction of the notion of a 'sacred people' (DeHanas and Shterin 2018: 180). Religious rhetoric and ethnic nationalism often go hand in hand, but what the case of Malaysia uniquely demonstrates is how these elements form part of a populist political milieu that is also very diverse. Thus, while I agree that it is crucial to distinguish between forms of populism that are not nationalist and forms of nationalism that are not populist (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017: 302), I have added to this discussion by investigating populism as a form of 'moral politics' (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013: 3). This framework allows for a more nuanced explanation of how political change might occur in authoritarian yet heterogeneous countries.

Without these distinctions, fiercely contested moral issues, such as LGBT+ rights in a country like Malaysia, run the risk of being stereotyped as merely one of the 'inherent' or 'inevitable' tensions in a supposedly Muslim-majority country. Yet the picture is more complicated than this. Rather than being the rallying cry of a monolithic group of 'Islamists' or 'nationalists,' LGBT+ issues are now being contested by multiple, competing, Malay-led political blocs – the ousted UMNO, PAS, and different factions within the PH coalition government – to redefine the notion of the

'people' and hence the nation. To put it another way, Malaysia's political scene is now seeing a backlash by the still-powerful ethno-religious nationalists – mostly consisting of an uneasy alliance of UMNO and PAS supporters – who are attempting to undermine the new government through mass mobilisation.

In recent months, for example, several Muslim non-governmental organisations have come together under the banner of the *Gerakan Pembela Ummah* (*Ummah* Defenders Movement), staging public rallies with the visible support of UMNO and PAS leaders. At *Ummah*'s recent public convention on Malay unity, chairperson Aminuddin Yahya said:

> For the past 10 years, the most brazen movement would be the human rights movement, which fights for equality, bringing in "universal values" which pushes aside religious values. We are shocked by the news that a representative from the LGBT group was given the opportunity to deliver a speech at the Human Rights Convention in Geneva. He was given respect by the (*de facto*) religious affairs minister who purportedly practises tolerance (Faisal in *Malaysiakini*, 25 August 2019).

Aminuddin was referring to Numan Afifi (whose controversial resignation from the Ministry of Youth and Sports was discussed above), who spoke at Malaysia's Universal Periodic Review at the United Nations in March 2019. Ethno-religious activists such as *Ummah* construe LGBT+ rights as an ideological and moral non-negotiable between a supposedly pure Malay-Muslim identity – upheld by UMNO and PAS – and the elite 'West' and Westernised Malaysians, i.e. the liberals within the PH government and its supporters. Thus, controversies on LGBT+ rights could reinvigorate UMNO's popular support, via an alliance with PAS, that lost momentum under the weakened BN government before 2018.

The PH government's response – largely an evasion of the conservative moral politics of UMNO-PAS – has been regarded as half-hearted by its supporters, who see it as too conservative, and the opposition, who see it as too liberal. This shows that the PH's capitalising of corruption as a moral issue has yet to provide ideological coherence and political consensus *within* the coalition on human rights and civil liberties. On one hand, it might be argued that the new government's indecisiveness is largely due to teething problems in the country's democratic transition. On the other hand, it could also be the case that the PH, as an internally diverse coalition, has not ruled out appealing to ethno-religious sentiments to stay in power. This remains a distinct possibility especially since, even before the 2018 elections, the PH coalition was led by several former authoritarian leaders who defected from the BN, and it continued accepting defections, especially from UMNO, months after forming government. At the time of writing, although the government supports the status quo position on LGBT+ rights, it is proceeding with other democratic reforms, for example, repealing the death penalty, the Sedition Act and other repressive laws.

Conclusion

Malaysia demonstrates unique political features which make it a valuable case to examine the phenomenon of populism. Islam is the established religion and is constitutionally fused with Malay identity, yet the country's population is highly diverse. The major political parties have historically been drawn along racial and religious lines, yet the country was governed uninterruptedly by the BN – a Malay-led, consociational, multicultural coalition – from independence until the historic 2018 general election.

The BN's surprise defeat in 2018 introduced fresh directions to analyse social and political change in authoritarian regimes. This article has focused on the direct and indirect influence of religion on this result by analysing populism as a form of moral politics. This is because with Muslim-majority countries, it is tempting to conclude that moral controversies, most visibly on gender and sexuality, are simply about a clash between monolithic religious forces and 'secular' political opponents. Such stereotypes can also be entrenched through similarly monolithic notions of 'nationalism' or 'populism,' or both. These

characterisations, however, do not explain the dynamics within countries with less dominant religious majorities and more diverse populations, such as Malaysia.

In this article, I have shown that moral politics remain central to the erstwhile BN government and its political foes. I have analysed the BN's electoral defeat by examining the contours of the moral contest between the BN and the PH, and have argued that this was a crucial ingredient in the populist politics of the 2018 election campaign, especially from PH. The unprecedented institutional and demographic changes in the country's political landscape introduced a new ideological cleavage which enabled the PH to capitalise on moral rhetoric that neutralised the BN's conservative religious nationalism.

Yet the PH's victory and viability as a government cannot be taken for granted – the bitter debates on LGBT+ rights, for example, expose the still-potent clash of moral politics between the PH and BN. This is where the definitions of populism that encourage us to look at how concepts of the 'people,' the 'elite' and 'others' are construed can still be valuable. They ask us to pay attention to the different resources that populist leaders and their supporters use to sacralise their idea of the 'people,' and to demonise 'the elite' and 'others.'

This perspective – on the moral appeals made by populist actors to define and sacralise the 'people' – is essential for diverse contexts beyond Malaysia, especially where religion and ethnicity play central roles in politics. It forces us to question and analyse the diversities within the interlocking concepts of religion and ethnicity and how these result in multiple and contradictory definitions of the 'people' and the 'nation.'

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Open Forum

Ethnic Options: Self-Identifications of Higher-Educated Second-Generation Minorities as Situated Ways to Negotiate Belonging*

by Marieke Wynanda Slootman (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Abstract

Individuals with ethnic-minority backgrounds are persistently labelled as ethnic minorities, as outsiders, and encounter negative stereotyping. Research argues that they lack power to identify as they want, and that their 'ethnic options' are limited. This paper explores the ethnic options of higher-educated second-generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch, focusing on articulated self-identifications in social interactions. In resonance with other literature, qualitative interviews show that mechanisms of exclusion, such as imposing minority labels, do not leave individuals powerless. Furthermore, the assumption that individuals have 'a' manner of self-identification appears too simplistic. Minority individuals have various identification strategies at their disposal, ranging from rejection to transformation and adoption of the ascribed label. Which strategy they choose depends on the situation and the audience. This focus on the articulated self-identifications highlights individual agency as used to negotiate belonging in various ways, while acknowledging the coercive power of the social context, revealing the interactive and situational nature of identification and boundary making.

Keywords: Ethnicity, identity, ethnic options, belonging, minorities, second generation.

Introduction

In the Netherlands, like in many other countries, the integration discourse has become increasingly polarized and assimilationist (Duyvendak 2011; Rydgren 2007). The current dominant discourse asks immigrants and their children to internalize 'Dutch culture' and to identify as Dutch (Slootman & Duyvendak 2015). When they identify as 'Moroccan' or 'Turkish' this is assumed to inhibit their identification as Dutch, and their self-articulation of these identities are interpreted as expressions of 'disloyalty' to Dutch society. Hence they are regarded with distrust. Paradoxically, in the Dutch debate, these same immigrants, and even their Dutch-born offspring who have Dutch nationality, are consistently labelled as 'Moroccan' or 'Turkish', which bears the connotation that they are not Dutch and do not fully belong in the Netherlands. Ethnic minorities are placed in the position of outsider and are subsequently blamed for occupying this position.

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Because such exclusionary labels are persistently imposed on (visible) ethnic-minority individuals, these minorities are assumed to lack 'ethnic options', to use the words of American sociologist Mary Waters (1996). This means that visible minorities do not have any freedom to choose when and how to identify because minority identities, associated with certain stereotypes, are imposed upon them. This view, which reduces minorities to powerless victims, has been nuanced and countered, for example by sociologists Nazli Kibria (2000) and Miri Song (2001), who elaborate on the ethnic options of minorities. They urge scholars to pay attention to the agency of minorities and to develop a more complex understanding of the abilities of minorities to assert their desired ethnic identities.

Adding to a growing body of literature about ethnic identifications of subordinated minorities – in other words, about ethnic options and boundary work – this article makes a contribution to our understanding of ethnic self-identifications among ethnic minorities. Its focus on the articulation of self-identification is unique and leads to fresh insights. By conducting in-depth interviews with higher-educated Dutch with Moroccan and Turkish backgrounds, a variety of self-identifications emerged – even within single interviews – in response to imposed labels and widespread negative stereotypes. These responses varied in the level of 'compliance' with the imposed ethnic minority label. While individuals sometimes downright refused the imposed label, on other occasions they adopted the label, or they tried to transform its meaning. These identity expressions do not necessarily reflect the individual's self-image (the cognitive component), but are interactional and have a strategic component. They seem to be part of ongoing negotiations of belonging on both the individual and group level. This focus directs the attention to the interaction, bringing into view the (subtle) mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, the power of the other person (the 'audience'), in relation to the options and the agency of the minority individual. It shows how options and choices are shaped by the context and the moment.

The focus on social climbers, which resulted from the research focus of the broader study (see Slootman 2018a), reveals that the range of options is limited for higher-educated individuals. Although the interviews suggest that the belonging that results from their social mobility can facilitate the usage of certain ethnic options, this does not automatically facilitate their choice. This nuances the claim that having an advanced socioeconomic position increases one's ethnic options, as stated by Kibria (2000) and challenged by Song (2001).

In the following sections, I explain the identity framework I use, discuss literature on ethnic options, and present the societal and methodological context of this study. I subsequently explain the exclusionary effect of imposed ethnic identities, also called external labelling or categorization. Based on the empirical data, I then present the various responses I encountered, ranging from rejection to adoption of the labels. The article concludes with a reflection on the role of social mobility and belonging and on the relevance of the findings.

Identity and Identification

Both in academia and in everyday life, 'identity' is an oft-used concept. However, its versatility makes the concept too vague for analytic purposes (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). At the same time, its use often (unwillingly) triggers an essentialist perspective in which identities are presumed fixed and singular, and categories of people are imagined homogeneous, particularly when ethnic background is taken as the analytic lens or the basis for selection. Elsewhere, I refer to this as the trap of ambiguity and the trap of essentialism (Slootman 2018a).

To avoid these traps, I composed an analytical toolkit, derived from various scholars (Slootman 2018a). Here, I mention four of these tools. Firstly, following scholars such as Giddens (1991), Hall (1991), Baumann (1999) and Jenkins

(2008b), I focus on *processes of identification* instead of some pre-existing 'identity'. Wimmer makes a similar turn when he shifts the focus from boundaries to boundary making (2008). In this article, I focus on individuals' expressions of self-identification, such as 'I really am Dutch' and '…then I say I am a Moroccan'. Interviewees often expressed different self-identifications within one interview, in different tones and with varying emphases, which puzzled me at first but piqued my interest.

The second tool is the *separation of label and content* (see for example Verkuyten 2004 and Jenkins 2008a). Contrary to many other studies on identification, I do not focus on cultural or social practices, such as language, social networks and cultural traditions as is often the case (Phinney 1990: 505). I study self-identification in terms of identity labels (the use of the labels 'Moroccan', 'Turkish', and 'Dutch'), without assuming that this automatically reflects certain cultural practices or social orientations. Research has demonstrated that expressed self-identifications often do not reflect some coherent sociocultural content (Modood et al. 1997, Slootman 2016, Van Heelsum and Koomen 2016), but this has not yet altered the importance attached to self-identification. Both in everyday contexts as well as in research, expressions of self-identification are often regarded as something substantive that is indicative of a broader state of 'assimilation' or 'loyalty' to society.

Thirdly, following others, like Song (2003), Verkuyten (2004), and Jenkins (2008a and 2008b), I consistently *distinguish between self-identification and external identification*, which is identity ascription by others. I call the latter ascription, categorization, or labelling. Lastly, an *intersectional perspective* allows the researcher to bring into view that categories are not homogeneous, and that one particular demographic characteristic does not fully shape individuals' experiences. Considering dimensions beyond ethnic background, such as education level, reveals how power and agency are affected by an interplay of these elements.

Ethnic Options in the Literature

The introduction of the term 'symbolic ethnicity' by sociologist Herbert Gans laid the basis for the idea of 'ethnic options' (1979). Building on Barth's idea that ethnic boundaries are social constructions instead of inevitable products of distinguishable sets of cultural practices (1959), Gans argues that ethnic self-identification can be 'symbolic'; this means that it is not anchored in practiced cultures and social networks (or 'cultural content'). How such symbolic ethnicity works is illustrated by the empirical material presented by Mary Waters in her book *Ethnic Options* (1990), which focuses on descendants of white European Catholic immigrants in the United States. For these descendants, their ethnic identification is voluntary, costless, subjective, and primarily expressive. These 'white ethnics' are not labelled by others in ethnic terms and they self-identify as ethnic only when they want to. In other words, they have a symbolic ethnicity. In later work, Waters (1996) reflected more on the power aspect, and argued that this 'optional ethnicity' is not available for minorities with an imposed identity and who are confined to a minority status by others. For them, ethnicity is not voluntary, costless and individual; they lack 'ethnic options'.

Over time, this argument has been nuanced, for example by Miri Song (2001, 2003). Without contesting the idea that the ethnic identity of visible ethnic minorities is (partially) imposed, she encourages scholars to recognize the ethnic options of minorities and 'to remember that ethnic minorities' interactions with others are not wholly determined by the dominant images held of them. (…) We must not overlook the ways in which minority people contest and assert their desired ethnic identities' (2001:74). Song urges us to acknowledge the agency of minority individuals, as they 'are not simply the passive recipients of unwanted stereotypes and images', and 'are not powerless in asserting their ethnic identities – even in the face of multiple forms and shades of racist practice and ideology' (2001:74).

Multiple studies have been published that describe how minorities negotiate their ethnic and racial identities (see e.g. Ogbu and Simons 1998; Song 2003; Chhuon and Hudley 2010; Khanna 2011; De Jong 2012; Diehl, Fisher-Neumann, and Mühlau 2016; Kassaye, Ashur, and Van Heelsum 2016; Çelik 2018). However, most of these empirical studies reveal only one or two strategies, and these strategies are allocated to certain groups or certain people. From the perspective of self-articulation, based on my empirical data, I argue that individuals have a range of ethnic options at their disposal. I present these options in relation to the imposed singular ethic-minority label: as ranging from rejection to adoption of the ethnic minority label, and can take various forms. My focus on the articulated self-identifications discloses that responses do not vary per group or person, but are more dynamic and vary between contexts and moments. It draws attention to the strategic and performative aspects of self-identification. Of course, the study's insights raise new questions, such as why individuals apply certain strategies at certain moments, which require follow-up research.

The Case of Second-Generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch

People of Moroccan and Turkish descent comprise the largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands. 5% of the Dutch population comes from Morocco or Turkey, or has parents who were born there (Statistics Netherlands 2014). In some neighbourhoods, for example in Amsterdam, this share is over 60%.[1] These two ethnic-minority groups have been most negatively targeted in the integration debates in the last decades. One of the saddest moments was in 2014, when the chairman of the populist Freedom Party (PVV), Geert Wilders, made an entire room of supporters chant that they want 'LESS, LESS, LESS MOROCCANS'. Wilders responded with: 'Then we will take care of this'.

The similarities between these two groups warrant a joint discussion in this paper. Turkish and Moroccan Dutch have very similar migration histories and societal positions. In the 1970s, many immigrants from Morocco and Turkey arrived in the Netherlands to work in lower skilled jobs (Vermeulen and Penninx 2000). Nearly all of these young males came from rural areas and had little formal schooling. Most were Muslim. Later, their families came over. While most of the first-generation immigrants remained in the lower socioeconomic strata, the second generation shows considerable mobility, and a substantial portion has obtained high education levels and has advanced into the middle class. Nevertheless, on average, second-generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch still lag behind ethnic Dutch (Statistics Netherlands 2014).

For decades – first because of this expectation of return and later for reasons of group emancipation – Dutch policy supported the cultivation of Moroccan and Turkish identities, group structures and languages (Scholten 2011). This has changed since 2000. Cultural assimilation has been increasingly presented as a remedy for a gamut of social problems, for which cultural diversity was blamed. This call, which still resounds, particularly centres on citizens of Turkish and Moroccan descent. Moroccan and Turkish Dutch are commonly portrayed as traditional, conservative, orthodox, unengaged, and unwilling to integrate into Dutch society. Apart from their relatively low socioeconomic position, this is partly due to the negative image of 'Islam'. Islam has been increasingly considered a threat to Dutch society and to the presumed uniform 'Dutch culture' (Ghorashi 2010; Uitermark, Mepschen and Duyvendak 2014). Moroccan, Turkish and Muslim identities are seen as incompatible with being Dutch. As mentioned before, immigrants and their offspring face the paradoxical situation that they are required to identify as Dutch, while at the same time they are accused of being essentially different and are consistently labelled

[1] **https://www.ois.amsterdam.nl/feiten-en-cijfers/buurten/?30100**, Tabel 1.4 Bevolking buurten naar leeftijdsgroepen, January 1st, 2018 (accessed October 6, 2019).

as 'Moroccan', 'Turk', 'Muslim' and foreigner – all labels with the connotation of being 'non-Dutch'.

Methodology

This paper focuses on Dutch citizens of Moroccan and Turkish descent with university degrees, who are of the 'early second generation' (born around the moment of their parents' migration). The conducted interviews were part of another, broader research project, a mixed-methods study that aimed to research processes of social mobility among second-generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch (for details see Slootman 2018a). In the context of that study, statistical analyses were complemented with fifteen in-depth interviews with university-educated Moroccan and Turkish Dutch men and women. I use pseudonyms to maintain my interviewees' anonymity.

I used snowball-sampling which started from my own (primarily ethnic-Dutch) network, which covered multiple industries in various parts of the Netherlands. It was required that my interviewees were born in the Netherlands or had arrived at young age, before enrolment in primary school. All interviewees were in their thirties or early forties at the time of the interview. They went to university and had jobs that corresponded to their education levels. Included were, amongst others, a consultant, an international entrepreneur, an engineer, a teacher (in higher education) and a medical professional. Although the level of religiosity varied, all participants called themselves 'Muslim'.

The interviews lasted between one and four hours and were all conducted in Dutch. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim into nearly two hundred pages of transcript. The interviews primarily focused on the educational trajectory and the details of the various social contexts (including family, school, peers, neighbourhood, work) in which the interviewees had manoeuvred throughout their lives. Their stories contained many different expressions of identification, positioning and belonging, which often, at first glance, seemed contradictory to me. A major underlying theme which emerged from their narratives was the negotiation between individual desires (to be and behave as one wants) and social belonging; negotiations that took place both in co-ethnic and inter-ethnic settings. For example, interviewees had often balanced their personal needs and the desire to please their parents. At other moments, when they were labelled 'Moroccan' in majority-dominated settings, they had to choose between self-assertion and maintaining a good atmosphere. This inspired me to look at identifications and ethnic options through the lens of belonging.

My analytical memos, which I wrote during the coding of the data, were central to my analysis. In total, I wrote 521 memos, all of which were connected to a code or text segment, or both. I followed Juliet Corbin's approach, in which she analyses her memos rather than her code structure (Corbin and Strauss 2008), because it is in the process of memo writing where the process of analytical thinking lies (see also Charmaz 2006: Chapter 4). In these memos, I reflected on my moments of surprise or confusion, which were for example triggered by expressions that seemed contradictory. I used a narrative approach inspired by Charmaz (2006), which brought these contradictions between interview segments into view. I identified and disentangled four 'paradoxes', which underlie my findings about ethnic options and the relation with belonging. These were: (1) the self-articulation of being different, but reluctance to be singled out as 'different', (2) ethnic self-identification, but aversion to ethnic ascription, (3) no recollection of instances of 'discrimination' but mentioning, in an annoyed way, many examples of being singled out, and (4) critical awareness of essentialist language, but nevertheless employment of essentialist categories.

Labelling as Exclusion

This article focuses on the ethnic options of individuals with ethnic-minority backgrounds in the face of imposed, exclusionary minority identities. These exclusionary processes can be flagrant but also relatively subtle.

Without exception, the interviewees were extremely critical about the general discourse. Although the participants clearly felt they did not fit the descriptions in media of 'Moroccans' and 'Turks' as unwilling to integrate, and as backward and conservative, they nevertheless felt personally addressed by this rhetoric. The generalizing rhetoric made them feel that these labels, with the associated stereotypes, were applied to themselves as well. Hence, for them, the exclusionary labelling and stereotyping not only felt as a rejection of the entire ethnic category but also as a frustrating and painful denial of their personal belonging in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the interviewees experienced an imposition of a singular identity, or – what one of them called – a 'mono-identity'. They felt forced to decide on what they 'really' are (*either* Dutch *or* Moroccan/Turkish), which failed to do justice to how they viewed themselves (as *both* Dutch *and* Moroccan/Turkish). Such dual self-identification is very common among the Turkish and Moroccan Dutch second generation, as I have shown elsewhere based on quantitative survey data of 1,000 Turkish and Moroccan Dutch respondents (Slootman 2016).

The interviewees' accounts of everyday social interactions with ethnic-majority individuals, such as colleagues, are more ambiguous. Many interviewees articulated feelings of belonging and mentioned that they did not feel different from their colleagues and that they had not experienced discrimination in their professional careers. (However, in their childhood many interviewees had felt like an outsider.) This does not mean, however, that they experienced seamless belonging. The participants' stories were spotted with instances in which they stood out as the Other; moments when they were labelled as 'Moroccan', 'Turkish' or 'Muslim'. They recalled these moments with annoyance, as the following quotes illustrate:

> Then I was asked – just because I happen to be a Muslim and a Moroccan – for my opinion on the murder of Theo van Gogh [a Dutch film maker, murdered in 2004 by a terrorist Muslim]. Of course, as a rational human being I think this murder is a disgrace. (…) Why ask me?? (…) Being addressed this way is simply ridiculous. Ridiculous. This totally lacks any respect for fellow human beings. (Bouchra)

> Do I feel different? Well, no. I don't feel different at all, no. But sometimes…. Verrrry occasionally, you can feel it. But that was in 2001, with those attacks. When people asked you: what do *you* think about these bombings? Which made me think: well, what do I think about these bombings? Yes, then you're suddenly labelled differently, because then, suddenly, you are this Muslim. Then you find out – on such occasions, then you find yourself thinking: Wait, I *might* think that I'm just a regular – well – just a regular consultant. But others obviously just see you as that woman. Or that girl. Or… that Moroccan for that matter. (Said)

Although they themselves did not explicitly label these instances as discrimination or exclusion, the annoyance suggests they did experience the imposition of the ethnic-minority label by ethnic majority members as acts of exclusion. This ethnic ascription is a mechanism through with 'invisible boundaries' are created (Abutbul-Selinger 2018). It is an act of exclusion, regardless of how the individual self-identifies, not because the interviewees see the label Moroccan or Turk (or Muslim) as inappropriate for themselves, but because such labelling denies them their individuality, their agency and their belonging (Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 2002:170-171). Being labelled by ethnic-majority individuals as Moroccan or Turk reduces the individual's identity to one-dimensional – one that is often not even relevant in the given context and is accompanied by a negative stereotype – and denies one's individual uniqueness. Karim said: "when we are labelled as 'good Moroccans', we are still not being seen as 'people' ". The categorization furthermore deprives one from the freedom to present oneself as one wants. Finally, in majority-dominated settings, the ascribed ethnic label is a classification as 'not-one-of-us', placing the individual in the uncomfortable position of outsider, denying one's belonging – for example, as a 'regular consultant.' Clearly, the imposition of ethnic-minority labels by ethnic-majority indi-

viduals is an exclusionary practice, irrespective of the intention.

Ethnic Options: Ranging from Rejection to Adoption

Although practices of exclusion such as ethnic labelling can be very coercive and persistent, they do not leave minority individuals entirely devoid of agency. From the interviews, various identification strategies emerged that the participants employed in response to being labelled as 'Moroccan', 'Turkish' or 'Muslim' in ethnic-majority contexts. These responses resembled the identity strategies from other studies and range from rejecting to adopting the ethnic minority label.

Rejection: Reject the External Categorization as (solely or primarily) Ethnic.

One response to ethnic labelling is to explicitly deny or challenge the categorization as Moroccan/Turkish, and therefore as non-Dutch. From the participants' accounts, various ways emerged that were used to contest the singular labelling. The first was to explicitly articulate the Dutch identity, to claim that an ethnic-minority background does not stand in the way of being Dutch. This is exemplified by the following quote of Adem, who firmly underlines the indisputability of his Dutchness. His sudden emphasis and emotion gave me the impression that he reacted to the (implicit) suggestion that he is not seen as Dutch:

> I feel I do *more* than enough for this country, more than the average Dutch person. And I would defend this country *more* than enough. And I *do*. So, when this is the condition for being Dutch, I am Dutch one thousand percent. (Adem)

Another way to challenge the singular ethnic categorization is to assert one's bi-culturality. The double identification 'de-essentializes' (a term borrowed from Lamont and Mizrachi 2012:374) the singular categorization and counters the idea that identities are mutually exclusive. Interviewees repeatedly stressed they feel both Moroccan/Turkish and Dutch and emphasized the benefits of this bi-culturality to counter the imposed mono-identity:

> Well… I'm not like a standard employee or anything. I somewhat divert from the standard. But that's fine. They have to take me as I am (…). I am Moroccan and Dutch. I am who I am, I cannot separate these things. (Imane)

> Before, I struggled because I felt I had to choose. Now I feel: I don't have to choose. I have already chosen for both sides (….) I really think I actually have the best of two worlds. (Berkant)

Interviewees furthermore rejected the external categorization by designating the ethnic label as irrelevant and articulated other identity dimensions that seemed more relevant to the situation at hand and that were less implied with negative stereotypes. This is why, for example, Cambodian-American students embrace pan-Asian identities (Chhuon and Hudley 2010). Ahmed countered the singular view on his identity in the following way:

> (…) because my identity not only consists of being-Moroccan or being-Dutch or Muslim. It also contains other aspects. I am also a brother, I am also a friend, I am also a colleague. I am also an administrator. (Ahmed)

Said nuances the emphasis on ethnicity by pointing to the fact that an individual is 'man, husband, woman, wife, foreigner, Moroccan, higher educated, societally involved and politically active'. Adem explains that local region matters more than ethnic background, as social codes in the eastern and western part of the Netherlands are worlds apart. Others also articulate their regional or city identity to describe themselves. Aysel dismisses the relevance of her ethnic background in the context of her work by asserting her professional identity. Ethnic-minority professionals studied by Waldring, Crul and Ghorashi articulate their professional identity to emphasize sameness based on profession, while they avoid giving up their ethnic-minority identity (2014).

Another way to deny the ethnic label is to challenge the entire practice of categorization by pointing out the futility of categorizing people.

This can be done by stressing the heterogeneity of the category or highlighting one's personal uniqueness. In the context of his study of Turkish-German youth – some of whom also tone down the relevance of ethnicity by referring to individual characteristics – Çelik calls this a 'universalizing' approach (2018; based on Lamont 2009). Karim tells how he (sometimes) refuses to self-identify in these categorical terms by stressing his personal uniqueness:

> Well… you just switch somewhat, you know. You want – At some moments you really strive to belong. Then you want to be either Dutch or really Moroccan. At other moments, you feel extremely rebellious and you think: "You know what? Never mind! I am who I am." I just don't care. (Karim)

The quotes in this section illustrate that these rejection-strategies require some assertiveness. After all, this strategy explicitly challenges the view expressed by the other person, which can possibly harm one's rapport and sense of belonging within the social setting, and lead to friction in that social context. These strategies of 'speaking out' were more on the confrontational end of the spectrum (Fleming, Lamont and Welburn 2012). Also, most of these strategies involved that the individuals educate their audience, or 'teaching the ignorant', (ibid.) to make the audience understand why a singular ethnic identification does not do justice to the reality of these individuals. Most of these expressions in the interviews were not descriptions but assertions; they sounded as if they were meant to convince and, as tools in a dialogue, were components of a contextual relationship. It was a response to a felt ascription of a (singular) ethnic minority label. To me, this dialogue did not seem to be (mainly) conducted with me, the interviewer, but instead seemed to be either explicitly or implicitly directed at another audience.

This assertiveness is not required for another, less explicit form of rejection of the ethnic label: disidentification or passing. In his book *Stigma*, Erving Goffman describes how people try to hide their minority identity (or other stigmas) and use 'disidentifying' strategies, such as certain speech patterns or clothing, to pass for a member of another category (1963:44, 73). That some of the Somali-Dutch studied by Kassaye, Ashur, and Van Heelsum (2016) downplay their minority background in order to emphasize their belonging in the Netherlands can be seen as this strategy of disidentification. This is a strategy that aims to reduce friction and protects personal belonging in a majority context. Likewise, many of the interviewees in my study, in order to be seen as 'normal', had once wanted to downplay, or even conceal, their ethnic identities. They mostly mentioned this response in the context of their childhood, when nearly all of them felt like an outsider. Some were severely bullied, others just felt they stood out, for example because of their clothes, or by the fact that they had eight siblings or that they were not allowed to join in after-school activities. Although the impact differed between the interviewees, nearly all emphasized 'standing out' as a negative experience. Some felt lonely, or like they were misfits. For many, it affected their feelings of self-confidence. They described that they wanted to be seen as 'normal', to be accepted by their classmates and neighbours, and this sometimes led them to conceal or de-emphasize their ethnic identity; a strategy that interviewees, on some occasions, still employed.

> At primary school, you are just busy trying to fit in. Trying to avoid standing out in a negative way, or in a positive way. That really hurt… Yes, actually, you have always learned about your cultural background – to actually hide it somehow. This is still the case: I mean – I avoid to explicitly show the outside world that I have a Moroccan background (…) Yes, it should not be too visible: I am Moroccan and I have a Moroccan background. (Mustapha)

Adoption: Adopt the Ascribed Label.

Minority individuals also sometimes adopt the imposed label. While, as mentioned, nearly all of the interviewees felt they were both Moroccan/Turkish and Dutch, they sometimes chose to primarily articulate the ethnic label. Conforming to the ascribed label can be a way to protect one's self-esteem (Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 2002).

Various levels and forms emerged in the interviews, with varying underlying motivations.

Sometimes, this singular ethnic self-identification is the result of weariness. As we have seen in many of the previous quotes, strategies of challenging external labels and stereotypes requires fierceness and energy. After all, opposing someone else's views does not always increase one's popularity, and makes one vulnerable to rejection. The audience might openly question the claimed identity or deny the belonging in any other way (Barreto et al. 2003). Individuals do not always have the energy to take up the fight and challenge the obtrusive ethnic categorization. Sometimes, they take up a more conflict-deflating strategy (Fleming, Lamont and Welburn 2012). They want to avoid certain sanctions or other consequences, such as spoiling the atmosphere, placing themselves in the spotlights in a negative way or causing conflict. Or they feel that any effort to challenge the imposed label is futile. Some interviewees responded to the persistent categorisation by adopting the ascribed label. This response is also found in other studies, which show that many Dutch of Moroccan and Turkish descent feel discouraged to use any other label than Moroccan or Turkish (De Jong 2012; Eijberts 2013; Omlo 2011; Van der Welle 2011). In spite of their ideas about themselves, these individuals present themselves solely in terms of the ethnic minority label, like Ahmed:

> Actually, now I think about it… Nine out of ten times I am not addressed as Dutch, but as Moroccan [by ethnic Dutch], whereas inside I feel like a Dutch Moroccan, both. (…) Look, I actually do not call myself Dutch because you are not seen as Dutch. (Ahmed)

Contrary to Ahmed, for some interviewees the persistent emphasis on their ethnic identity strengthened their ethnic identification on a deeper level. The salience of ethnicity in society makes some strengthen their ethnic-minority identification (although this does not necessarily mean that this identification with the ethnic reflects cultural retention – it often contains some sort of reinvention; see Slootman 2014). This strengthening of the ethnic-minority identity in the face of persistent ethnic labelling is what Rubén Rumbaut called 'reactive ethnicity' (2008). Also Martijn de Koning (2008) and Susan Ketner (2009, 2010) observed these processes among the Moroccan Dutch youth they studied, and Kassaye, Ashur, and Van Heelsum encountered this among Somali-Dutch (2016). Based on by his personal experiences, Hicham describes how such reactive identity develops:

> Before, people were much less aware of their being Moroccan or Muslim, they possessed multiple identities. It was more dynamic. It was just how you felt at a particular moment. In the afternoon, at the snack bar with your peers, you use slang, while in the evening with your mom, you speak Berber. Currently, it happens that one identity becomes more and more prominent. That you are Moroccan or Muslim becomes imprinted as the most prominent identity. I feel pushed into this identity, by people questioning me about it, or who write about it in the papers, or those who study the second and third generation, whatever. That makes me think about my identity and wonder: "What actually *is* my identity?" Then I suddenly have to make decisions, whereas, before, my identity was like: it all fits together. (…) Now it seems like some sort of a make-or-breakpoint. It is almost like: "Take it or leave it, it belongs with me and it's important to me." Things that you were not aware of, previously, become more and more important. (Hicham)

This is an alternative strategy to Ahmed's weary adoption. Even though ethnic minority individuals take up the imposed identity (they primarily identify as Moroccan or Turkish), they present this identification in an assertive way. Others can take it or leave it. Evidently, adoption of the imposed label is not only an act of compliance, is not only conflict-deflation. Particularly in the face of the societal demand that people with immigrant backgrounds 'integrate' and identify as Dutch, the articulation of the ethnic-minority label can, in some cases, be understood as an assertive form of identification.

The articulation of the ethnic-minority label can even be rebellious. This is the case in what Ogbu and Simons (1998) call an 'oppositional

identity'; when minorities themselves define the minority-label in opposition to the mainstream, and reject success in school and fluency in the mainstream language. They reverse the hierarchical order, by rejecting the norms and values that are dominant in society. Wimmer calls this strategy of normative inversion 'transvaluation' (2013); Lamont 'particularization' (2009). Another example of such oppositional identity (or rebellious adoption) is the radicalization of young Muslims, whose radical identity is presented as superior and diametrically opposes the rest of society (see Slootman and Tillie 2006). Among the Turkish-German youth studied by Çelik (2018), imposing negative stereotypes upon the ethnic majority group is a commonly applied strategy.

Just like the rejection-strategies, which often contained some 'educational' element, adoption strategies are sometimes used to challenge stereotypical ideas and change the audience's viewpoint. After all, the threat emanating from external labelling partly results from the negative stereotype. Interviewees mentioned that they published in newspapers, became politically active, started social initiatives and became members of societal organisations. The interviews demonstrated a strong inclination to challenge negative stereotypes by showing 'good' behaviour in everyday life. This parallels other studies, which show that many second-generation Moroccan Dutch continuously try to display socially desirable behaviour to change negative stereotypes, which makes them relatively reticent in the presence of ethnic Dutch people (De Jong 2012; Ketner 2010). That this is a broader phenomenon is illustrated by the Cambodian-American students that choose to articulate the Cambodian identity to defy the negative stereotypes and to 'prove haters wrong' (Chhuon and Hudley 2010).

Of course, when one wants to challenge ethnic stereotypes, this requires the self-articulation of the ethnic label. Said's quote clearly illustrates this:

> I actually highlight it [the fact that I am Moroccan] all the [time] – I am just PROUD of it (laughs apologetically but affirmatively). I find it important to – I want to show that you can be both Moroccan and successful. I want to, very deliberately, show that these two can be combined. (…) And whenever I can I say that I – whatever – that I visit Morocco every year, for example. So, you know, I just try to make people realize: "Wait, there's something wrong in that picture…" To show the right picture and to show that in your mind you are too black-and-white. (Said)

Discussion: Negotiating Belonging

How the interviewees articulated their self-identifications clearly demonstrates an interactional aspect. In some instances, this was explicitly mentioned ('I actually do not call myself Dutch, because you are not seen as Dutch [by others]') 'They have to take me as I am'. In other instances, the rhetoric and emphasis they used suggested that the interviewee spoke to a specific audience and discourse: 'You know what? Never mind! I am who I am. I just don't care'. 'Take it or leave it, it [my Moroccan identity] belongs with me and it's important to me', 'I felt I had to choose', '[I highlight the fact that I am Moroccan, because] I want to show that you can be both Moroccan and successful', 'I feel I do *more* than enough for this country'

This relational aspect shows that the articulated self-identifications are not solely descriptive reflections of some autonomous self-image, but are part of an interaction with a specific audience. I interpret these expressions, which are frequently presented as assertions, as part of a negotiation of belonging, as ways to carve out a space to be accepted as a full-fledged person or even to improve the belonging of the entire ethnic group by proving negative stereotypes wrong. These negotiations vary in the level of confrontation and effect. While the weary adoption of the ethnic label or a silent disidentification avoids social friction at that particular moment, it is also unlikely that these strategies lead to a more structural change of social hierarchies on the long run. On the other hand, a strong denial of the relevance of ethnicity might finally contribute to less bright, or blurred, boundaries (Wimmer 2008, 2013) and enhanced belonging, but

it can be confrontational and disturb the atmosphere at that particular moment.

This relational aspect is in line with the findings of Barreto et al. (2003), who observe that in making statements of self-identification, ethnic minority members take into account the external categorization by that particular audience and 'its power of sanction'. They show that these statements not only have a 'cognitive component' but also a 'strategic component'. Although my findings imply that this is indeed the case for the participants in my study, a next step is to further investigate when the various strategies are employed by whom; to study how the choice for a certain strategy is not only influenced by the national discourse, cultural repertoires and migration history, but also by individual characteristics and the everyday context. My small-scale study has not revealed noticeable differences based on gender.

My study does, however, uncover a mechanism in relation to social mobility that is relevant here (for a more elaborate argument, see Slootman 2018b). Some of the interviews showed that the achieved socioeconomic status made the interviewees feel that they could more justifiably claim a full-fledged position in society. After all, what more could they do to belong as a Dutch citizen? This confidence lowers the barrier to claim Dutch identity ('I am Dutch!'). In addition, the confidence that nobody can deny them their belonging in the Netherlands facilitates the assertion of their minority identity ('Yes, I am also Moroccan, and I am proud of it!'). This can be read as a substantiation of Kibria's claim that socioeconomic advancement affords minorities 'some latitude in how to organize and express their ethnic identity' (2000: 80). At the same time, my study shows that these ethnic-minority social climbers felt a strong social responsibility to sometimes assert the ethnic label. Achieving success, according to dominant standards, placed them in the ultimate position to counter negative stereotypes, which required them to highlight their ethnic identity ('See, I am a medical specialist *and* a Moroccan'). Furthermore, for some, their advanced status and their relatively white social network made them vulnerable to critique from co-ethnics who accused them of 'acting too white'. This suggests that higher-educated individuals might have easier access to the options of articulating the Dutch identity and dual identities than the less-educated, though this does not necessarily make self-identification easier.

Conclusion

Imposing ethnic-minority labels on individuals has exclusionary effects, particularly when negative stereotypes are attached. Such labelling reduces individuals to their minority identity and places them in the position of the inferior 'Other'. Based on in-depth interviews with university-educated Moroccan and Turkish Dutch, I examined how ethnic-minority individuals deal with the imposed categorization as (solely) 'Moroccan' or 'Turkish', and what ethnic options they have at their disposal. I analysed their articulated self-identifications. Although this focus excludes some important aspects of identification (such as cultural practices and social relations), it is clearly demarcated and concrete, and has large societal relevance.

The range of strategies that emerged from the interviews substantiate and illustrate Song's argument (2003) that minority individuals are not powerless and do possess a range of ethnic options. The ethnic options in this study parallel the identifications and 'boundary work' described in other studies. The value of the article is in the concrete focus on articulated self-identifications, which reveals the situational and relational context of self-identifications in everyday contexts. Depending on the moment and context, minority individuals respond in various ways to the ascription of ethnic-minority labels. Sometimes, they *reject* the imposed label and present the audience with alternative labels or challenge the act of categorizing people altogether. In other moments, individuals *adopt* the imposed label, out of weariness, internalization or rebellion, or because they want to challenge the cor-

responding stereotypes. The variety of responses to ethnic ascription might explain why Van Heelsum and Koomen do not find a significant relation between 'ethnic ascription' and ethnic self-identification among Moroccan Dutch in their quantitative study (2016). This is not because their respondents are not affected by the ethnic ascription, but because their responses vary between rejection and adoption of the label. How one identifies at a particular moment in the face of unwanted labelling seems to be the result of a balance between various motivations in relation to possible consequences. Individuals balance a need for self-expression, the desire to be seen as 'one of us', the wish to protect the good atmosphere and one's image as a nice, rational, easy-going person, and the intent to counter stigmatization and exclusion. This is a situated trade-off between one's self-expression, one's feelings of personal belonging at a particular moment, and the belonging at the level of the minority-group in society. At any given moment, individuals may stress their bi-culturality, later present themselves as Moroccan, and then emphasize the futility of ethnic and national labels. The situational character of articulated self-identities warns us to be cautious when researching identities in quantitative ways. While identity expressions are often taken as substantive indicators of some absolute cultural orientation or loyalty to a certain country or group, identity expressions are dynamic, interactional and situational.

The focus on the interaction between self-identification and external labelling simultaneously brings out both individual agency and the coercive power of social structures. It shows that thinking about ethnic options in binaries (presence or absence) is too simplistic. Even the adoption of an imposed label, or a 'reactive identity, often is much more than passive compliance and conflict deflation. Although external forces are strong, conforming to the ascribed label is still the result of a (mostly unconscious) trade-off between various motives, and can even have a rebellious component.

While it is important to acknowledge that minority individuals possess agency and are not entirely pinned down by imposed labels, it is equally important to acknowledge the coercive power of external categorization. When external labelling happens, 'ethnicity' is put on the table by the other person and the labelled individual is placed in a reactive position. External labelling can be overwhelming, and attempts to challenge these might simply seem futile. When we regard individuals solely as 'resilient actors' we overlook this coercive power and shift the responsibility for social oppression from society to the individual (Meyer 2003:23). A recent statement of the Dutch prime minister is a good case in point. Reacting to a study that (again) proved the presence of discrimination in the Dutch labour market, he stated that it is 'up to Mohammed to stand up for himself' (in Dutch *Mohammed moet zich 'invechten'*) (NRC 2015). From this perspective, minority individuals are held responsible for their outsider position, and the influence of ethnic ascription and other exclusionary societal mechanisms is ignored. In the Netherlands, the reverse (or perverse) effects of the assimilationist integration discourse are disregarded (Slootman and Duyvendak 2018). The demand placed on ethnic minorities to self-identify as Dutch and not as Moroccan/Turkish leads to a societal preoccupation with ethnicity and imposed ethnic labels, which, in turn, enhances ethnic self-identification, for which the minorities are then blamed. In our use of ethnic options, we should acknowledge – but not overestimate – individual agency. It is important to realize how social others limit and shape the individual's options.

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Open Forum

An Investigation of Belgian-Descent University Students' Perceived Barriers to Establishing Contact with Muslim Students

by F. Zehra Colak (KU Leuven), Lore Van Praag (University of Antwerp) and Ides Nicaise (KU Leuven)

Abstract

This study investigates Belgian-descent university students' perceptions of contact with Belgian–Muslim ethnic minorities and the ways they reflect on their own intergroup contact experiences. The results of the study demonstrate that many Belgian-descent students appear to perceive barriers when contacting Muslim students. Their accounts of contact with their Muslim peers suggest that those experiences were often constrained, even when participants framed them as enriching. Such constrained interactions with Muslim students were linked to the perceived barriers in contact. Firstly, students of Belgian descent experienced behavioural insecurities in approaching and interacting with Muslim peers. Secondly, participants seemed to perceive a lack of interest from Muslim students, which formed a barrier in approaching them. Finally, students of Belgian descent described Belgian culture as being reserved and introverted, thus hindering realization of contact with Muslims. While the university offers a context that provides all students with intergroup contact opportunities, these were rarely taken up, partly due to ethnic-majority students' perceptions of barriers in establishing or deepening contact with Muslim students.

Introduction

Ethnic and religious minorities in Belgium are still perceived to be 'allochthons' ('allochtoon' in Dutch, i.e., 'not from here') regardless of an individual's birthplace or nationality. More concretely, Muslim ethnic minorities are viewed as people who originate from and belong within a non-European cultural background (Billiet et al. 2012; Heath and Brinbaum 2014). They are expected to demonstrate knowledge of ethnic-majority culture in their behaviour and to be proficient in the Dutch language even though most of them learn it in schools (Clycq and Levrau 2017; Van de Pol 2018). In the same vein, Muslim ethnic-minority students are often held responsible for establishing contact with ethnic-majority group-members as a means of facilitating their so-called integration into the mainstream community (Van Praag et al. 2016). However, both groups—the Muslim ethnic minority and the ethnic majority—need to be willing to engage in interaction in order to realize intergroup contact in educational settings. Nonetheless, the prevailing prejudice and negativity against Muslims in Europe hamper the development of contact between ethnic majority and Muslim ethnic minority students (Hutchison and Rosenthal 2011; Vedder et al. 2017). Still, our knowledge of how ethnic-majority group-members experience and perceive contact with Muslims in higher education settings remains limited. Therefore, in this study, we focus on perceptions of intergroup contact from the perspective of ethnic-majority students and investigate the ways they make sense of their interactions with Muslim students born and raised in Belgium.

Research has shown that intergroup contact in educational settings leads to positive changes

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in students' attitudes towards members of other (minority) groups (Fischer 2011) with particularly strong beneficial implications for ethnic majority groups (Binder et al., 2009). Nevertheless, ethnic-majority group members report fewer intergroup friendships than ethnic-minority members (Baerveldt et al. 2007; Vedder et al. 2017; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). The ethnic composition of the educational setting may result in fewer opportunities for ethnic-majority students to meet and interact with peers from ethnic and religious minorities (Van Houtte and Stevens, 2009). Still, the quality and quantity of intergroup contact have important implications for individuals' intergroup attitudes (Kanas et al. 2015; Van Acker and Vanbeseleare 2011). For instance, when non-Muslim students have frequent, high-quality contact with Muslims, their outgroup attitudes are more positive, they perceive greater outgroup variability, and exhibit more positive behavioural intentions (Hutchison and Rosenthal 2011; Vedder et al. 2017).

The factors influencing the development of intergroup contact have been documented by the well-known social – psychological theory of prejudice reduction known as 'intergroup contact theory' (Allport 1954). According to Allport (1954), contact with outgroup members produces a positive change in social relations and leads to more favourable outgroup evaluations. He outlined certain contact conditions—such as equal status, shared goals and the support of authorities—that enable the positive contact effect to occur. A large-scale meta-analytic study by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) has shown that even when those optimal conditions are not met, contact between groups can help to decrease prejudice. Nonetheless, the ideal and successful contact situation is described as one that exhibits understanding and affection, thus having high friendship potential (Pettigrew 1998). Cross-ethnic friendship is especially crucial in developing positive outgroup attitudes and reducing ingroup bias and prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp 2011). Previous research has also highlighted the role of positive contact in reducing intergroup anxiety (Stephan et al. 1999). Due to their concerns about adverse outcomes for the self, like being rejected, people can feel anxious during intergroup interactions (Stephan and Stephan 2000). The feeling of uneasiness in the presence of members of other ethnic groups can cause anxiety, due to uncertainty about how to behave toward them (Stephan and Stephan 1985). However, cross-group friendships reduce intergroup anxiety and facilitate self-disclosure, intimacy, and open dialogue among individuals of different ethnic backgrounds (Barlow et al. 2009).

Building upon the premises of contact theory (Allport, 1954), it is expected that in educational settings where the student body is diverse, status among students from different groups will be more equal, and more support will come from authorities to build intergroup contact and benefit from repeated contact opportunities. Nevertheless, the existence of these factors does not automatically imply greater friendship or contact potential (See Colak et al. 2019; Van Praag et al. 2015). Students of different ethnic or racial origins are found to lead separate lives on the university campus and seldom engage in deep interactions (Jackson et al. 2014; Morrison 2010). However, lack of interaction among different student groups can negatively affect academic success and socio-psychological adaptation, and lead to the perpetuation of stereotypes and inequality (Jackson et al. 2014). The present study thus aims to understand individual perceptions of intergroup contact among ethnic-majority students in a high-achieving intergroup setting (i.e., university campus). Understanding explanations of why contact opportunities are not taken up helps identify strategies to promote meaningful interaction across ethno-religious groups. In the study, we focus on the intergroup contact perceptions of Belgian (i.e., ethnic-majority) students in a Flemish university setting. The university years constitute a crucial phase of the transition of young people into adulthood and for the development of contact and friendships (Marsh et al. 2006; Nelson et al. 2011). Also, some ethnic-majority students

find the student body on the university campus relatively more diverse than at the secondary schools they attended, due to prevailing ethnic segregation across schools and the different study tracks in Flemish secondary education (Van Houtte and Stevens, 2009; Van Praag et al. 2019). The greater diversity of the student body implies that such students have a higher chance of meeting Muslim peers compared to secondary education (Jacobs et al. 2009; Thys and Van Houtte 2016). Therefore, the university setting provides an ideal platform to explore how Belgian-descent students make sense of their encounters and develop contact when they enjoy relatively more opportunities to meet Muslim students. We use qualitative methods to thoroughly investigate the nature of ethnic-majority students' intergroup contact perceptions and experiences. This is of added value, as previous research on contact has mainly used quantitative methods that employ predetermined contact measures (e.g., Kanas et al. 2015; Vedder et al. 2017; Zagefka et al. 2017), hindering a more nuanced understanding of contact in real-life settings (Dixon et al. 2005).

Participants and procedure

The study involved twenty ethnic-majority (i.e., Belgian-descent) students—eleven females and nine males —in a higher education setting in Flanders, in the northern part of Belgium. The participants were full-time undergraduate and graduate students, aged between eighteen and twenty-five years old. The majority of those taking part in the study originates from the provinces of Flemish Brabant, Antwerp, and Limburg. Study participants were recruited by several methods, including an online questionnaire sent to the email accounts of all students and contacting student associations on campus. Once an initial sample was drawn, a snowballing procedure was adopted to recruit further.

The first author conducted semi-structured interviews in English with students who agreed to attend an interview. A few participants later declined to take part because they lacked the confidence to express their thoughts in English. Agreeing to be interviewed in English by a non-Belgian student might already indicate a certain degree of openness towards intergroup contact with Muslim ethnic minorities by the selected students. Nonetheless, the researcher aimed to include ethnic-majority students with diverse intergroup contact experiences and all kinds of political orientations via student associations on campus. Some of these students were interested in participating in the research as they found it important that their views on the subject were included in the study.

The interviewer was open about not being a native Dutch speaker. The outsider status of the interviewer may have encouraged participants to elaborate on explanations, which might otherwise have been condensed due to an assumption of shared knowledge (Mielants and Weiner 2005). Even though the interviewer is an international student in Belgium, her identity as a Muslim (she wears a headscarf) may have affected the participants' responses to the questions. Being interviewed by a discernibly Muslim female interviewer might have encouraged certain kinds of reactions (while limiting others). Reviewing participants' responses to some questions (i.e., those on headscarf-wearing), there is a sense that respondents felt no inhibitions in honestly expressing opinions about Muslim students who cover their heads. Nonetheless, it is likely that some of them framed their responses to avoid the risk of offending the interviewer. However, all attempts were made during the interview to ensure respondents felt comfortable speaking candidly about their own experiences and thoughts.

The participants were informed about the study purpose before the interviews were conducted. They were assured of the confidentiality of the interviews and that pseudonyms would be used to protect their anonymity. The interviews took place between January 2014 and November 2015 and lasted approximately 120-180 minutes. They were taped and transcribed verbatim. The interview questions firstly aimed at understand-

ing the intergroup contact experiences and perceptions of students. Specifically, intergroup relations with ethnic-minority groups were explored. Participants were asked if they had had any contact experiences with Belgian-Muslim ethnic minorities, whether there were students from other ethno-religious backgrounds in their classrooms, and how they perceived relations with these ethnic or religious outgroups. Most students mainly pointed to intergroup barriers in making sense of the lack of intergroup contact between ethnic-majority and minority groups. Hence, we mainly focused on understanding the underlying factors behind students' perceptions of intergroup barriers and the ways students make sense of their own intergroup interactions.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using a thematic analysis method. The initial codes were generated and sorted into potential themes. The coded data extracts were thus combined within the designated themes. Themes were compared with one other and with the original data set to determine their accuracy (Braun and Clarke 2006). The themes were later refined for further analysis and to identify the final framework. NVivo11 software (2014) was used to index the themes systematically. We organized the findings under two main themes based on our analyses. The first covers the intergroup contact experiences of ethnic-majority students and elaborates on what students share, and about which issues, with their Muslim peers. The second focuses on perceptions of intergroup contact. We focused on barriers to contact because most ethnic-majority students referred to the difficulties in approaching and interacting with Muslims. Based on student responses, the second section is divided into three themes: 1) behavioural insecurities when approaching Muslim peers and establishing intergroup contact; 2) the perception that Muslim students lack interest in intergroup contact, and; 3) the perception that the reserved Belgian culture acts as a hindrance to contacting Muslims.

Intergroup contact as an enriching yet constrained experience

The findings of the study show that ethnic-majority students mainly reflected on their own experiences of contact with second- or third-generation, Belgian-Muslim ethnic minorities of Turkish and Moroccan background. Participants with positive contact experiences often described those experiences as enriching. Mia (undergraduate, Criminology), for instance, referred to her friendship with a Muslim peer during secondary school:

> I had a Muslim friend in high school. I learned a lot from her. She was not judgemental. Our class was mixed…My friend invited us during Ramadan for dinner. It was very nice… We usually talked about school-related things and her perspective on things…we worked well together, sat next to each other all the time…I learned a lot from being friends with her. It was a positive experience.

As her account demonstrates, Mia reported that contact at an intimate level helped to increase her understanding of, and familiarity with, ethnic-minority cultures. Nonetheless, for many students, most of their interactions with Muslim peers were constrained. Although many students had opportunities to meet Muslim students on the university campus and in their classrooms, they had but a few interaction experiences. For instance, Evy (undergraduate, Law) mentioned that she did not have any intergroup contact experiences with peers from different ethnic origins until she started studying at the university:

> At the university, I was forced [during group work] to go and talk to people from different ethnicities. [Nevertheless] they became my friends and, in the class, we get along…You learn about new things from other cultures. By interacting with people, you know why it [learning about other cultures] is important.

In this statement, Evy recognizes the value of learning about other cultures and intergroup communication. Despite recognizing this value, she told that her interactions with Muslim peers were limited to class context and the courses. Similar to Evy, Linda (undergraduate, Social Sci-

ences) spoke about the presence of Muslim students in her university class. However, as she continued, their interactions were mainly restricted to their group work and assignments:

> Here, at the university, there are some [ethnic-minority] students, and we do group work. They are mostly from Islamic cultures, [and there is] not that much interaction…I grew up in a small village. I go out [i.e., socialize] with people who are more like us. [However] my cousins grew up in Antwerp. They are more social [there]; they would go out with anyone.

According to Linda, the place where she grew up determined with whom she hung around at the university. Growing up in a place with low diversity, she mainly sought out people she perceived as more like herself.

The perceived lack of familiarity with Muslim students seemed to open up space for friendships to go awry. Students were often very concerned about the topics discussed during their interactions and refrained from talking about specific issues—such as abortion, alcohol, sex (including homosexuality), religion, and drugs—in the presence of Muslim students. Thus, as mentioned by Evy, most intergroup interactions seemed restricted primarily to the curricula and university-related issues:

> With my Belgian friends, I talk more about my personal life, while with Muslim friends it is [about] coursework. The only Muslim friends I have are at university; I have none outside school. They have no experience of certain things, such as drinking and partying, so I feel I can't share these things… Muslims are very conservative about sex, drugs, drinking alcohol, etc. I would never talk about these things with Muslim friends. I can put my personal opinions aside.

Evy noted that she resisted bringing up 'contentious topics' when interacting with her Muslim peers at the university, due to a fear of causing offence or sounding disrespectful. Interestingly, Evy added that she had a friend of Turkish descent, who did not follow Islamic religion anymore, and therefore she met her outside school, as well. Thus, Belgian-descent students often seem to attribute the lack of deep intergroup interactions mainly to the religious affiliation of their Muslim peers.

This perceived lack of familiarity with a Muslim peer was particularly powerful when the student in question had a visible identity-marker, such as a headscarf. Many students perceived Muslim female students wearing headscarves to be unfamiliar and uninterested in interactions with them. They also noted feeling insecure about whether they would be received well by those Muslim students. Mieke (undergraduate, Social Sciences) shared her views about the challenges of approaching her female Muslim classmates at the university:

> Girls who wear the headscarf, they hang around together. I would love to go and talk [with them] … But you don't know if they want to be approached. My Belgian friends also don't know how to approach [them]. They [Muslim girls] think that we have a bad image about them …

To conclude, students with positive contact experiences described them mainly in favourable terms, stressing the positive sides of learning about the culture of Muslims and the exchange of knowledge (Brown and Hewstone 2005; Pettigrew 1998). Nonetheless, most contact opportunities at university were often constrained due to Belgian-descent students' perceptions of a lack of familiarity with Muslim peers. Despite having relatively more opportunities to meet and interact with Muslim students at university, most students of Belgian descent interviewed in this study had no Muslim friends. In the following sections, we will delve deeper into possible explanations to understand the lack of contact between ethnic-majority and Muslim students in the higher education setting.

Perceived barriers to intergroup contact

Behavioural insecurities

Many ethnic-majority students appear to perceive a wide variety of barriers when attempting to establish contact with Muslim students—or when thinking of doing so. Most students seem to perceive Muslims as people without European descent and reported feeling uncertain about the

norms and behavioural guidelines during intergroup contact. They are particularly concerned about the idea of offending the 'other'. This is, for example, noticeable in the case of Rose (undergraduate, Sinology). Even though she is clearly interested in the Chinese culture and language, she reported finding it more challenging to interact with someone of a Turkish or Chinese descent than someone of European origin:

> I always have these questions in mind. I do not know how you do it; is it okay to do it this way, can I do this or not? If it is someone from England, I would not have such questions, but with someone from China or Turkey, it would be more difficult. Very different from my culture … Most Belgians do not know how to communicate with migrants. I have never had a real conversation with a migrant, just in the shop. For most Belgians, the problem is that we have no opinion about religion. And they have a strong opinion about it. That is the most difficult to understand. (Rose, undergraduate, Sinology)

Rose underlined her lack of knowledge about what is acceptable when she is around people of non-European ethnic backgrounds. She attributed this lack of knowledge about how to contact members of these groups to not having engaged in any in-depth relationships with them. Similar to Rose, Evy (undergraduate, Law) relishes the opportunity to contact ethnic and religious minority students in her class, yet underlined that a general lack of knowledge about behavioural guidelines and a fear of causing offence forms a barrier in approaching and contacting them: *How do we do the right thing, what do we say and not say? And how to approach and act? You don't know [and] you don't want to offend people. We also think that they don't want to open up.* Evy's quote suggests that she feels apprehensive when thinking about interacting with a Muslim classmate. These feelings of uncertainty about approaching and having an open conversation with Muslim peers appears to be based on a focus on the stereotypical differences between the worldviews of their own and the perspectives of Muslims. Also, Samuel (postgraduate, Political Sciences) referred to being on guard against undesirable situations and avoided discussing specific topics with Muslims: *I can't discuss homosexuality with 'ethnic friends'; you can't say something like 'all religion is bullshit' [to them]. Our society has put religion aside. With a Muslim, I would be careful when I talk about religion.* According to Samuel, his culture has actively dismissed religion from a position of centrality and he views this as a key difference that is driving his fear of offending or feelings of guardedness. Thus, uncertainty and unpredictability about how ethnic-minority students might behave and respond to particular issues seems to deter students of Belgian descent from starting conversations about these topics. This does not automatically prevent the development of intergroup contact among students. Nonetheless, the potential for open interaction and knowledge exchange seems to be constrained due to a 'sense of guardedness' that ethnic-majority students adopted around their Muslim peers (Fozdar 2011). As a consequence, the depth of their interactions is often restricted by 'issue avoidance' (Paolini et al. 2004).

In sum, students indicated that when they contacted members of ethnic-minority groups, they were often unable to build contact at an intimate level. They explained this by referring to the uncertainty over the appropriate way to make contact and over the outcomes of intergroup contact. Many ethnic-majority students expressed feelings of uncertainty about the interactional norms when having contact with ethnic and religious minorities (Stephan 2014; Zagefka et al. 2017).

The perception that Muslims lack interest in intergroup contact

A second barrier reported by ethnic-majority students relates to their perception of Muslim ethnic-minority groups as not being interested in interacting with them. Specifically, female Muslim students wearing a headscarf and those perceived to be forming ethnic cliques among themselves are presumed to lack interest in interacting with ethnic-majority groups. This is not sur-

prising given the negative attitude towards the headscarf in Belgian society (Bracke and Fadil 2011). Francis (postgraduate, Engineering) told that, in general, ethnic majorities associate Muslim women wearing headscarves with a lack of interest in having contact with someone from another ethnic group and directed her point to the interviewer (who wears a headscarf):

> People see you [as] more pious and conservative if you wear a headscarf. It is also a sign that you belong to a specific group. If you do not wear it, people will talk to you more. Some people will not approach [you], thinking that you belong to your own group and won't talk to them.

Francis said that the headscarf is considered a strong indication of membership in a closed ethnic or religious community. For himself, he argued that having different beliefs and ideas about specific issues is not a barrier to the development of relationships with his Muslim friends. In contrast, Mia (undergraduate, Criminology) explained that she draws back when she meets a woman wearing a headscarf—such a symbol, in her view, automatically implies a lack of mutual understanding between them: *I will hold back if a person is wearing a headscarf. [She is from] a different group [and so] you don't have any common ground. She would be more approachable without a headscarf.* Mia perceives the visible religious marker as negating any other potential points of engagement and common interest. A number of the ethnic-majority students interviewed share this view—namely, the sense that it is easier to approach individuals without a headscarf and that such individuals would be more receptive to this form of contact. However, these views about interacting with Muslim students appear to be based on assumptions rather than concrete real-life experiences. These students agreed that ethnic-majority Belgians generally view women wearing headscarves as being oppressed by men. A few students noted that they do not share this mainstream negative perception, even if they also appear to perceive challenges in interacting with discernibly Muslim women. Possibly in an attempt to avoid offending the interviewer, a few students told her that she was easy to approach and talk to, despite wearing a headscarf.

The views of ethnic-majority students imply that this group frames ethnic-minority students wearing the headscarf as a barrier standing in the way of contacting them. For instance, Mieke (undergraduate, Social Sciences) recounted that:

> When they are wearing a headscarf, there is already something that would make you feel [like] an outsider. It makes it harder to approach. [I think that] the one without headscarf would feel more open about me approaching them; a person with a headscarf would not like me to contact her. It is more about how that other person would feel.

By referring to her thoughts about how her ethnic group appears to other ethnic groups, she was looking through the eyes of the other at how she might appear (see also: looking-glass self, Cooley 1956). Remarkably, although it appears students genuinely perceive such barriers in contacting Muslim female students, they did not mention having any negative contact experiences with them.

Belgian-descent students also mentioned the belief that Muslim students, in choosing to hang around peers of the same ethnic or religious origin, lack the motivation and the interest to initiate contact or deepen outgroup relationships. They asserted that Muslim students of different ethnic origins form cliques among themselves and interpret this as a lack of interest in becoming friends with ethnic-majority groups (McPherson et al. 2001). While they feel excluded by the grouping of ethno-religious minorities, Belgian-descent students expect that it is these students who will seek contact with them should they desire it, not necessarily the other way around. They think that intergroup contact is necessary for Muslim students to facilitate their so-called integration in Belgium and achieve upward social mobility. For example, Lien (undergraduate, Criminology) referred to the Flemish culture and stressed that it is often ethnic minorities who are expected to take the first step in making contact (see also Van Praag et al. 2016):

> The typical Flemish culture is very closed; they [native Belgians] are tight, a little bit more defensive… It is a bit scary that we are closed, and everything stays in the family, and you [are told you] should not trust anyone else [outside the family]. First contact is much harder—more open people when they come to Belgium and [come across] new people … are disappointed [with the difficulty of connecting]…It is a mix of these—we are closed and [we are] a bit defensive—and expect them [newcomers] to be open…A lot of people in Flemish culture expect others to [take the initiative and] come and say 'hi'.

Other comments such as *you should be open to meeting new people to be integrated,* and *integration is to have friends from here (Belgium) and not only from your own community* indicate that the onus of initiating contact was often on ethnic-minority groups. Only a few students underlined the mutual responsibility in intergroup contact and argued that the lack of motivation and interest in establishing contact is reciprocal. This was expressed by Linda (undergraduate, Social Sciences) as follows: *I think it comes from two sides—we don't go and talk to them either. It is not because we don't want to, but there is no motivation—with everyone, not just Muslims. My friends are also like that [with strangers].* Linda underlined the lack of motivation on both sides to explain why there was little intergroup interaction, adding that they do not specifically avoid their Muslim peers but treat everyone they do not know this way.

Overall, ethnic-minority women with a visible identity-marker—namely, a headscarf—are usually perceived by ethnic-majority students as lacking interest in intergroup contact. Additionally, the accounts of ethnic-majority students show that they still appear to perceive responsibility for the acculturation processes to lie mainly with the ethnic-minority students (Van Praag et al. 2016). These two facts likely inform their interpretation of minority-group behaviour as indicating a lack of motivation (cf. other potential explanations for reticent contact behaviour). It also likely informs their sense that it is the responsibility of Muslim students to manifest such a motivation by initiating contact with ethnic-majority groups to fulfil their perceived acculturation duties.

The perception that the reserved Belgian culture is a hindrance to intergroup contact

Being stuck in in- and outgroup thinking, a vast majority of the Belgian-descent students attached particular personality features to their own ethnic group. Traits, such as being reserved and introverted, were seen as a group characteristic of people of Belgian descent. This personality (group) trait was used as an excuse to explain the lack of initiative to establish intergroup interactions. According to participants, the low intergroup interaction levels among ethnic-majority groups are linked to a general group personality characteristic of being reserved that many individuals of Belgian descent share. The students argued that ethnic-majority groups were not enthusiastic about interacting with strangers due to these (group) personality traits. Such personality traits could be viewed as a general characteristic of human beings in the sense that people may not be always open to those they perceive as unfamiliar or foreign. Nonetheless, students of Belgian descent framed these traits as *specifically Belgian* rather than a general attitude common to all people. Some students reported that such traits formed a challenge to interacting with any stranger, including people of Belgian descent. Samuel (postgraduate, Political Sciences) for instance, made an obvious generalization of the ethnic ingroup and assigned personality traits to it:

> Belgians are introverts. It took me a year to make friends [at university]; it is difficult to start interactions. If you are not white, it will always be difficult… we don't despise other people but we are focused on our groups, so you will always be an outsider. It is easier for other Europeans [to be insiders], but I still think most Flemish people, due to a history of oppression [i.e., past oppression from other ethnic groups] and so on, they focus on themselves [own ethnic group]. A typical Belgian person is very closed to diversity… not because of the racist elements but [simply because] Belgians do not want to establish interaction [make contact].

Samuel referred to the challenges he experienced when trying to establish connections with students of Belgian descent at the university. He underlined that ethnic-majority people are not willing to establish contact with ethnic minorities, especially those of non-European descent. Jean (undergraduate, History) approaches this from an outsider perspective. By arguing that ethnic-majority groups are defined as 'introverted' by ethnic-minority groups, Jean looked at his own ethnic group through the eyes of the 'foreigners' (see: looking-glass self, Cooley 1956). He noted that it is not necessarily individuals, but rather the general culture that can be described as introverted:

> For foreigners we are introverted; we don't consider ourselves as introverts—the culture itself is introverted. We don't like to share; the suicide rate is high [and] we don't like to share our emotions and feelings. It is hard for us to approach just anyone, also Belgians…A lot of people have social anxiety; you can define [i.e., perceive] this only if you live within the culture.

Jean stated that an overall shared culture of social anxiety made it hard to approach any individual, regardless of their ethnic descent. Similarly, Mieke (undergraduate, Social Sciences) also thought that it was a 'Belgian thing' to be uninterested in interactions with ethnically diverse people, even though many European cultures share this attitude. Mieke attributed this attitude of Belgian-descent people to a specific upbringing in Belgium. The somewhat rigid way of raising children – which she claims is part of the Belgian culture – teaches specific ways to act when meeting people of distinct cultures: *You are taught here that you are not allowed to interfere with other cultures. You should not do something culturally wrong. [And so people] don't know how to approach other cultures.* Mieke concludes that the Belgian culture is, in a sense, xenophobic in nature.

To conclude, ethnic-majority students seem to assign a personality trait to their own ethnic ingroup and culture and use it as an explanation for the lack of contact with Muslim students. Moreover, they seem to represent their reserved behaviour as explicitly non-racist by referring to the trait of not being open to others as a general cultural one that applies to every stranger or foreigner. Attributing this combination of both factors to ethnic in- and outgroup also made it reasonable for ethnic-majority students to not make so much effort in reaching out to Muslim students. These rationalizations were strengthened by views on how 'others' viewed them and how they were taught that others would perceive their initiatives to establish contact with them. It is also important to recall that the participants might have framed their responses in a way that, in their view, would not offend the interviewer.

Discussion

This research aimed to study the intergroup contact perceptions of Belgian descent ethnic-majority university students in Flanders and outline the ways they experience their interactions with Muslim-Belgian ethnic-minority students. This study has approached intergroup contact from an ethnic-majority perspective and probed into the nature of the views of and experiences of this group concerning contact with Muslim students. The university setting provides a unique research context, since Belgian-descent students have relatively more opportunities to establish intergroup contact than in secondary schools but are not bound to do so, due to the very loose contact obligations in most courses. The study has found that even though students do not necessarily frame their contact experiences as negative and have sufficient contact opportunities, they are often disinclined to interact with Muslim students and form ethnically homophilous relationships (McPherson et al. 2001). Thus, mixing ethnic groups and having positive intergroup contact experiences may not necessarily facilitate the development of intimate ties among students, even though they might create an illusion of successful intergroup contact. Independent from their actual contact experiences with Muslim ethnic-minority students, many ethnic-majority students still seem

to perceive many barriers to the establishment and deepening of interethnic contact. The barriers are mainly linked to ethnic-majority students' behavioural insecurities in approaching and interacting with Muslim peers, perceptions of a lack of interest from Muslim students, and perceptions that Belgian culture is reserved and, therefore, forms a barrier to meaningful contact with Muslim students.

The findings indicate that ethnic-majority students' feelings of uncertainty and discomfort about intergroup interactions seems linked to their perceptions of cultural unfamiliarity and perceived cultural differences in ways of thinking and acting (Hewstone and Brown 1986; Wright et al. 1997; Van Acker et al. 2014). This is possibly due to the low quality and quantity of positive and open intergroup interactions. Such positive and open instances reduce expectations of adverse outcomes from intergroup contact by challenging negative beliefs about interacting with a member from another ethno-religious group (Paolini et al. 2004; Pettigrew 2008; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008). The conversational and physical avoidance of the Muslim ethnic minorities can be due to the lack of intergroup friendships (Barlow et al. 2009), which provide individuals with insights about the norms and behavioural scripts of other ethnic groups (Stephan and Stephan 1985). This avoidance of Muslim students is also based on ethnic-majority students' perceptions that Muslim students lacked interest in interacting with them. Thus, there is a tendency among Belgian-descent students to blame their Muslim peers for the segregation which occurs on the campus and overlook their own role in perpetuating it. It is important to note that societal discourses requiring ethnic-minority groups to put effort into integrating into the Belgian culture are apparent in the narratives of the ethnic-majority students who participated in the study. Such claims also reduce the responsibility of the ethnic-majority students to put energy in the establishment of contact with their Muslim peers.

Using cultural traits as a justification for the lack of contact with Muslim peers, most students of Belgian descent did not consider their own role in the development of intergroup contact. Furthermore, although the Belgian culture was clearly depicted as an introverted culture, not eager to establish interethnic contact, this was not necessarily problematized by students. Many students, however, tended to explain the lack of intimate relations with Muslim peers on account of the latter's religious background, constructing incompatible representations of them. The stereotypical image of the religious other as 'intolerant', 'conservative', 'not open-minded', and 'easily offended' was often hinted at by participants to legitimize the lack of intimate interactions. The fact that these negative perceptions of Muslim students appear based on assumptions demonstrates the overwhelming influence of societal hostility and prejudice towards Muslims (Clycq 2017; Hutchison and Rosenthal 2011; Savelkoul et al. 2011). At the same time, Belgian-descent students were sometimes reluctant to talk about their own experiences or views and often referred to how other people perceive contact with Muslims. This suggests that students of Belgian descent favour a strategy to maintain a positive representation of the self to avoid the label 'racist', an undesirable social identity (e.g., in the family context. See Clycq 2017). The sensitivity of the issue and the Muslim identity of the interviewer might have also favoured students adopting general opinions rather than offering their personal views and experiences.

While previous research has documented the prevailing hostility and negative attitudes towards Muslims, few have offered nuanced insights into the nature of intergroup contact experiences, from the perspective of those engaged in such contact. The views of ethnic-majority students presented in this article offer a deeper understanding of what prevents students of Belgian origin from building deeper relations with Muslim-Belgian students. The transcripts hint that examining the motivational mindsets of students could offer further insights into why intergroup interactions go awry in ethnically diverse higher education settings (Murphy et al.

2011). For instance, many ethnic-majority students reported a focus on avoiding undesired outcomes such as not appearing biased when they think about interacting with a Muslim peer. However, when ethnic-majority members are motivated to learn about their partner during interactions, their intergroup attitudes are more favourable than those who try to avoid unwanted consequences (Migacheva and Tropp 2014; Plant et al. 2010). Overall, these findings contribute to existing research by highlighting that attempts to ameliorate relations between members of different groups in higher education settings need to consider the role of motivation in shaping intergroup contact dynamics.

Some limitations need to be mentioned as well. This study only focused on students of Belgian descent who were enrolled at one university. A follow-up study could compare student groups in different educational settings and elaborate further on the implications for intergroup contact and friendships of different student characteristics, such as gender, age, ethnicity. Also, it is interesting to further explore everyday intergroup contexts in educational settings by adopting qualitative methodologies so that we have more insights into how and why potential contact opportunities get overlaid. Finally, future studies on intergroup contact could engage the positionality of interviewers and map out the implications of this researcher positionality for the study results.

Some policy recommendations can be drawn based on the study findings. First, universities can take a more active role in facilitating intergroup contact by encouraging random assignment of roommates from other ethnic groups. This distribution was shown to have a positive influence on friendship patterns and individual intergroup attitudes (Laar et al. 2005). Second, learning about Muslim ethnic minorities could have positive implications for intergroup anxiety (Pettigrew 1998). However, this needs to be put into practice more. Increasing knowledge of and familiarity with Muslim students and their values, norms, attitudes without essentializing could be helpful to facilitate intergroup interactions as it will provide students with behavioural guidelines and cues (Zagefka et al. 2017). In doing so, it is essential to avoid broad generalizations and delve deeper into concrete actions, fears, and interactions.

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