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Beyond Populism: From Scholarship to Politics in “New” Turkey

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Doctoral Thesis

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Abstract

Lately, it has become almost a cliché to label Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as populist. Turkish democracy’s dramatic backsliding under his Justice and Development Party (AKP) government is often raised as a reminder of why all who believe in democracy should protect it against populism and populists in their own societies. But this was generally not the case until the summer of 2013 when millions took to the streets as part of the nationwide anti-government protests. The ruthless way in which the government suppressed the protests reminded his liberal-minded supporters at home and abroad of other populists with a similar authoritarian streak. Once promoted as the “Nelson Mandela of Turkey”, Erdoğan was turned into its “New Sultan” almost overnight.

On the first level, this dissertation examines the epistemological and ontological roots of the mainstream narrative by asking: How could Erdoğan government so suddenly turn from beloved democrats into wretched populists? Operationalising a post-foundationalist theory of populism, this dissertation demonstrates that rather than undergoing an ideological metamorphosis, the AKP government was a consistently populist force from the beginning. Understanding populism as a fundamentally neutral rather than necessarily anti-democratic discourse whereby “the people” as the only legitimate yet presently powerless source of sovereignty is discursively constructed in antagonism with an illegitimately powerful elite, this dissertation firmly categorises the AKP as a populist party from the moment it first appeared on Turkish political stage in 2001. In fact, it argues that the moment when the mainstream scholarship started to label it populist was roughly the time authoritarianism and nativism came to fore much more pronouncedly as its core features, effectively transforming the AKP into a populist radical right party. The reason why most accounts failed to define it as such and instead vehemently supported it as a harbinger of liberal democracy for so long is that the AKP successfully integrated the epistemological framework of their thinking into its own ideological self-identification, branding itself as a “conservative democratic” party. Grounded on a strictly unidimensional logic whereby the Turkish modernisation process is understood with a reference to a distance between the bureaucratic centre and the Islamist periphery, mainstream scholarship considers the struggle between Kemalist power and Islamist opposition as the constitutive axis of Turkish politics along with the stereotypes of the authoritarian state and populist Islamist opposition. Having internalised this topographic model, the AKP broke its ties with Islamist tradition and branded itself as a state-of-the-art “conservative democratic” party

that was uniquely capable of overcoming, rather than perpetuating, this constitutive antagonism between the centre and periphery. Insofar as the party perfectly synchronised itself to the post-political tune of centre-periphery and declared its mission to be the realisation of a “politics beyond antagonisms,” early years of the AKP was celebrated as the end of political conflicts when the centre and the periphery of Turkish society would soon be “one” again.

On the second level, through an immanent reading of the Laclaudian theory of populism in Turkish case, this dissertation also remarks at a significant shortcoming of his model, namely its underlying “emancipatory apriorism” about populism. There is a tendency in Laclaudian theory to categorise “political” as such only insofar as it refers to democratising and emancipatory endeavours. Having rendered populist reason synonymous with political reason, Laclau assigns populism an essentially emancipatory mission. This study inquiring the rightward trajectory of a populist actor seeks to overcome this “emancipatory apriorism” that constitutes a gap in Laclaudian approaches to populism. Critically examining the AKP’s discourse as its trajectory from populism to nativist/nationalist radical-right has intensified in each dislocatory moment, the empirical part of this dissertation demonstrates that, contrary to Laclaudian conviction, it is indeed practically possible for populism to take non-emancipatory forms and descent into authoritarianism. As the case of Erdoğanism demonstrates, populist discourses can and do reach at such an extreme point of bipolar hegemony that they collapse all social differences into a singular political identity with respect to their articulation through the name of the leader. Though at this extreme point, it would be analytically more correct to categorise such cases not as mainly populist but radical right, for it is the nativist/nationalist and authoritarian—rather than populist—features that primarily determine their discourses.

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Contents

Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements	5
Chapter 1: Beyond Populism: From Scholarship to Politics in “New” Turkey	9
1.1. The Research Problem.....	9
1.2. Post-Foundational Theory of Populism.....	14
1.3. A Post-Foundational History of Turkish Politics	18
1.4. Contributions	25
1.5. Thesis Structure.....	26
Chapter 2: A Conceptual Inquiry on Populism: Towards a Working Theory	33
2.1. Introduction	33
2.2. Populism as Proto-Fascism.....	34
2.3. From <i>Narodniki</i> to the People’s Party.....	40
2.4. Back to the Origins: Populism as the New Radical Right	46
2.5. Towards a Working Concept of Populism.....	51
2.6. Conclusion.....	63
Chapter 3: Populism as a Discourse: Post-Foundationalist Approach.....	65
3.1. Introduction	65
3.2. Post-Foundationalist Discourse Theory	67
3.2.1. Discourse and Discursivity	74
3.2.2. The Political and Its Logics.....	79
3.3. Laclaudian Notion of Populism	83
3.4. Discourse Theoretical Methodology and Materials	87
3.5. Conclusion.....	93
Chapter 4: Roots and Early Accounts of Populism in Turkey	94
4.1. Introduction	94
4.2. “Save the State”: Westernisation and Its Discontents	96
4.3. CUP and the Early Young Turk Idea of the People	99
4.4. Populism as the Lifebuoy of <i>II. Meşrutiyet</i>	104
4.4.1. People [<i>Halk</i>] and Populism [<i>Halkçılık</i>]	106
4.4.2. Russian Narodniks and <i>Halka Doğru</i> Movement.....	110
4.5. Kemalist Populism	115
4.6. Kemalist <i>Halkçılık</i> vs Laclaudian Populism	124
4.7. Conclusion.....	127
Chapter 5: Contemporary Populism in Turkey: From Scholarship to the AKP.....	129
5.1. Introduction	129

5.2. Anti-Populist Roots of Centre-Periphery Model.....	130
5.3. Legacy of Mardin: Populism as the Birth-Defect of Turkish Democracy.....	135
5.4. From Theory to Practice: Use of “Populism” in the Early AKP Era	146
5.5. Conservative Democracy: An Anti-Populist Bridge to Close Centre-Periphery Gap.....	150
5.6. Conclusion.....	160
Chapter 6: AKP’s Discursive Trajectory: From Populism to Erdoğanism	161
6.1. Introduction	161
6.2. Constructing The People: AKP’s Non-Populist Populism	162
6.2.1. An Empty Dream of Europe	165
6.2.2. A New Constitutive Other: The Deep State.....	169
6.3. Spectre of <i>Gezi</i> and The Decisive Turn to Radical Right.....	173
6.4. Populism on the Loose: Erdoğanists and Anti-Erdoğanists.....	182
6.4.1. Enemies Within	187
6.4.2. Poverty of Anti-Erdoğanism	189
6.5. Conclusions	194
Chapter 7: Conclusions: Limits and Trajectories of Populism.....	196
7.1. Findings	196
7.2. Limitations.....	200
7.3. Avenues for Further Research	200
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	202

Chapter 1: Beyond Populism: From Scholarship to Politics in “New” Turkey

1.1. The Research Problem

It is a truism of today to single out Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as a *populist par excellence* (Castaldo 2018; Grigoriadis 2018; Kenny 2019; Park 2018; Ruth-Lovell, Doyle, & Hawkins 2019; Selçuk 2016; Waisbord 2018; Yabancı 2016; Yılmaz 2018; Yılmaz & Bashirov 2018). Described as Turkey’s ‘New Sultan’ (Çağaptay 2017), his case is often employed as part of a general attack against populism per se and put forth as a emblematic example of populism in power that should warn Western democracies about dangerous populist trajectories their own societies have been following (Bremmer 2018; Chu 2018; Jenkins 2018; Koru 2019; Momani 2017; Naím 2017; Tharoor 2018). Jan-Werner Müller’s oft-cited book *What is Populism?* offers one of the clearest illustrations of this mainstream instrumentalization of Erdoğan as one of the most dangerous populists in power today whose authoritarian rule should stand witness to the illiberal, and therefore anti-democratic, nature of all populist politics (Müller, 2016a).

But this was generally not the case until the summer of 2013 when millions took to the streets of Istanbul as part of the Gezi Park protests against Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP). Much of the mainstream scholarship used to champion the party as the harbinger of Turkey’s long-awaited democratisation (Carroll 2004; Dağı 2004, 2006, 2008; Nasr 2005; Tepe 2005; Hale 2005; Casanova 2005; Yavuz 2004, 2006, 2009; Çavdar 2006; Heper 2006; Özbudun 2006a, 2006b; Turunç 2007; Baran 2008; Cizre 2008; Rabasa & Larrabee 2008; Yılmaz 2009, 2011; Abramowitz & Barkey 2009; Hale & Özbudun 2010; Taşpınar 2012). During the course of Gezi protests, however, vilifying protestors as “terrorists” taking part in a foreign conspiracy to halt the rise of *New Turkey*, the AKP government wielded a terrifying offensive that resulted in several deaths, thousands of injuries and arrests (Demirel-Pegg, 2018; Özkırımlı, 2014). The chilling image Erdoğan reverberated through the merciless way in which he suppressed the Gezi reminded his liberal-minded supporters at home and abroad of other “populists” like Orbán and Putin, with a similar anti-democratic, anti-Western conspiratorial streak. Having reverted their support for the AKP—which they used to promote as the sole harbinger of liberal democracy in Turkey for about a decade—mainstream scholarship quickly united in their worry about Turkey’s ‘democratic backsliding’ and ‘authoritarian turn’ (Aslan-Akman 2012; Benhabib 2013; Taşpınar 2014; Esen & Gümüüşçü 2016; Öniş 2016; Özbudun 2014; Taş 2015; Philips 2017; Çağaptay 2019).

Critical scholars of Turkish politics have been operationalising a radically different approach from the mainstream in their analyses of the hegemonic discourses of the AKP (Dinçşahin 2012; Ongur 2018) and Kemalism (Sayyid 1997; Çelik 1999; Yeğen 2001; Arısan 2006; Bagdonas 2008; Çarmıklı 2011), as well as of counter hegemonic struggles against them (Kara 2012; Mercan & Özşeker 2015; Özen 2015; Damar 2016; Onbaşı 2016; Tekdemir 2016; Mert 2019). Rather than taking core political signifiers of Turkish politics like the people, nation, laïcité, Islam and democracy as given, they have been problematising the various ways in which those terms have been articulated within competing discourses as part of ongoing political struggles. Though it shares a great deal with this radical literature in terms of its epistemological commitments and, especially in the case of Kemalism, relies on their findings, this dissertation attempts to fill a particular gap left in-between them.

Despite offering an alternative reading of the AKP era from a post-foundationalist perspective, the so far existing Laclaudian accounts on Turkish politics either focus on a rather brief period surrounding a particular moment of crisis (Dinçşahin 2012) or remain largely confined to the authoritarian ways in which the party has consolidated its hegemony later on (Ongur 2018). Crucially they do not account for the symbiotic relationship between the mainstream political science literature and the AKP's rebranding of its early populism under the auspices of "conservative democracy", because they do not challenge—at least not directly—the hegemonic "centre-periphery" model (Mardin 1973) through which populism in modern Turkish politics have been observed in academia. Furthermore, due to their inadvertent adoption of Laclau's 'emancipatory apriorism' (Marchart 2007, 156-59; Urbinati 2013), which is based on the moral presumption that in order to be qualified as populist, a movement has to place emancipatory and egalitarian (i.e. traditionally leftist) ideals at its horizon, other Laclaudian scholars of Turkish politics tend to operationalise the theory exclusively vis-à-vis left-leaning instances of popular mobilisation such as the Gezi Park protests, where it can be most seamlessly applied (Mercan & Özşeker 2015; Özen 2015; Damar 2016; Onbaşı 2016; Tekdemir 2016; Mert 2019).

On the first level, this dissertation examines the epistemological and ontological roots of the mainstream hegemonic intellectual thinking by asking "How could Erdoğan and his government so suddenly turn from beloved *conservative democrats* into *wretched populists*?" In his following statement, Müller offers arguably the most succinct example of this thinking: 'Erdoğan [is] not just [an] evil authoritarian who emerged out of nowhere; [He] was doing something democratic when he asserted the presence of what had often been dismissed as

“black Turks”—that is to say, the poor and devout Anatolian masses—against the one-sided Westernised image of the Turkish Republic celebrated by the Kemalists. The quest for inclusion did not have to take the form of the *pars pro toto* populist claim’ (Müller 2016a, 85). Far from being an exception, Müller’s is only one of the better known instances of the popular narrative about the AKP’s sudden “populist turn” in the post-Gezi era, which is embraced by many in the mainstream who used to promote the party’s “conservative democracy” as a model for the entire Muslim world (Akyol 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Cook & Gwertzman 2007; Cook 2012; Taşpınar 2012, Yılmaz 2009, 2012; Özbudun 2006; Hale & Özbudun 2010), only to vilify Erdoğan and his fellows as populist autocrats as soon as the Gezi protests broke out (Akyol 2013d, 2013e; Cook & Koplw 2013; Taşpınar 2014; Yılmaz 2015; Özbudun 2014). The cases of Mustafa Akyol and Steven Cook are exemplary in this regard. Right up until the day when Gezi Events broke out on May 31st 2013, Akyol used to be among the most vocal supporters of AKP government in English-speaking world (Akyol, 2011). For several years, he did not just celebrate it as *the* model of Islamic liberalism which, after ‘a decade of economic progress and political reform,’ finally ‘consolidated’ democracy in Turkey (Akyol 2012). Assuming the role of Erdoğan’s unofficial spin doctor abroad, Akyol also actively exported the AKP leader’s rhetoric which he employed to discredit and eventually criminalise his critics at home, bashing the opposition as ‘insane’, ‘immoral’, and ‘irrational’ supporters of military coups and dictators (Akyol 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). Like Akyol, Cook too used to offer complete support for the AKP government at the expense of all its political competitors, hailing it as the only democratic force in Turkey that would establish a ‘truly secular system...and remove [religion] as an issue in the political arena’ (Cook and Gwertzman 2007). In May 2012, he still had the confidence to state that, in its decade-long tenure, the AKP government did ‘everything that it can’ to forge ‘a more democratic and open country’ (Cook 2012). However, few days into the Gezi, he would lament Turkey’s ‘hollow democracy’, citing Erdoğan government’s old antics like using the ‘machinery of state’ to ‘silence its critics’, jail journalists, and suppress freedom of expression (Cook and Koplw 2013). Similarly, in his first two pieces after Gezi, Akyol also suddenly discovered the appalling state of the freedom of press and started criticizing Erdoğan’s ‘patriarchal personality’ as well as his political strategy that is based on a ‘polarisation of Turkish society on primordial values’ (Akyol 2013d, 2013e). Unsurprisingly, this swift U-turn soon took him to the terrain whereby the story Erdoğan’s “authoritarian slide” following Gezi got inescapably linked with a ‘story of populism’ (Akyol 2016a). The same goes for more academic accounts offered by, among others, Ömer Taşpınar and İhsan Yılmaz, whose earlier praises for the AKP’s successful transformation of political Islam into conservative democracy

(Taşpınar 2012, 128; Yılmaz 2009, 93; Yılmaz 2012, 20) take a sudden turn against Erdoğan's 'populist approach to politics' in post-Gezi era, which they saw at odds with 'crucial attributes of liberal democracy' such as 'individual rights and liberties, an independent media, and the separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers' (Taşpınar 2014, 50; Yılmaz 2015, 100).

Operationalising a post-foundationalist theory of populism (Laclau 2005, 2007; Marchart 2018; Mouffe 2018; Palonen 2009, 2018; Palonen & Sundell 2019; Stavrakakis 2017a; Stavrakakis et.al. 2017; De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017; De Cleen et.al. 2018, 2019), *this dissertation demonstrates that, rather than experiencing an abrupt ideological metamorphosis of sorts, the AKP government has been a consistently populist force from the beginning and the ideological trajectory it followed throughout its political chronology has been a linear one. In fact, the moment when mainstream accounts started to call it populist was roughly the time authoritarianism and nativist nationalism came to fore much more pronouncedly as the primary features of the AKP's discourse, effectively transforming it into a party of the radical right* (Mudde 2007).

Understanding populism as a fundamentally neutral, rather than necessarily negative or positive, discourse whereby "the people" as the only legitimate yet presently powerless source of sovereignty is discursively constructed in antagonism with an illegitimately powerful elite (De Cleen et.al. 2018), this dissertation firmly categorises the AKP as a populist party from the moment it first appeared on Turkish political stage in 2001. The reason why most accounts failed to define it as such and instead vehemently supported it as a harbinger of liberal democracy for so long is that, in a way Anthony Giddens (1987) describes as 'double hermeneutics', the AKP successfully integrated the modernist and post-political epistemological framework (Crouch, 2004; Mouffe 2000; Rancière, 2004; Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014) of their thinking into its own ideological self-identification, branding itself as a 'conservative democratic' party (Akdoğan 2003; 2005; 2006; 2010). Grounded on a strictly unidimensional logic whereby the Turkish modernisation process is understood with a reference to a distance between the bureaucratic center and the Islamist periphery (Mardin 1973), mainstream scholarship considers the struggle between Kemalist power and Islamist opposition as the constitutive axis of Turkish politics along with the stereotypes of the authoritarian state and populist Islamist opposition (Sunar 1990; Heper & Keyman 1998; Kalaycıoğlu 1994, 2001; Yavuz 2006; Hale & Özbudun 2010; Çarkoğlu 2012; Öniş 2007, 2015; Aytaç & Elçi 2019). Having internalised this topographic model, the AKP discursively broke its ties with Islamist tradition and branded itself as a state-of-the-art "conservative democratic" party that was

uniquely capable of overcoming, rather than perpetuating, this constitutive antagonism between the centre and periphery. Insofar as the party perfectly synchronised itself to the post-political tune of centre-periphery and declared its mission to be the realisation of a “politics beyond antagonisms,” early years of the AKP was ‘heralded as the end of “political alienation”’ (Yılmaz 2017, 489) when the centre and the periphery of Turkish society would soon be “one” again.

Through an immanent reading of the Laclaudian theory of populism in Turkish case, on the second level, this dissertation also remarks at a significant shortcoming of his model, namely its underlying “emancipatory apriorism” about populism. As Nadia Urbinati notes (2013), there is a tendency Laclaudian theory shares with other post-foundationalist thinkers like Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière, who are ready to categorise “political” as such only insofar as it refers to democratising and emancipatory endeavours (Marchart 2007, 156-9). Having rendered ‘populist reason’ synonymous with ‘political reason *tout court*’ (Laclau 2007, 225), Laclau assigns populism an emancipatory mission to ‘postulate a radical alternative’ and offer a ‘choice at the crossroads’ (2005, 47). This study inquiring the right-ward trajectory of a populist actor seeks to overcome this emancipatory apriorism that constitutes a gap in Laclaudian approaches to populism with the exception of a few authors (e.g. Palonen 2009, 2018; Sunnercranz 2017, 2019). Critically examining the AKP’s discourse as its trajectory from populism to nativist/nationalist radical-right has intensified in each dislocatory moment, the empirical part of this dissertation demonstrates that, contrary to Laclaudian conviction, it is indeed practically possible for populism to take non-emancipatory forms and descent into anti-democratic regimes. As the case of Erdoğanism demonstrates, populist discourses can and do reach at such an extreme point of ‘bipolar hegemony’ (Palonen 2009; Palonen 2018) that they collapse all social differences into a singular political identity with respect to their articulation through ‘the name of the leader’ (Laclau 2007, 100). Though at this extreme point, it would be analytically more correct to follow Mudde’s advice (2007, 26) and stop categorising such cases as primarily populist.

This chapter, which introduces the post-foundational theory of populism and the way in which it is applied to the case of AKP in Turkey here, is divided into two parts. The first presents the post-foundationalist ontological and epistemological bases of this dissertation, briefly introduces the particular understanding of populism which stems from them and discusses its benefits. These are further discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, where the competing conceptualisations of populism are examined at length. In the second part, this chapter provides

a snapshot of the political and ideological circumstances that eventually paved the way for the emergence of AKP phenomenon in Turkish politics. In the end, it also presents the contributions this dissertation hopes to make to this interesting topic.

1.2. Post-Foundational Theory of Populism

It is possible to distinguish two main intellectual reservoirs from which post-foundationalist theory of populism is nurtured: Gramscian theory of hegemony and Derridean deconstructivism (Howarth & Torfing 2005, 10). While it is Antonio Gramsci's concept of *hegemony* that helps it to overcome the problem of essentialism, deconstructivism provides the key to understand the ultimately contingent character of all objectivity, paving the way for a novel definition of *discourse* and, then, politics and *populism*.

Gramsci puts forth politics as the primary force in a field of constant struggle where collective wills are formed around different standpoints that either reinforce or weaken the status quo in varying degrees. Rather than being a given objectivity, any social order is a construct of concrete political struggles for *hegemony* that is 'the formation and organization of consent' (Ives 2004, 3). Therefore it is indispensable for a social scientific inquiry to begin from the political struggles of power and antagonisms, and work its way through what kinds of "society" these processes construct. This primacy of the political is directly related to Derridean deconstructivism (Derrida 1981; 1982; 1997). Built upon the Saussurean linguistics, Jacques Derrida argues that establishing binary oppositions like signified and signifier, modern Western epistemology tends to order the world hierarchically between a privileged, pure essence that is "inside" and an inferior, threatening "outside" (1997; 315). Through a 'deconstructive destabilisation of these hierarchies,' Derrida uncovers the '*ultimate undecidability*' that lies at the core of any system of representation that claims to correspond to an intelligible order of the world (Howarth & Torfing 2005; 11-12). Post-foundationalist ontology thus radically breaks from the notion of an epistemological blueprint and, instead, argues that the social being-qua-being stems from contingent political acts—what Derrida calls 'play of differences'—taken on an infinitely open terrain, privileging in each instance certain meanings over others.

These principles of the primacy of politics and ultimate undecidability of meaning together lead to a novel understanding of *discourse* that comprises of *all* linguistic and non-linguistic social phenomena (Laclau & Mouffe 2001 [1985]; Howarth 2004). In the absence of any transcendental foundation, social meanings and identities are always already discursively

constructed and, hence, bound to remain eternally open to competing representations. In the ‘infinite of the social’ where ‘any system of meaning is contingent, contextual, and relational’, discourses attempt to achieve an impossible social fullness—a hegemony—by fixating meanings to objects and relations between them at the expense of countless others that are left out (Howarth 2004, 266). In this sense, discursively constructed nature of social phenomena inevitably entails ‘an investment, in a partial object, of a fullness which will always evade us because it is purely mythical’ (Laclau 2007, 116).

Post-foundationalism takes this impossibility of social fullness as the condition of possibility for the *political* because the excess of meaning that is bound to remain outside of any given system of representation carries the seeds of a contestation of the hegemonic regimes and practices (Laclau 1990, 172; Laclau 2000, 79; Glynos & Howarth 2007, 113–117; Marchart 2018). The political consists in such competing discursive interventions that provoke or capitalise on a hegemonic social order’s failure to represent this excess by articulating it themselves (Glynos & Howarth 2007, 116). In this sense, the task of a post-foundationalist political research is to study those “dislocatory moments” when ‘failures of established identifications and hegemonic orders’ lead to a ‘crisis of representation’ and competing political discourses offer ‘alternative narrations of the crisis and of their proposed solutions’ (Stavrakakis 2017a).

Post-foundational understanding of populism emerges as a rather straightforward one once these ontological premises are laid out. Populism, like any political discourse, is an articulatory practice that poses a challenge to hegemonic order by imposing a system of representation of its own: a totality (Glynos & Howarth 2007, 141–145). Insofar as democratic societies are concerned, that mythical partial object any political discourse striving for hegemonic fullness invests in invariably involves ‘constructing a popular identity out of a plurality of democratic demands’ (Laclau 2007, 95). This is why the main point of reference any populist discourse operating under the legitimating framework of democracy privileges is *the people*. Populism is concerned primarily with the construction of a popular political identity around the nodal point of *the people* by welding an equivalential chain between various differential elements whose shared ‘lack’ of power and sovereignty is conceived as resulting directly from the existence of an antagonistic and illegitimately powerful ‘elite’; a ‘constitutive outside’ that is at once the nemesis of *the people* and necessary condition of possibility of its existence (Laclau 1996, 44; Laclau & Mouffe 2001 [1985], 127–134; Laclau 1990, 17–26; Mouffe 1993, 2; Laclau 2007, 77–83). *The people* of populism is a partial component that is

conceived as the only legitimate totality by instituting a frontier of exclusion, ‘a part which identifies itself with the whole’ (Laclau 2007, 82; Canovan 2005, 78–79).

Post-foundational approach to populism maintains that the conceptual confusion surrounding it stems from the fact that populism is usually presumed to be an *ontic* category where it actually is an *ontological* one (Heidegger 1962; Laclau 2005, 34, 44; Glynos & Howarth 2007, 108-9). That is to say, the focus has been on investigating instances of populism without being concerned with the political and social phenomena as such. Contrary to mainstream accounts that effectively reify an association between radical right and populism by equating the latter with moralism and anti-pluralism (Jagers & Walgrave 2007; Meijers 2011; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012; Rooduijn 2014; van Kessel 2015; Müller 2016a), a post-foundationalist take critically engages with the analytical and normative biases of the predominant intellectual framework of liberalism in Western academia, from the vantage point of which populism has long been dismissed a priori as a pejorative concept (Katsambekis 2016; Stavrakakis 2017b).

This dissertation stands to benefit further from such an approach with respect to its engagement with the scholarship on Turkish populism as well, for it compels this research to undertake an immanent reading of that literature through the empirical case of AKP phenomenon. As discussed at length in Chapter 5, in their attempts to explain the country’s ‘democratic backsliding’, mainstream scholars begun in unison to employ the term in the same breath with a series of other pejoratives, in order to describe the authoritarian way in which Erdoğan government has been ruling the country (Aslan-Akman, 2012; Benhabib, 2013; Esen & Gümüşçü, 2016; Öniş, 2016; Özbudun, 2014; Taş, 2015).

As the detailed discussion on the competing conceptualisations of populism in Chapter 2 shows, this conceptual overlap whereby radical right, nativism, authoritarianism and populism are used almost interchangeably has a long history of its own and is extremely prevalent in contemporary Western political science literature (Houwen 2011; Stavrakakis 2017b). So, interestingly, the extended discussion over the scholarship on Turkish populism undertaken in Chapter 5 may potentially serve as a befitting example of a much wider scholarly misidentification, which often permeates even those critical political economical accounts that use populism as a pejorative in their otherwise enlightening investigations on the neoliberal governmentality of the AKP era (Yıldırım 2009; Bozkurt 2013; Akçay 2018; Boyraz 2018). A

robust analysis of this misidentification could lead to a conceptual clarification that would offer a categorical differentiation between these deeply entangled concepts.

Methodologically, post-foundationalist understanding of populism enables this dissertation to recognise how exactly the core categories of “the people” and “the elite” are constructed and transformed in the AKP discourse over the years. With its focus on populism as a particular political logic in which the equivalential moment overcomes the differential one, such an approach allows the empirical part of this dissertation to identify those popular demands that remained frustrated by the previous governments and examine how the AKP articulated them into a common political identification that became “the people” and against a common enemy that was the *Kemalist tutelary elite*. With a keen eye on the radical contingency of political arrangements, dissertation accounts for the drastic transformations those core categories have gone through in each critical juncture during the party’s tenure, tracing the AKP’s trajectory from a quintessentially populist party into a radical right one. Whereas the people were initially a much more ambivalent and, therefore, inclusive category that comfortably accommodated Sunni conservatives, Anatolian businessmen, Kurds, urban poor, political left and liberals, and non-Muslim minorities all simultaneously against the elite in politics, judiciary and military, it has gotten much more nativist/nationalist and monolithic, and the elite much more foreign, criminal, evil and conspiratorial, whilst the party eliminated political opponents, consolidated power, and established its hegemony. Having taken a post-foundational approach to populism, this dissertation locates and examines those transitory moments of dislocation, critical junctures, where the political—that is to say, contingent—nature of social phenomenon, as well as the articulatory effects of the logics of equivalence and difference are exposed during political crises (Laclau 1990; Hay 1999; Stavrakakis et.al. 2018). Materials and data that together comprise of the AKP’s political discourse, i.e. party documents, speeches, policy papers and writings of its ideologues, are in this sense selected and examined as they are articulated through shifting nodal points in these dislocatory moments of crises. Foundation of the party in 2001, its first electoral victory in 2002, crises surrounding the presidential elections in 2007 and anti-coup trials in its aftermath, Gezi protests and corruption exposes in 2013, and the continuous offensive the party undertaken in the course of four elections between March 2014 and November 2015 are those critical junctures this dissertation identifies and examines in depth in its empirical part (Chapters 5 and 6).

1.3. A Post-Foundational History of Turkish Politics

It is possible to read the political history of modern Turkey through the lenses of such post-foundationalist approach as a struggle between hegemonic forces attempting to establish a closed society and counter-hegemonic forces striving to destabilise them by representing their excluded ‘outside’ and, thus, reinvigorating the ‘political’. This serves the double purpose of providing a brief outline of the politico-historical groundwork on which the AKP phenomenon has been built whilst paving the way to our own analysis by offering a glimpse into the post-foundationalist literature on Turkish politics this dissertation hopes to contribute to.

Collapse of the Ottoman Empire following the Balkan Wars and World War I constituted a catastrophic moment of dislocation when a wide array of religious, ethnic, economic elements which used to be more or less stably located in the Ottoman social field under the hegemonic imperial order for centuries, were disunited (Arısan 2013). Foundation of the Republic of Turkey as a secular, nation-state, in this sense, was one among many competing discursive attempts to suture a dislocated social field by rearticulating those elements under a new representational order. As the eventual winner of this struggle and the hegemonic political force of the early Republican era [1923-46], the Kemalist party-state ‘relied upon the creation of a new secular, modern and Western Turkish identity, and the representation of the Turkish nation as an undivided, homogenous and harmonious totality’ (Çelik 1999, 196). Through its efforts to render any counter-hegemonic imaginaries and sources of antagonism they tried to activate (religious, ethnic, class-based etc.) pre-emptively invisible by articulating them to the “outside” of the field of representation (Yeğen 2007), Kemalism constituted an attempt to eradicate the *political* in its antagonistic dimension and, instead, enforced a solidaristic understanding of Turkish society as a national, closed totality that was fully represented by the Republican single-party regime.

This early hegemonic era came to an end with the transition to multi-party regime following the end of the World War II when the Democratic Party (DP), articulating the previously unfulfilled demands of excluded groups for political representation, economic development, and cultural recognition against the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the state elite (Bora & Canefe 2008, 640-46), reinvigorated the political and successfully challenged the Kemalism myth of a homogenous and undivided society. Following Çelik (2010), we can plausibly understand the 1960 coup d’état against the DP government as well as the subsequent military interventions of 1971, 1980, and 1997 as manifestations of an

enduring desire to achieve the impossible ideal of a totally closed society, that is to say, attempts to ‘sterilise’ Turkish politics by way of eliminating representations of antagonisms that could constitute a challenge against the hegemonic order of the ‘etatist elite’ (Karpaz 1988, 141). Having incorporated the signifier “democracy” into its hegemonic discourse, 1960 coup and 1961 constitution did not only identify Kemalism as the royal road to “democratisation” but charged the etatist elite with the duty of preserving this state-of-the-art “tutelary democracy” against political transgressions through newly-established institutions of the senate, National Security Council and Constitutional Court (Tachau & Heper 1983, 17-33). Throughout the 1960s and 70s, rapid industrialisation and urbanisation triggered by massive waves of rural depopulation led to a proliferation of social demands and antagonisms that nevertheless remained largely excluded from the realm of legitimate political representation. Though it remained central, Kemalist democratic discourse ‘failed to incorporate fully and determine the social and political spheres, that is, to control a field of discursivity exceeding its hegemonic grasp’ (Çelik 1999, 199). Thus, the era between 1960 and 1980 was marked by the rise of radical left and right movements beyond the borders of Kemalism, which were locked in a violent struggle ‘aimed for the total destruction of their political rival and...for a full possession of political power’ (Arısan 2006, 227). Even the CHP itself got reformed under a new leadership as a social democratic, left populist party, leaving its traditional role as the natural flagship of Kemalist ideals behind. Such proliferation of counter-hegemonic discourses undermining the Kemalist hegemony paved the way for the etatist elite’s claim that ‘there were too many political freedoms, which were leading to anarchy and chaos’ (Arısan 2006, 230).

While the 1971 military intervention simply replaced the incumbent government with a hand-picked technocrats who would end the political violence and reinstate societal “order”, the 1980 was a complete military takeover that aimed to put an end—once and for all—to political fragmentation and polarisation, ‘regulate democracy’ and ‘carve an arena for the state against “politics”’ (Heper 1988, 7) by prioritising ‘national unity...at the expense of democracy’ (Çelik 1999, 199). In this sense, the 1980 coup and the 1982 constitution was the critical moment of reinstitution that shaped the contemporary Turkish politics as well as directly giving birth to the phenomenon that is the AKP. It would not be an exaggeration to describe the political atmosphere in Turkey during the dark decades of 1980s and 90s as one of a permanent state of emergency whereby the entire society was restructured on the groundwork the 1980 coup d’état brutally laid down. Aside from closing down all political parties and banning their cadres, the military regime in 1980-83 heavily punished all who were in any way involved in

political acts. Some 650,000 people were detained and tortured; 171 people died from torture; 230,000 were tried; 7,000 people were tried with capital punishment, 108 prisoners condemned to death penalty, and 50 people were executed; 30,000 fled the country; 14,000 were excluded from citizenship; more than 1.5 million people were blacklisted (Söyler 2015, 132). Designed specifically to ‘protect the state from the actions of its citizens rather than protecting the individual liberties from the encroachments of the state,’ the 1982 constitution cemented the military government’s anti-political, authoritarian and etatist ethos, spreading it further down the veins of Turkish state and society (Özbudun 2011, 44). Due to the condemnation of politics as a dangerous and disruptive endeavour that could jeopardise the peace and unity of the nation, the constitution required new parties to be approved by National Security Council and declared it illegal for the political parties to embrace “radical ideologies” such as Marxism, Islamic fundamentalism, or extreme right which, it reasoned, would incite antagonisms in-between them. Insofar as their role was restricted to the reproduction of national unity, societal order and stability, the political parties lost their primary function of representation: ‘Students, teachers, and civil servants were barred from party membership and the new parties were not allowed to form roots in society because they were not allowed to found women’s or youth branches, to develop links with trade unions or to open branches in villages’ (Zürcher 2004, 281-82).

The post-coup governments of the following two decades fully employed, to the point of near suffocation, the ideological and repressive apparatuses of the state in order to reorganise all spheres of life around the image of an harmonious society, which most succinctly found its representation in the slogan “one nation, one state, one flag, one religion, one language” (Jongerden 2009, 10; Yeğen 1996). Throughout this period, all those political activists and struggles that embodied the possibility for emergence of alternative political subjectivities and, therefore, posed a challenge against this homogeneous ideal, were violently eradicated from the social and political life—some permanently, others temporarily (Karacan 2015). Besides party politics, civil society, religion, media, judiciary and universities were all brought under putative control of the state via supervisory bodies that ensured these institutions maintained their functions in unity with the officially-sanctioned guidelines. Crucially, the post-1980 period was marked by the rearticulation of Islam into the official Kemalist discourse through the adoption of so-called *Turkish-Islamic synthesis* (Çetinsaya 1999; Kaplan 2005). Emphasising the importance of religion in preserving the national integrity, the military government and its civilian successors pursued a policy of reconciliation with the orthodox, i.e. Sunni, Islam as an

indispensable component of Turkishness. In order to gain mass support for the tutelary regime and construct a society resistant to any political alteration, Islam was rearticulated as an ideological tool that would protect the society against ‘Turkey’s most deadly foes’ of socialism and communism, and contain the rising tide of Islamism, that is, the politicisation of Islam in a way that way unsanctioned by the state. Accordingly, to permeate the society ‘with a mixture of fierce nationalism and a version of Islam friendly to the state’ post-1980 governments endowed the Directorate of Religious Affairs with a new goal of ensuring ‘national solidarity and integrity’ (Davison 2003, 340) and introduced “religion and ethics” courses as compulsory part of the basic curriculum, which presented ‘patriotism and love for parents, the state and the army...as a religious duty’ (Zürcher 2004, 288).

In addition to its immediate casualties, the long-lasting outcome of the 1980 military coup was a reign of state terror against the left, Islamists, and the Kurds, whose very existence in the public sphere were antithetical to a “politics devoid of antagonisms”. The effects of this campaign were heavily felt during the dark decade of 90s, which stood witness to the disappearance of Turkish left, and was marred with a civil war against the Kurds, a witch-hunt against symbols of political Islam, scandals of widespread corruption, state-sanctioned massacres, assassinations and extrajudicial killings. In fact, as Soli Özel succinctly chronicles, four crucial events that took place in the short span of five years between 1996 and 2001 traumatised the country deep enough to ‘change the course of Turkish politics’ thereafter, paving the way for the AKP phenomenon (Özel 2003, 86-7). A fatal car crash in 1996 offered a rare glimpse into the incriminating networks formed between organized crime, government officials and Turkish state-security agencies in order to eliminate leftist and Kurdish “enemies” of the state (Ünver 2009, 9) Mass protests calling for transparency and accountability spread all around the country, whereby millions demanded (in vein) a full revelation of Turkey’s so-called deep state. A year later, the coalition government led by the Islamist Welfare Party [*Refah Partisi*, RP] following a remarkable electoral victory was forced to resign as a result of yet another military intervention. Unlike before, however, this so-called ‘post-modern coup’ of 28 February 1997 (Çandar 1999) did not even compel the army to get its hands dirty, so to say, but to delegate the duty of “sanitation” to its civilian subordinates, who duly excommunicated Islamist “undesirables” along with their trademark symbols like the Islamic headscarf, from the political scene and brought back the “order”. Just two years after that, a major earthquake hit near Istanbul, causing thousands of death and devastating Turkish economy, which eventually hit rock bottom with the 2001 financial crisis.

The traumas of this post-1980 era had been so deep and dark that they made a significant part of Turkey's population extremely respondent to those who presented themselves as uniquely capable of offering a way out of that ever-stable dark pit; 'Voters were prepared to follow anyone who could offer hope' (Zürcher 2004, 306). Once the coalition government collapsed following the 2001 financial crisis, the AKP was the light that came through the cracks. In post-foundationalist terms, the party was the latest incarnation of the 'return of the repressed' antagonistic essence of the political that emerged at a moment of dislocation, constituting a counter-hegemonic discursive challenge to the dominant order from its hitherto excluded outside (Mouffe 1993, Çelik 2010, 223). As a brand new political party, the AKP laid a selective claim over the Islamist legacy of the National Outlook movement (Şen 2010). On the one hand, despite their credentials as prominent figures of the movement, AKP leadership unequivocally denounced the National Outlook's trademark Islamism and, instead, identified themselves as "conservative democrats." Yet, simultaneously, they did not miss any opportunity to own up to other aspects of the same denounced past when these assisted them in reminding that, as ex-figureheads of the National Outlook, they had more than their fair share of pain and suffering under the tutelary regime of 1980s and 90s (Yılmaz 2017). The fact that the RP's electoral victory had been illegitimately taken away through a 'post-modern coup' and both the party and its Islamist successor Felicity Party [*Fazilet Partisi*, FP] were closed down on account of their allegedly anti-secular activities prior to the AKP's foundation only reinforced their victim status during this period. Finally the 4-months prison sentence Erdoğan himself had received in 1998 for reciting a poem with Islamist references on a public rally granted him personally a "veteran of democracy" status against the guardians of the regime (Zürcher 2004, 300-306). Having skilfully articulated this "anti-political" record of the state elite—which stood witness to their readiness to protect the state and established order against political transgressions by any means necessary—into a brand-new 'conservative democracy' discourse, the AKP founders succeeded in distancing themselves from the legacy of Islamist politics whilst simultaneously taking credit for its anti-establishment credentials. Into this "conservative democratic" discourse, the party further incorporated the popular disgruntlements caused by the unjust distribution of wealth that had worsened during the course of recurrent economic crises of the 1990s and 2001, as well as the reactions against widespread corruption exposés in the wake of the 2002 election. Having successfully assumed the role of the 'patron of the victimised, the excluded, and the oppressed' (İnsel 2003, 303), the AKP cultivated more than just the benefit of the doubt from a wide range of Turkish electorate,

including urban working class, Kurds, leftists, liberal middle-class, pious Muslims, and business people.

The AKP came to office with a landslide victory in November 2002 and kept its power ever since. Contrary to serious scepticism the party faced from its secularist opponents at home due to the Islamist past of its founding cadres, Erdoğan and his companions were embraced wholeheartedly abroad. During whistle-stop visits they made to the European capitals and the US even before the beginning of their term, the AKP founders easily charmed the Western officials and area specialists in various governments, think-tanks, and media outlets with their expressed devotion to the values of liberalism, democracy, free market, rule of law, and human rights. Amidst the global fears of a renewed ‘clash of civilizations’ at the dawn of post-9/11 era, this new “conservative democratic” government in Turkey was hailed as an ‘exemplar of regional enlightenment, a model of moderate secularism and democratic ambition’ in the Middle East (Remnick 2002). In his address at the Istanbul NATO Summit in 2004, the US President George W. Bush echoed this approach, praising Erdoğan government for the ‘example [Turkey] has set on how to be a Muslim country which embraces democracy, rule of law and freedom’ (BBC 2004).

Particular resolve with which the AKP government kick-started towards Turkey’s long-awaited goal of EU membership made many liberal scholars at home and abroad feel vindicated in their conviction that, contrary to what their orientalist and often Islamophobic opponents insisted, Islam and democracy were in fact compatible as these “Muslim Democrats” of Turkey had proven (Altunışık 2005; Dağı 2006, 2008; Fuller 2008; Kanra 2005; Nasr 2005; Taşpınar 2012; Tepe 2005; Yavuz 2004, 2006, 2009; Hale & Özbudun 2010). Writing in the early and mid-2000s, scholars of both democracy and European integration largely considered the case of Turkey as an affirmative example of how the political conditionality laid out as part of the so-called Copenhagen Criteria was the driving force behind democratic consolidation in candidate countries (Avcı 2005; Kubicek 2005; Müftüler-Baç 2005; Schimmelfennig et.al. 2003, 2006; Tocci 2005). Political economists, on the other hand, described the AKP’s first term simply as an ‘economic miracle’ (Öniş & Bakır 2007; The Economist 2005). Scholars of comparative and Middle Eastern politics were likewise quick to promote Turkey under the AKP as a “model” to be followed by other Muslim countries (Nasr 2005; Yavuz 2006; Kalyvas 2012; Hashemi 2009; Monshipouri 2009). Insofar as the Middle East was concerned, the agreement was that the AKP provided ‘the best picture [of] what Muslim Democracy might become and what it might stand for’ (Nasr 2005, 23), offering ‘the single best hope for reconciling

Muslims—from Morocco to Indonesia—with twenty-first-century social and political realities’ (Kaplan 2004). This heightened profile of the country under Erdoğan was reverberated by many reformists in the Arab world, who saw the transformation of Turkish Islamists ‘instructive’ for their own societies as well (Altunışık 2010). Popularity of the “Turkish model” reached at its peak once the so-called Arab Spring spread in the region: By 2011 two-thirds in the Arab world agreed that Turkey ‘could be a model for Middle Eastern countries’ (Salem 2011). Thanks to this overwhelming atmosphere of euphoria and support, series of questionable and worrisome steps the AKP took during this so-called “golden decade” of 2002-11 were either supported or overlooked but rarely criticised. Aside from a few articles, reports and op-eds, at the time nobody really took an issue with the way in which the AKP government systematically converted the public procurement into a notorious instrument of political patronage since day one (Gürakar 2016), which created nationwide networks of economic dependency and drastically shifted the ownership structures of media as well, effectively turning much of Turkish businesses and media into diehard government supporters (Akser & Baybar-Hawks 2012; Esen & Gümüşçü 2016). From 2007 onwards, the party also blatantly instrumentalised the ‘anti-coup’ trials to consolidate its power, dismantle the system of checks and balances, and to suppress opposition (Rodrik 2011). Notwithstanding a few voices from the fringes (Jenkins 2009, 2011; Dinçşahin 2012), those developments were broadly welcomed in the mainstream as part of the country’s much-needed process of democratic cleansing and liberalisation that would finally bring the tutelary regime to an end (Cizre & Walker 2010; Heper 2011, 243-44; Bonzon 2014; Ersoy & Üstüner 2016; Denli 2018, 210-12). Thus, following the suit, Western media kept describing Turkey under the AKP rule customarily as a ‘vibrant democracy’ during this period as well (Berlinski 2017).

Yet it was the Gezi protests in the summer of 2013 and the heavy-handed way the AKP government responded to them which finally broke the camel’s back, giving rise to a radically different picture of the country and rapidly shattering the beloved “Turkish model” around the world. Having completely overhauled the entire police forces and judiciary to put an end to the corruption probes in the winter of 2013, the AKP government converted the following four elections between March 2014-November 2015 into one, continuous all-out war, in which the entire state machinery, including the armed forces, police, and judiciary were mobilised against a unified front of “terrorists.” Parallel to its assault against what is left of the independent or critical media, in an organised effort to stifle any opposition on the grassroots level by restricting access to information, the AKP government began to frequently block online

platforms such as Youtube, Facebook, Twitter Instagram, WhatsApp and Wikipedia as well (Freedom House 2016; Osterlund 2018). Once the de facto “one-man regime” was established with Erdoğan’s ascension to Presidency in August 2014, criminalisation of all forms of opposition and dissent, along with the instrumentalization of courts and law enforcement forces to silence its critics have become *modus operandi* of Erdoğan’s ‘New Turkey’ (Tuğal 2016). The brutal way in which the Turkish government capitalised on the chaos that followed the failed coup d’état attempt in July 2016 was in this sense largely a re-enactment of what had been going on for quite some time in the country, only at a larger scale. The state of emergency regime that lasted for two years enabled the AKP government to establish a super-presidential regime, providing it a cloak of impunity while it continued doing what it had been already doing for several years: methodically eradicating what little clusters of opposition remained on the fringes of Turkish politics and society, and finalising the concentration of the entire state power under Erdoğan’s personal authority.

1.4. Contributions

The primary ambition of this dissertation is to contribute to Ernesto Laclau’s post-foundational theory of populism. Through an immanent reading of his theory in the empirical case of AKP in Turkey, this research addresses the latent “emancipatory apriorism” of his approach (Marchart 2007, 156-9). Tracing the AKP’s discursive trajectory from populism to Erdoğanism, it demonstrates that populist articulatory practices, under right circumstances, can and do lead to a case of what Laclau himself dismisses as impossible. As Erdoğanism shows, in an extremely polarised polity such as contemporary Turkey, all social differences can and do get collapsed into a singular political identity with respect to their equivalential articulation through ‘the name of the leader’ (Laclau 2007, 100), resulting in a ‘bipolar hegemony’ (Palonen 2009).

With the help of such a modified model, the dissertation shows that, contrary to the perspective of mainstream scholarship in Turkish politics (Heper & Toktaş 2003; Yavuz 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2009; Kieser 2006; Keyman & Öniş 2007; Ciddi 2008; Cizre 2008; Fuller 2008; Hale & Özbudun 2010), the AKP has been a populist party from its inception. In fact, the moment when most scholars started to call it populist at the dawn of its third term in office (Criss 2011; Çınar 2018; Yılmaz & Bashirov 2018), was roughly the time *nativism* and *authoritarianism* came to fore much more pronouncedly as the ultimate core features of the AKP’s discourse, effectively transforming it into a radical right party (Mudde 2007, 22-26).

This dissertation also directly tackles the mainstream scholarship on Turkish politics, identifying its failure to discern the AKP's populism as a direct result of the hegemonic intellectual framework informing nearly all analyses of the party: centre-periphery (Mardin 1973). Through an in-depth analysis of the party's early discourse, dissertation shows that the AKP's self-identification as a "conservative democratic" party is also informed by the very same intellectual framework, making the relationship between the mainstream literature and the party a perfect example of "double hermeneutics" whereby their "findings" on the basis of the decades-long hegemony of Mardin's model 'enter constitutively into the world they describe' (Giddens 1987, 20). This enables the dissertation to account for both the support party garnered among the proponents of the centre-periphery model as well as the latter's shortcoming in identifying the party's populist discourse.

1.5. Thesis Structure

This chapter outlined the research question, briefly introduced the post-foundationalist approach that informs the way in which this dissertation answers that question, offered a snapshot of the empirical case at hand through the lenses of this approach, and listed contributions it makes. Importantly, it identified a gap in the literature on contemporary Turkish politics between the mainstream perspective and its post-foundationalist critics. While the first group have long been accustomed to read Turkish politics, including the AKP, through the lenses of centre-periphery framework, which comes with a massive baggage of modernisation theory on its own, the latter group, despite offering a radically different approach that reads Turkey beyond such essentialist binaries, either do not engage comprehensively enough with the mainstream in their analyses on the AKP, or critically enough with the Laclaudian theory of populism in their works on populist movements in Turkey. This is a shame because, as this dissertation shows, such an endeavour, in the first place, accounts for the curious relationship between the AKP and mainstream scholarship by revealing their mutual epistemological basis, which predicates a deeply pejorative understanding of populism that is the most prevalent one in the literature. A critical engagement with the Laclaudian theory, on the other hand, reveals its underlying emancipatory apriorism vis-à-vis populism, which otherwise leads him—and by extension others who utilise his approach uncritically—to locate populism predominantly within those emancipatory and left-leaning instances of political mobilisation. Utilising the Laclaudian theory uncharacteristically in a case where the populist discourse takes an

increasingly more personalist form, i.e. the case of AKP, helps us to address this theoretical pitfall.

The following chapter focuses on the current literature on populism and its discontents through an exploration of the concept's historical and intellectual origins. Tracing the persistent trajectory of a deeply pejorative understanding of the concept as it spans from the post-war era American social sciences all the way to contemporary Western accounts on populism, it identifies a series of shortcomings in the mainstream and emphasises the need for a change of perspective. It shows that, despite being thoroughly discredited in the following decades (Nugent 1963; Kazin 1998; Stavrakakis 2017b), the revisionist myth based on modernisation theory which initially branded populism as a proto-fascist ideology in the 1950s and 60s (Hofstadter 1955; Shils 1956; Lipset 1960) is very much alive in spirit within the contemporary mainstream. While some (e.g. Kriesi & Pappas 2015; Müller 2016a; Aalberg et.al. 2016; Inglehart & Norris 2017) remain largely on the revisionist path and insist using populism to refer to what are in fact nationalist/nativist or radical right political stances, others, notwithstanding their avoidance from such conceptual overlaps, do not completely depart from it either (Mudde 2004; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012, 2013, 2017). Identifying populism as an essentially moralistic response, the 'ideational approach'—the most predominant one in literature—not only classifies it as an inferior form of political reasoning compared to that of supposedly "rational" liberal pluralism, it also fails to capture what specifically makes populists *populists*, for "moralisation" is a ubiquitous feature of all contemporary politics (Jäger & Stavrakakis 2017). Through a critique of the deliberative democratic framework that draws the horizons of "politics" within which the ideational approach to populism functions, the final part of the chapter offers a segue way to a post-foundationalist take on populism which not only rejects the reified association between radical-right and populism but also accounts for the underlying mechanisms behind a distinctly populist articulation of popular demands under the concept of "the people" united against "the elite."

The third chapter, in turn, provides a clear outline of the post-foundational approach to populism and introduces a methodology that comes along with it. Relying on the discourse theory that has been theorised by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Laclau 1977; 1990; 1996; 2005; 2007; Laclau & Mouffe [1985] 2001; Mouffe 1993; 2000; 2005), and further developed by other scholars who are associated with the Essex School of discourse analysis (Glynos & Howarth 2007; Palonen 2009, 2018; Marchart 2007; 2018; Marttila 2015; Stavrakakis 2004; 2017a; 2018), it develops a clear understanding of populism as a political logic that looks

beyond the empirical contents of its various manifestations and instead reflects the logic of the political itself:

‘a dichotomic discourse in which “the people” are juxtaposed to “the elite” primarily along the lines of a down/up antagonism in which “the people” is discursively constructed as a large powerless group through opposition to “the elite” conceived as a small and illegitimately powerful group. Populist politics thus claim to represent “the people” against an “elite” that frustrates their legitimate demands, and presents its demands as expressions of the will of “the people” (De Cleen et.al. 2019, 6).

Through a critical review of the Laclaudian body of work, the chapter presents an original reading of his political theory which proposes pure institutionalism and pure populism as the two extreme poles of the continuum of politics, whose populist tenor is like a pendulum from the latter to the former. This reading enables the chapter to spot a curious conceptual overlap within the Laclaudian theory between populism and logic of equivalence, which leads to a mistaken identification of populism with emancipatory politics and a priori dismissal of those unsavory cases where populism paves the way for the establishment of authoritarian, anti-democratic regimes as *reductio ad absurdum* extremes of logical impossibility (2005, 45-6). It addresses this problem by concluding that insofar as the Laclaudian theory holds that ‘the equivalential logic leads to singularity, and singularity to identification of the unity of the group with the name of the leader’ (Laclau 2007, 100), it has to recognise—rather than disregard as Laclau does—the ever-present risk of extreme polarisation and personalisation in populism.

Furthermore, chapter 3 combines this modified post-foundational conceptualisation of populism with a methodology that is operationalised recently in several empirical analyses (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014; Katsambekis 2017; De Cleen 2016; De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017; Stavrakakis et.al. 2017; De Cleen et.al. 2019). Through their interventions to break the reified association between populism and radical-right politics, these studies handle populism and nationalism as two separate discourses wielded around the nodal points of “the people” and “the nation” respectively. This discourse theoretical framework contributes to the main argument of the thesis by assisting it to systematically identify the changing elements of the AKP’s discourse whilst it transformed from an archetypically populist party into a nativist/nationalist radical right one over the years. While the gradual advance of “the people-as-nation” at the expense of “the people-as-underdog” as the nodal point of the AKP’s discourse alone indicates a shift away from populism to nationalism, the changing subject position from

“member of the people” first to “member of the nation” and ultimately to “Erdoğanist” points at a discursive juxtaposition between the nation and the name of the leader. Similarly the trajectory *constitutive outside* has followed from its initial identification of the Kemalist elite and the establishment with the “other of the people” all the way to “anti-Erdoğanists” indicates at an extreme logic of simplification at work whereby nothing but less than complete subordination to the “leader” alone becomes the criteria for a subject to be articulated to the “outside” of the uniquely legitimate political subjectivity of “the nation.”

Formal Criterion	Populism	Nationalism	AKP Discourse
Nodal Point and claim to represent	The people-as-underdog	The nation and/or the people-as-nation	?
Subject position offered	Member of the people	Member of the nation	?
Constitutive Outside	The elite/establishment	Non-natives and/or other nations	?
Orientation of relationship between nodal point and constitutive outside(s)	Vertical: Down/Up (on the basis of hierarchy, power, recognition, incorporation, socio-economic and/or socio-cultural position and identity)	Horizontal: In/Out (on the basis of national identity or membership)	?

Source: Adapted from De Cleen & Stavrakakis (2017) and De Cleen et.al. (2019)

Table 1 - Discourse Theoretical Conception of Populism & Nationalism

The fourth chapter, in turn, sets to explore the politico-intellectual roots of Turkish populism as those were first formulated in the late Ottoman era and eventually embedded into the official ideology of modern Turkey in the form of *Kemalist populism* that was *halkçılık*. This is of particular importance because of the negative way in which the core concepts, principles and categories of Turkish politics as they were formulated during this period still cast a long shadow over the thinking and acting of contemporary scholars and practitioners of Turkish populism. Through an analysis of the Young Turk ideas at the turn of the 20th century, the chapter first demonstrates that those generations of Ottoman and Turkish revolutionaries never really approached “the people” as a constitutive political *subject* in its own right, but invariably as an *object* of their protracted struggles to either save the Ottoman state or (following the collapse of Ottomans) to found the modern Turkish nation-state. Critically engaging with the ideas of its theoreticians like Ziya Gökalp and *Halka Doğru* [Towards the People] Movement in early 1900s and first generation practitioners including Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself and his political companions during the single-party era (1923-46), the chapter then draws attention to the particular ways in which populist ideas that had been originally imported from Russian

Narodniki were rearticulated into the doctrine of *halkçılık* for the construction of a homogenous nation state and a hegemonic republican elite at its helm. Such an in-depth exploration of the elitist, etatist and ruptural roots of the founding ideology of modern Turkish nation-state leads the chapter to refute the classical Laclaudian reading of Kemalism (Çelik 1999; Laclau 2007, 212-13) which erroneously locates its departure from the populist path at the much later period of 1920s when its attempts to “homogenise” the nation took an unmistakably authoritarian turn.

The fifth chapter tackles the mainstream scholarship on Turkish populism and its overwhelmingly pejorative understanding of the concept. Identifying Şerif Mardin’s ‘centre-periphery model’ (1973) as the master framework that informs nearly all accounts of populism in Turkey, it makes a rather noteworthy, twofold discovery. On the one hand, the chapter uncovers the scholarly origins of centre-periphery model in the modernisation theory as it was prominently advocated by Edward Shils (1956; 1961; 1975), and shows that a set of largely discredited, deeply elitist assumptions underlying this theory were imported into Turkish political science literature thanks to Mardin’s model, resulting in a pathological understanding of populism that has become the predominant way the concept has been used ever since. Through a detailed reading of the AKP’s early discourse, the chapter further shows that the party ideologues like Yalçın Akdoğan (2003; 2004; 2006; 2010) have consciously formulated the AKP’s so-called “conservative democratic” identity for the gaze of those who have seen Turkish politics exclusively through the lenses of centre-periphery: A culturally conservative yet politically liberal party uniquely fitting to the “Turkish exception” that would modernise and democratise the country by overcoming the centre-periphery cleavage without falling into the trap of populism. This means that the relationship between the scholars of Turkish politics and the AKP constitutes an exemplary case of what Giddens calls as ‘double hermeneutics’ whereby ‘the “findings” of the social sciences...enter constitutively into the world they describe’ (1987, 20). This two-folded discovery enables the chapter to account for not only the widespread support the AKP received among the ranks of mainstream Turkish scholarship during its early years but also the latter’s failure to identify the party as a populist one during the same period.

In the sixth chapter the dissertation analyses the AKP discourse throughout the party’s political trajectory from a Laclaudian perspective and, contrary to mainstream, classifies it as a characteristically populist one from the very beginning. Tracing it through the critical junctures of the political crisis surrounding the 2007 Presidential elections, the deep state trials, the Gezi protests and subsequent elections of 2014 onwards, the chapter identifies a discursive

transformation, in the course of which the AKP turns from a typical populist party into a radical right one, eventually reaching to the “limits” of the political in the form of *Erdoğanism*. Of particular interest is the steady advance of nativist/nationalist and authoritarian emphases of the AKP discourse at the expense of its earlier populism. This is characterised most distinctively in the gradual disappearance of the Kemalist establishment and elite as the constitutive outside of “the people”, giving way to an increasing more conspiratorial and criminal category of the enemies of “the nation.” At its zenith, this “people-as-nation” is transformed into *Erdoğanists* who are constructed as totally identifying with the name of the leader and the opposition is pushed into a corner where anti-*Erdoğanism* remains as their only way of survival, even though this amounts to being inevitably labelled as the “enemies of the nation” and paradoxically reproduces the *Erdoğanist* discourse. An examination of the case of *Erdoğanism* also presents this chapter with an opportunity to confront the ‘emancipatory apriorism’ latent in Laclau’s body of work (Marchart 2007, 156-59; Urbinati 2013), which tends to imbue populism with an egalitarian essence and disregard those unsavory instances where it paves the way for the establishment of authoritarian, anti-democratic regimes. Contrary to Laclaudian tendency to downplay populism’s predisposition towards personification, our examination of the AKP’s discursive trajectory demonstrates it in action, and stands witness to the fact that rather than being a mere limit concept, Laclaudian notion of “pure populism” is an actually realisable political arrangement that is observed most clearly when the AKP’s early discourse reaches at its nativist and authoritarian zenith in the form of *Erdoğanism*.

Finally, the concluding chapter both summarises the main arguments presented in the dissertation and reflects upon them in light of comparative cases of populism, pointing towards potential avenues for future research. It reiterates the amendment this dissertation makes to the Laclaudian conceptualisation of populism: Equating populism with politics *tout court* constitutes a misstep in this otherwise comprehensive and elaborate theory, which runs the risk of rendering populism useless. Such a conceptual expansion leads Laclaudian theory to dismiss instances of ‘bipolar hegemony’ (Palonen 2009) rather confusingly as empirically impossible cases of ‘pure populism’ (Laclau 2005, 45; 2007, 82). *Erdoğanism* demonstrates that it is indeed possible for a discourse to reach such an extreme form of polarisation and personification that it narrows politics down to an antagonistic zero-sum game between two homogenous camps that are separated by a single frontier and sustain themselves solely through their opposition to one another. Nevertheless, considering the expansive trajectory the AKP discourse has gone through over the years, whereby its early populism first had to give way to radical-right

nativism/nationalism and authoritarianism for it to subsequently take the extreme form of Erdoğanism, the chapter concludes that it would be more appropriate not to stash such instances under the category of populism in order to retain the concept's analytical usefulness. A similar yet much more fundamental criticism of conceptual confusion is directed at the mainstream scholarly accounts of Turkish politics because of their pejorative use of populism as an inferior form of political reasoning and as a place-holder for radical-right politics. Having remained trapped within the epistemological limitations of the modernisation theory and post-political paradigm, they have not only failed to appreciate the populist character of the early AKP discourse but even bought in to the party's "conservative democratic" branding, expecting it to rid Turkey off political antagonisms once and for all. Thus it was only when the AKP government adopted authoritarianism and nativism/nationalism as the core features of its discourse at the expense of its earlier populism that the party has begun to be classified—once again erroneously—as populist.

Chapter 2: A Conceptual Inquiry on Populism: Towards a Working Theory

The hope is that under this name [populism] they will be able to lump together every form of dissent in relation to the prevailing consensus, whether it involves democratic affirmation or religious and racial fanaticism. And it is hoped that a single principle will come to be ascribed to this thus-constituted ensemble: the ignorance of the backward, the attachment to the past, be it the past of social advantages, of revolutionary ideals, or of the religion of ancestors. Populism is the convenient name under which is dissimulated the exacerbated contradiction between popular legitimacy and expert legitimacy, that is, the difficulty the government of science has in adapting itself to manifestations of democracy and even to the mixed form of representative system. This name at once masks and reveals the intense wish of the oligarch: to govern without people, in other words, without any dividing of the people; to govern without politics (Rancière 2005, 80).

2.1. Introduction

In today's world, it seems impossible to live through a day without coming across the word *populism* or one of its derivatives at some point. As Michal Kazin observed more than two decades ago, there is a 'habit of branding as 'populist' everything from Bruce Springsteen to Rush Limbaugh to loose-fitting cotton trousers' (Kazin 1998, 5). There is a restaurant in Oregon, a records label in Los Angeles, a cleaning company in Michigan, a global marketing agency, an Indian Pale Ale beer, and, of course, an iPhone app named *populist*. It is the name of *The Guardian's* online weekly pop-culture guide. Pope Francis, Christopher Nolan's movie *Inception*, classical music festival *The BBC Proms*, and even a recent fashion-wave popular among young Japanese women, are all called *populist*. One might say that the popularity and commonness of the word in public sphere has reached to that of the iconic picture of Ernesto "Che" Guevara. It is simply everywhere and not unlike the portrait of Argentinian revolutionary, the meanings and connotations it once had all but evaporated, having turned into a little more than a catchy name.

But what does populism mean? For a term to have any analytical value while conducting a systematic inquiry into an observed phenomenon it has to retain a minimal core with more or less delineated limits of what it signifies. In the case of populism, the fundamental scholarly disagreement over any single definition runs so deep that it can be categorised as an 'essentially contested concept' (Collier et.al. 2006). 'Strong normative valence' of the concept 'motivates

users to strongly prefer a particular meaning' which will 'defend their own usage, whereas others will contend that an alternative usage is correct' (Collier et.al. 2006, p. 212).

A scholarly contest has been going on over the meaning of populism for almost as long as the word existed. As it is shown in the following section (2.2), there is a long tradition of theorising populism in pathological terms. Vilifying it as the ideological hothouse of the worst political evils of 20th century including fascism and anti-Semitism, this school of thought paved the way for what is still today the most prevalent understanding of populism which tends to situate it in contrast to supposedly "proper", "healthy" or "desirable" ways of conducting politics. Tracing the historical roots of the concept back to the 19th century American and Russian politics, third section (2.3) lays out in what political context and by whom the term was invented and utilised, and gives voice to the "self-definition" of populists themselves. The goal here is to demonstrate as clearly as possible the major shift in meaning of the term populism that happened somewhere along the line during the post-war years.

Just as their predecessors had done in the early post-war period, contemporary proponents of this mainstream approach have drawn a direct continuum between the very concept of populism and the radical right political movements that they consider as posing an existential threat to the healthy functioning of Western democratic regimes. The fourth section (2.4) illustrates that this particular understanding very much dominates the general view of how populism is seen in mainstream academic scholarship and contemporary politics, delegitimising populist actors as modern-day heretics who shall be excommunicated from the body politic. This chapter then demonstrates that such a pejorative understanding of populism is neither the only nor the oldest one in the literature. There is another, distinct school of thought that understands populism in purely formal terms as a constitutive dimension of the political and some of its roots are laid out in the fifth section (2.5) before being fully developed in the following chapter 3. This post-foundational theory of populism as well as the analytical tools and the methodology it offers are explored more thoroughly there, before being utilised in the case of Turkish politics in later chapters.

2.2. Populism as Proto-Fascism

In the everyday political terminology, especially since the beginning of the electoral upsurge of radical-right parties in Europe at the end of Cold War (Betz 1994; Ignazi 1994; Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Betz and Immerfall 1998; Carter 2005; Givens 2005; Mudde 2007), this

otherwise hollowed-out word *populism* maintains a rather rigid core that corresponds to a determinedly pejorative term, a highly charged political insult: ‘Much like Dylan Thomas’s definition of an alcoholic as “someone you don’t like who drinks as much as you”, the epithet “populist” is often used in public debate to denigrate statements and measures by parties and politicians which commentators or other politicians oppose’ (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008, p. 2). Populism is the spectre that haunts mainstream liberal politicians in the West, like President of the European Union Herman Van Rompuy and President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, both of whom consider it the ‘greatest danger’ in Europe with a potential to turn the continent ungovernable in near future (Mudde 2013, 2). It is the miserable end that awaits French people, former Finance Minister Pierre Moscovici forewarned, if the economic situation fails to get better soon (D’Eramo 2013, 5). Populism is indeed no less than a ‘backlash against globalisation’ itself in former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s opinion (Meny and Surel 2002, 217).

In fact, it is possible to argue that the word *populist* is in the process of becoming the new *fascist*, i.e. the contemporary equivalent of *heretic*. Both George Orwell and Michael Foucault noted that the use of word fascist in post-war terminology had become so pervasive and vague that it meant nothing but ‘something not desirable’ (Orwell 1968 [1946], 132), ‘a floating signifier whose function is essentially that of denunciation’ (Foucault 1980, 130). More recently, Jonah Goldberg echoed this sentiment when he likened the word to ‘a cudgel to beat the opponents from public square like seditious pamphleteers,’ branding them as ‘worthy of excommunication from the body politic’: ‘After all, no one has to take a fascist seriously. You are under no obligation to listen to a fascist’s argument or concern yourself with his feelings and rights. Once such an association takes hold, there is no reason to give such people the time of day’ (Goldberg 2009, 3-4).

An eerily similar tendency is observable in the pattern in which the word *populist* and its derivatives are utilised in public discourse today where they stand as a shorthand term for things and people one does not approve of. This tendency is documented most systematically in a detailed case study of the British broadsheet print media covering 676 articles published in the span of two six-month periods in 2007 and 2008 that contained the word “populist” or “populism” (Bale et.al. 2011). Exploring how the term is used ‘in vernacular usage’, the study first reaches at a somewhat less surprising conclusion that it is ‘thrown around with abandon’ and ‘the actors and issues to which the concept is related seem to have little in common’ (Ibid, p. 123). As it exists in media, populism/populist is little more than a catchphrase used without

any justification or clarification to pronounce an impossibly wide range of political actors, from the South African President Jacob Zuma to the UK Conservative Party, from the US Senator John McCain to the AKP in Turkey. One thing is certain though, the study concludes: if something or someone is in the news long enough, ‘sooner or later’ they will be called populist (Bale et.al. 2011, 119-21).¹

Bale et al. also indicate that the word “populist” often comes up as a ‘hollow term of abuse’, a pejorative label ‘to pin on one’s political enemies and their stances and policies.’ While left-leaning papers employ it most frequently in reference to right-wing issues such as tax-cutting and xenophobia, right-wing papers call populist those policies traditionally associated with the left, like healthcare spending and income redistribution. Tory leader David Cameron is the archetypical populist for the *Independent*, whereas the *Telegraph* points the finger at Labour PM Gordon Brown. Despite being almost diagonally opposed in terms of their positions in political spectrum, they all seem to agree that populism is what irresponsible, power-thirsty politicians do to win votes (pp. 126-8).

It is possible to extend the parallel between fascism and populism from public to academic discourse as well, where both concepts share the unfortunate fate of being deemed slippery and useless in equal degrees. The only question seems to be “which one is the worse?” Stanley G. Payne, who is considered as one of the leading theorists of fascism, wrote of the concept as ‘probably the vaguest of the major political terms’ in the 20th century (1995, p. 3). This conviction is shared by so many scholars that it has become ‘almost *de rigueur* to open contributions to the debate on fascism with some such observation’ (Griffin 1991, p. 1). Due to the inflationary and increasingly more imprecise uses of the term ‘as an all-purpose pejorative’, fascism has become to account for ‘any sort of authoritarianism that seems clearly not leftist in character’ (Payne 2006, p. 175). Thus, unsurprisingly, some scholars of fascism seriously suggest abandoning the idea of finding a definition altogether for such a conceptual hold-all that ‘virtually means nothing’ (Allardyce 1979, 388).

Meanwhile the scholars of populism seem to be in no better place than their colleagues who are specialised on fascism, falling tragically short of agreeing over even a minimal definition of their object of analysis. Like scholars of fascism, they frequently observe that theirs is probably one of the ‘most slippery’ and ‘most used and abused’ concepts ‘inside and

¹ This particular finding is, of course, analogous to the famous Godwin’s law on online interactions, which asserts that ‘as an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches 1’ (Godwin 1995).

outside of academia' (Bjerre-Poulsen 1986, 27; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012, 1). Such an outcry has become so commonplace (Ionescu & Gellner 1969, 1; Laclau 1977, 143; Taggart 2000; Weyland 2001, 1; Mény and Surel 2002; Canovan 2005; Bale et.al. 2011) that it has become a 'cliché' to open a contribution with the warning that 'dealing with populism is a rather *risky* and *slippery* process' (Katsambekis 2011, 6; van Kessel 2015). Like Allardyce who stated that the scholars of fascism tacitly 'agreed to use the word without agreeing on how to define it', Ernesto Laclau empathetically admits: 'We know intuitively to what we are referring when we call a movement or an ideology populist, but we have the greatest difficulty in translating the intuition into concepts' (Laclau 1977, 143).

Even a passing glimpse at the vast literature on populism is more than enough to make one sympathise with this observation. Among many other definitions, populism has been called a political style (Taguieff 1995; Knight 1998; Moffitt 2016), a political strategy (Weyland 1999; 2001), a communication style (Jagers & Walgrave 2007), an adoption expansive economic policies (Edwards 2010); a revolt against modern state (Priester 2007), a transitional phase towards modernisation (Di Tella 1965; Germani 1978), a thin-centred ideology (Abts & Rummens 2007; Mudde 2004; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012; Stanley 2007), an electoral strategy (Bonikowski & Gidron 2016), and a subgroup of extreme-right parties (Bornschier 2010). This scholarly contestation has reached to such a level that some political scientists have all but lost faith in the analytical values of populism (Roxborough 1984; Collovald 2004; Marlière 2013). Annie Collovald, for instance, suggests discarding the term from scholarly use in favour of other labels that still carry proper weight (2004). In her analysis on the *Front National* in France, she argues that the very act of incorporating the party into populist classification is not only imprecise but, more worryingly, 'less stigmatising' and therefore has an inadvertently legitimising affect. Ironically, her suggestion is to categorise the Front National as a *fascist* instead of *populist* political party!

Of those in academia who believe that populism can be used profitably, most employ it in a rather pejorative sense (Meijers 2011; van Kessel 2015; Müller 2016; Finchelstein 2017; Eatwell & Goodwin 2018; Norris & Inglehart 2019). In fact this tendency has quite a history that stretches back to 1950s, when a new wave of elitist fear of the masses mounted up following the popular support totalitarian regimes in Europe harnessed during interwar years and the societal approval McCarthy's policies enjoyed in the US (Dionne 2012; Nugent 2013, 3-21; Hixson 2015, 17-26; Stavrakakis 2017b; Jäger & Stavrakakis 2018). Rise of the "red hunters" triggered a burning question in the minds of liberal intellectuals such as Richard Hofstadter

(1955), Peter Viereck (1955), Victor Ferkiss (1955), Edward Shils (1954), Daniel Bell (1955, 1963) and Seymour Lipset (1960): ‘How could millions of Americans—perhaps a majority—share such irrational, inchoate resentment against thinkers and high officials who were on the same side as they in the Cold War?’ (Kazin 1998, 190) Their fear was that ‘given the right circumstances’ uneducated masses could turn American society into a nightmare where ‘the rational pursuit of our well-being and safety could become impossible’ (Hofstadter 1955, 79). Inspired by Ortega y Gasset (1932) and other European thinkers (e.g. Burckhardt 1943) who believed that the roots of totalitarianism were to be found in ‘the revolt of the masses,’ as well as by the highly-influential social-psychological ideas of the time like authoritarian personality (Adorno et.al. 1950) and mass psychology (Reich 1933), they shared a deep suspicion of the prevalent ‘populist culture’ in America which, they believed, lacked not only the necessary supervision of the institutions and rulers but most importantly ‘a responsible elite with moral and political authority’ (Hofstadter 1955, 79). They thus developed a pathological definition of populism, conceptualising it as a political neurosis that had overtaken American politics in various forms of radical-right, including Ku Klux Klan of 1920s, Coughlinism of 1930s, McCarthyism of 1950s, and the John Birch Society of early 1960s. Their shared conviction was that ‘nineteenth-century populism contained fascist elements’ and the common denominator of those 20th century radical-right movements was their populism (D’Eramo 2013, 16).

In his critical take on American security policies in the aftermath of World War II, Edward Shils came up with a definition that encompassed not only McCarthyism but also Nazism and Bolshevism (1954; 1956). For Shils, populism stood in clear opposition to the liberal democratic regime and its constitutive principles, particularly the separation of powers and rule of law. As an ‘ideology of popular resentment,’ it was based on the unshakable belief that the people were not just equal to but ‘actually better than their rulers’ and the latter group was considered as maintaining an unjust ‘monopoly of power, property, breeding and culture’ (1954, 100-101). He further identified populism as a form of ‘hyper-democracy’ that is ‘a distorted and extreme elaboration of the tradition of moral equality,’ radically opposed to the very notion of social heterogeneity (Ibid. 107). Though it had traditionally targeted ‘big business’, ‘intellectuals’ and ‘politicians’ in the past, Shils maintained that populism posed a threat to *all* autonomous centres of authority in society, such as the members of the judiciary, which he considered as the lynchpin of legitimacy in democratic regimes (Ibid. 103). What shall to be remembered as populism’s greatest accomplishment once it had done wreaking a havoc on American democracy in the form of McCarthyist mass paranoia of “red hunt,” Shils

argued, would be the ‘ten-year-long disturbance of public peace by the angry quest for publicity about conspiracy’ (1956, 237).

Hofstadter, Viereck and Lipset, for their part, took a further step and proposed a smooth ideological continuum between the 19th century populism in Southern states and the extreme-right of the following century, whereby the latter was considered a natural consequence of the former, only ‘turned sour’ (Hofstadter 1955, 20). The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s, for instance, was essentially ‘a latter-day expression of provincial [p]opulism appealing to farmers and the small business’ (Lipset 1960, 169). Whereas Father Coughlin, with his anti-Semitic preaching and vocal support for the governments of Hitler and Mussolini, constituted the ‘missing link between populism and McCarthyism’ (Viereck 1955, 137). Defining feature of McCarthyism itself – ‘pseudo-conservatism’ goal of defending the so-called traditional American values and institutions against ‘more or less fictitious dangers’² – was a brainchild of the classical populist imaginary ‘that loved the secret plot and conspiratorial meeting’ (Hofstadter 1955, 70). The novelty of this ‘irrational protest ideology’ (Lipset 1960, 173) was limited to its success in shifting the populist terminology from the infamous villainy of “international money power” to that of “Red Scare”. Nevertheless what all proponents of American extreme-right were at heart was ‘the same old isolationist, Anglophobe, Germanophile revolt of radical Populist lunatic-fringers against the eastern, educated, Anglicised elite’ (Ibid, 138).

These post-war theoreticians of populism claimed that the proto-fascist features like anti-intellectualism and anti-Semitism were always there for one to see in the populist tradition. It was true that finding solutions to pressing economic problems of agrarian producers constituted the primary focus of their politics but ‘the underlying cultural identification of the international financier with the international Jew’ was too strong of a feeling for the populists to resist (Lipset 1955, 299). Under the facade of egalitarian populist economic policies like free coinage of silver, graduated income tax and public ownership of railroads, there laid ‘a mania for xenophobia, Jew-baiting, intellectual-baiting, and thought-controlling lynch-spirit’ (Viereck 1956 quoted in Nugent 2013, 8). Once these scholars had thoroughly dissected the ideological

² “Pseudo-conservatism” is a term Hofstadter borrows from Theodor Adorno’s classic text in 1950 ‘Authoritarian Personality’ in the following manner: ‘The pseudo-conservative, Adorno writes, shows “conventionality and authoritarian submissiveness” in his conscious thinking and “violence, anarchic impulses, and chaotic destructiveness in the unconscious sphere. . . . The pseudo conservative is a man who, in the name of upholding traditional American values and institutions and defending them against more or less fictitious dangers, consciously or unconsciously aims at their abolition” (1954).

components of *body populist* with the surgical precision of a post-mortem specialist, there was very little to differentiate this species from its fascist successors:

‘American fascism had its roots in American populism; it pursued the same ends and even used many of the same slogans. Both despaired of achieving a just society under the joined banners of liberalism and capitalism. The attacks on finance capitalism, the hatred of social democracy and socialism, the belief that representative democracy is a mask for rule by a predatory economic plutocracy, and that a strong executive is essential for the creation and preservation of a middle-class society composed of small independent landowners, suspicion of freedom of the press and civil liberties generally as the shields and instrumentalities of the plutocracy, ultra-nationalism, anti-Semitism (both latent and active), and, finally, a peculiar interpretation of history which sees in events a working-out of a dialectic which opposes the financier and the producer’ (Ferkiss 1955, 174).

There we have it: Populism is a proto-fascist, illiberal, irrational and nativist protest ideology with a deep-seated distaste for intellectuals and Jews, whom it represents as the nefarious masters of a sustained conspiracy that causes all sorts of social, political and economic malaise. As a dangerous, manipulative political tool, always ready to be used in the hands of talented, power-thirsty opportunists, populism constitutes a severe threat against our civilised way of life, for it has the force to mobilise the ignorant masses against the building blocks of society by appealing to their primitive feelings of fear and hatred.

2.3. From *Narodniki* to the People’s Party

A brief conceptual history of the term reveals that *populism* as a distinctly political term comes into existence during the late 19th century, at a time when the notion of *the people* begins to shake off the exclusively negative connotation it used to hold for a very long time and, in relation to this, *democracy* tends to be positively valued again (Houwen 2011). A constitutive ambiguity has always formed the core of *the people*, causing it to have a deeply divided, dual meaning. On the one hand, *the people* have long been associated with the lower classes, the plebs and the common ones. Tracing roots and uses of the term throughout the course of Western political thought and history, Margaret Canovan shows that, from Plato onwards, the political thinkers and ruling classes have generally identified *the people* with the unpredictable and poor majority, who were despised and often feared by their patrician betters’ (Canovan

2005, 68). This fear of *populus*, as the people were called in Republican Rome, stemmed from three reasons that were passed on to later political thinkers. Firstly, because of their material poverty *populus* were an easy prey for demagogues who could employ them to ‘plunder the rich.’ Also, due to their ignorant and resentful nature, they were liable to turn into a vengeful ‘mob’ – a concept that has long ‘haunted the elite political imagination.’ Yet the greatest danger *populus* posed for any civilised society was due to their child-like gullibility to get turned into a political weapon in the hands of a military tyrant, who could easily utilise their support ‘with bread and circuses’ like Julius Caesar did (Ibid, 69).

In relation to this, democracy as a form of government whose legitimacy is based on *the people* was considered equally dangerous and carried overwhelmingly negative connotations. Despite having identified *the people* as the legitimate source of sovereignty, the newly found American and French political systems of the 18th century had defined themselves as “republican” or “representative” governments rather than democratic ones due to the latter’s meaning as the ‘rule by the worst class’ of society with no economic independence or political breeding but a tendency to pursue their own rather than communal interests (Ankersmith 2011; Hanson 1989, 70-71; Manin 1997, 1).

However, the revolutionary political moments of the late 18th and 19th century altered this connotation significantly. ‘For the first time in modern history,’ John Dunn asserts, ‘democracy at last appears not merely as a passing expression of political taste but as an organising conception of an entire vision of politics’ (Dunn 2005, 114). It was the revolutionaries during the February Revolution in 1848 and Paris Commune in 1871 who placed the democratic ideal at the locus of political allegiance explicitly, articulated political goals through democratic rights and often took extreme measure to achieve them: ‘no longer merely an elusive or blatantly implausible form of government, but a glowing and perhaps in the long run all but irresistible pole of attraction and source of power’ (Ibid., 118). Built upon the legacy of American and French revolutions, they not only considered *the people* as the legitimate source of political sovereignty but also travelled great lengths to fill this subjectivity with concrete content of democracy as a primarily egalitarian politico-economic vision.

Emergence of the first self-identified populist movement in Russia dovetails this period when both *the people* and *democracy* had received a sudden boost of reputation in Western politics, began to be seen in a more positive light and associated with reputable terms such as equality and popular sovereignty. In his semantic inquiry of the term *Narodnichestvo*—which

is generally translated as populism into other languages—Robert Pipes maintains that the word entered the Russian political vocabulary in the 1870s (Pipes 1964, 443). Linguistically, it is a derivative of the noun *narod*, Russian equivalent of the German *Volk*. Its adjective derivative, *narodnyi*, also meant “on the side of the people,” “popular” or “democratic.” Representing a ‘specific phase in the history of the socialist-revolutionary movement,’ *Narodnichestvo* was used to describe the prevalent attitude particular groups of revolutionaries had towards the Russian people and *Narodniki* [populist] was the name used to call these groups (Billigton 1958; Wortman 1967; Offord 1986; Hildermeier 2000).

Russia of 19th century was a predominantly peasant society where overwhelming majority of the population lived and worked as the property of wealthy landowners and Tsar himself. The abolition of serfdom in 1861 did not do much for many peasants, for they were too poor to purchase their own land and now were forced to pay rent to live there. On top of this, modernisation reforms undertaken to compete with the European Empires caused massive socio-economic transformations that threatened the livelihood of peasant communities. Groomed by the ideas of peasantist writers like Herzen and Chernyshevky, groups of young socialist intellectuals from Moscow and St. Petersburg came to believe that Russia’s future had to rely on the village community [*mir*]. They feared that industrial capitalism ‘would dissolve the traditional solidarity of the village, and, in the end, introduce inequality and class war to the countryside’ (Worsley 1969, 221-2). It was against such a background that the “going to people” movement of 1872-74 was triggered as ‘an act of expiation on the part of the intellectual’ who believed his responsibility was towards the people as it existed in *mir* and his calling was to ‘stimulate socialist feelings in the village’ (Pipes 1964, 443).

Following the ideas of Mikhail Bakunin and Pyotr Lavrov, these original Russian populists believed that the people were ready for a revolution. Likening themselves to secular missionaries, they saw it their divine calling to ‘go to the people’ and ‘tell them the whole truth’, inviting them to join a ‘religion of equality’ (Venturi 1960, 498). Often in peasant disguise, they attempted to befriend locals in order to ‘carry to them the socialist doctrines, to clarify their presupposed communist instincts and so prepare the social revolution’ (Fedotor 1942, 28). For almost all of them, however, this turned out to be a major disappointment. They found that *the people* were a different species than the one they had imagined. Disinterested in their ideas, peasants were often hostile towards populists (Fedotor 1942, 29; Venturi 1960, 505). They discovered that *the people* ‘possessed strongly rooted, indigenous social institutions, such as the commune, great respect for the monarchy, and equally great suspicion of the intellectuals’

(Pipes 1964, 444). This first populist episode came to an end when *the people* reported on them, resulting in the arrest of some 1600 revolutionaries throughout the Empire (Offord 2004, 17). This forced Russian populists to formulate a new ideology which would eventually be labelled as populism [*narodnichestvo*], and to form a proper organisation called Land and Liberty [*Zemlya i Volya*] in 1876. From their past mistakes, the group learned that a populist revolution would have to be in accordance with ‘traditional and heartfelt desires’ of the people (Venturi 1960, 573-5). They would settle in the village and humbly learn from the people by familiarising with their needs and attitudes. Populists were not to ‘lead the people in the name of abstract, bookish, imported ideas but adapt themselves to the people as it was’ (Pipes 1964, 445).

This means that in its original form, populism was born as a decisively anti-intellectualist, anti-elitist and anti-capitalist ideology with strictly formulated ideas about the people and intelligentsia, as well as their corresponding political roles. The people carried the seeds of a successful societal transformation and being a populist meant maintaining an infinite faith in and subordinate oneself to them. Populists’ duty, in this sense, was limited to helping the people ‘organise its forces’ against the ruling elite so that it would ‘throw off the yoke of the government’ in its own terms (Tikhomirov 1927, p. 86 quoted in Pipes 1964, 444-5).

This was arguably the last era when the terms populism and populist had relatively agreed upon meanings in Russia (Offord 2004, 26-35). In a way that is eerily similar to the situation in the 20th century, soon these became catch-all terms, thrown around liberally to describe contradictory political stances and actors (Pipes 1964, 450-51). Within the context of revolutionary discussions in the 1890s, their meanings took a definitive turn to negative. Used exclusively by Marxist writers to attack their opponents, they turned into pejoratives that became shorthand for utopianism and Slavophilism (Pipes 1964, 454-55). Wholeheartedly embraced by Lenin himself, this was the official sense in which they were used in Russian political discourse up until the death of Stalin (Bachman 1970, 600).

While populism in Russia was an ideology developed and practiced by intellectuals about the peasantry, American populism was a political movement of the peasantry itself, finding its embodiment in the People’s Party in the late 1800s. Similar to their Russian counterparts, American farmers had been left desolate in the aftermath of the Civil War. Gold standard restricted money supply and deflated prices of farm commodities. What little income they had left after paying their debts to banks were further cut due to the outrageous freight charges

imposed by the monopoly of railroad companies (Hicks 1931; Kazin 1998; Postel 2007). Their grievances fell on deaf ears in politics since, as Lawrence Goodwyn describes, ‘everywhere—North and South, among Republicans and Democrats—business and financial entrepreneurs had achieved effective control of a restructured American party system’ (Goodwyn 1978, 7).

Having united a number of radical movements that represented the farmers, Southern blacks and urban workers under its umbrella, the People’s Party was founded in 1892 to challenge this system (Goodwyn 1978, 97-124). In an attempt to bridge divisions bred of ‘ethnicity, religious dominations, and prior partisan loyalties’ the party aimed to ‘restore the Government of the Republic to the hands of the plain people with whom it originated’ (Kazin 1998, 28-9). These plain people were understood to be ‘those who tilted the land and produced all the goods of society’ (Worsley 1969, 221; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, 23). In the words of the party platform, they were the producing class of ‘farmers and laborers of the entire country,’ fighting for the same interests against ‘identical’ enemies (Kazin 1998, 37; Hicks 1931, 441). The enemies of the people were unequivocally named as the creditors, railroad companies, monopolies, and the plutocrats of Wall Street. Together they formed what the populists called “money power,” a term they borrowed verbatim from the Jacksonians, which signified ‘a non-productive, immeasurably wealthy octopus whose long, slimy tentacles reached from private firms on both sides of the Atlantic to grasp every household, business, and seat of government’ (Kazin 1998, 31). Populists considered politics primarily as a battle against this parasitic monster in the name of common people to ‘take back what was rightfully theirs’ (Canovan 2005, 72-73).

‘Wealth belongs to him who creates it’ American populists repeated and, indeed, this principle informed the moral, economic and political basis of the party (Kazin 1998, 29). It translated into a series of demands including a graduated income tax, public ownership of the railroads, unlimited coinage of both gold and silver, government-established banks, direct election of senators, secret ballots, shorter working hours, and the banning of strike-breaking groups. (Bjerre-Poulsen 1987, 28). The People’s Party reached its zenith in 1892 when the populist presidential candidate James B. Weaver polled over a million votes, and in 1894 midterm elections when the party took over 10% of the vote. Unable to settle on a “name” among its own ranks, the party endorsed the Democratic nominee William J. Bryan in 1896 presidential election. Following Bryan’s defeat, the People’s Party rapidly succumbed to internal feuds and gradually withered away before expiring in 1908 (Postel 2007, 269-70).

Unlike *narodnichestvo* in Russian context, the American populism in the 19th century was not revolutionary but merely *radical* at the time. It was not an anti-capitalist movement but one that demanded a ‘freer, more competitive, less trustified, market economy in which the producer would be sovereign; in which credit would be readily available; and in which control over the crucial political centres of decision-making would lie also in their hands’ (Worsley 1969, 223-24). Furthermore, American populists had no intention to take down the state, only those who controlled it. Their utopia was not an anarcho-socialist one but a modern democratic government under popular control. They wanted to reform the whole system not destroy it, so that it would serve the interests of the people, which was identical to the producing classes.

Most significantly effect of this understanding of the people-as-producing-classes was that it enabled the populist message to reach beyond the racial, geographical, ethnic and religious fault-lines that crisscrossed the American society at the time. It also enabled them to become the first political party to support and even locally legislate for the women’s suffrage (Erwards 2006; Marilley 1996, 124-158). In their stead, populists drew just a single line: ‘You will see arrayed on one side the great magnates of the country, and Wall Street brokers, and plutocratic power,’ the national leader of the Farmer’s Alliance said in 1890, ‘and on the other you will see the people’ (Goodwyn 1978, 133). In the course of two decades after the party’s withering away, Republicans and Democrats adopted most of the populists’ demands into their own programs (Sanders 1999, 7; Postel 2007, 279). So much so that the patently populist ‘thrust of using the government to benefit all people’ formed the backbone of the Progressive and New Deal eras in the first half of the 20th century (Nugent 2013, xi; Hicks 1931; Woodward 1938 and 1951).

So where does the extremely influential account of Hofstadter that established causal relationship between populism and fascism fit in this picture? The short answer is: nowhere. Half-a-century worth of scholarship failed to locate any evidence supporting Hofstadter’s claim that populists were frontrunners of nativism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism of the 20th century America (Nugent 1963; Hackney 1969; Parson 1973; Larson 1974; Argersinger 1974; Goodwyn 1978; Palmer 1980; Cherny 1981; Miller 1987; Pollack 1987; Clanton 1991; Ostler 1993; Kazin 1998).³ In the preface to the 2nd edition of *The Tolerant Populists*, Nugent notes

³ Nugent. *Tolerant Populists on Kansas* (1963); Sheldon Hackney on Alabama (1969); Stanley Parson on Nebraska (1973); Robert W. Larson on New Mexico (1974); Peter Argersinger on Kansas (1974); Goodwyn on *Populist Movement Culture* (1978); Bruce Palmer on the South (1980); Robert Cherny on Nebraska (1981); Worth Rober Miller on Oklahoma (1987); Norman Pollack on *Populist Thought* (1987); O. Gene Clanton on Kansas (1991); Jeffrey Ostler on Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa (1993)

that in all the first-hand sources on American populism there are overall a few dozens statements that could pass as nativist or anti-Semitic, whereas several thousands others indicating the opposite are found (2013). This opposite body of work decisively shows that the democratic principles of plurality and egalitarianism were so embedded within the populist movement and its demands that Hofstadter's account 'should be replaced with a viewpoint so much in contrast as to be practically the opposite' (Nugent 2013, 174).

But this does not change the fact that, even decades after its publication, Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform* was celebrated as 'the most influential book ever published on the history of 20th century America' (Brinkley 1985, 462). Scale of the damage this Pulitzer-winning book caused for populism can hardly be overstated. As Nugent observes: 'Until [the book came out], "populism" was not a dirty word. But it became one, and it has continued to carry the connotation of demagogic, unreasoning, narrow-minded, conspiratorial, fearful attitudes towards society and politics' (2013, x). It gave way to a wave of revisionist accounts in political history literature that applied the term populism to explain the rise of right-wing demagoguery spearheaded by McCarthyism (Viereck 1955; Ferkiss 1955; Shils 1956; Bell 1955, 1963; Lipset 1960). Aside from cementing the conviction that populism was a proto-fascist ideology practically responsible for most of the political evils present in the 20th century America, revisionist literature initiated a larger and even more radical conceptual transformation that is still lasting (D'Eramo 2013; Stavrakakis 2017b). Uprooting populism from the politico-historical conditions it was born to, revisionists unleashed a brave new era where the term has become an 'all-purpose put-down':

'The terms "Populist" and "Populism"...became generalised in the print media to mean rattle-brained, irresponsible, ignorant—the eructations of the common herd against their betters. It continues to be applied to a vast array of individuals and movements, past and present, foreign and domestic, almost always with an unsavory connotation...At worst it means demagogic, hypernationalistic, or irrational. "Populism" has become a useful word in dodging informed thinking' (Nugent 2013, xii).

2.4. Back to the Origins: Populism as the New Radical Right

Explosive rise of the radical right parties in Europe since the beginning of 1990s has generated an immense scholarly interest in this new party family and, by association, in populism itself.

(Ignazi 1992, 2003; Betz 1994; Kitschelt & McGann 1995; Di Tella 1997; Betz and Immerfall 1998; Taggart 2000; De Vos 2002; Bruff 2003; Mudde 2004, 2007; Kitschelt 2007; Rydgren 2005, 2006; Kriesi et.al. 2008; Zaslove 2009; Müller 2016). Spearheaded by National Front in France, members of this party family have mushroomed all around the continent in the span of a few decades. Despite having a genealogical connection with the extreme right parties of the inter-war period, new radical right parties are not anti-system parties but display certain level of respect towards the constitutional order and willingness to participate to the procedures of parliamentary democracy (Taggart 1996; Hermet 1997; Ignazi 2003; Kitschelt 2007, 1178; Mudde 2007, 31).

The ideological roots of this party family lay at the *Nouvelle Droite* [New Right] movement. Founded by French philosopher Alain de Benoist in 1968, *Nouvelle Droite*'s ideas were widely circulated in France and Western Europe in late 1970s and early 80s (Taguieff 1983; Tassani 1986). De Benoist identifies the ideological hegemony of liberalism as an inherently destructive force which annihilates 'organic communities' under a single, global dominant culture based on individualism and egalitarianism—which understands equality as sameness (Ignazi 2003, 23; de Benoist 2009). *Nouvelle Droite*, on the contrary, pushed for a 'non-liberal' form of representation to preserve the 'true essence' of democracy by restructuring the relationships between the rulers and ruled in such a way that they stem 'naturally from the organic communities' (de Benoist 1991).

With this goal in mind, *Nouvelle Droite* first lost the 'old master frame of the extreme right' with its defunct ideological baggage of 'biological racism, anti-Semitism and anti-democratic critique of the political system' (Rydgren 2005, 426). In a crucial move that marks its 'most important ideological innovation' (Ibid., 427), *Nouvelle Droite* replaced this old fascist master frame with a new one around the idea of 'ethno-pluralism,' which considers cultures and ethnicities as equal but different and incompatible (Spektorowski 2003; Harrison & Bruter 2011). This new right ideology based on nativism and 'right to difference' was adopted first by the National Front, constituting the 'core of the party's political programme and rhetorical profile' (Rydgren 2005, 427; Bornschieer 2010, 4; Mudde 2007, 18-21). The party's electoral breakthrough shortly afterwards led many parties across Europe to follow its course, which firmly established the legacy of *Nouvelle Droite* as the founder of the new radical right party family (Taguieff 1994; Fennema 2005; Lachat & Kriesi 2008). Characterised by this ethno-culturally exclusivist ideology that typically manifests itself in the form of a strong hostility against immigrants and multiculturalism, these parties devote much of their attention to issues

such as the EU integration and enlargement, immigration, Islam, crime and national identity (van Kessel 2015, 1-9).

Though nearly all who study radical right in Europe refer to more or less the same forces and retain an overall intuition with regards to what it takes to be a member of that party family, this certainly does not mean that there is any sort of agreement on terminology among them. Cas Mudde provides an impressively long list of twenty-three terms that are interchangeably used in the literature in reference to the same political parties, ranging from simple *right* all the way to *fascist* and *racist* (2007, 11-12). Most interestingly for the case at hand, eight of those terms in Mudde's list contain *populism*: radical right-wing populism, right-wing populism, national populism, new populism, neo-populism, exclusionary populism, xenophobic populism, populist nationalism.

In his doctoral thesis, for instance, Christian Norocel uses 'radical right populism' as an 'umbrella concept' incorporating scholarship on radical right parties, extreme-right parties, the new populist right parties, far right parties, anti-immigration populist parties, right-wing populist parties, right-wing radical parties, neo-nationalist parties, national-populist parties, radical right populist parties, populist radical right parties, and populist parties (2013, 32-33). In an edited volume on "European populism," nearly all parties discussed in the course of over a dozen case-based chapters belong to the radical right family (Kriesi & Pappas 2015). In some extreme cases such as Simon Bornschieer's *Cleavage Politics and the Populist Right* (2010), populism becomes a term thrown around in a completely intuitional way, not even deemed worthy of a discussion longer than a single sentence throughout the book that has the word in its title. So, befittingly, an index search for populism leads to those pages where 'radical right parties' are simply listed (Bornschieer 2010, 9-17).

Indeed more often than not, growing body of research on radical right in European politics is assembled under some version of populism, effectively treating the term as their lowest common denominator (Zaslove 2009, 21-24). This naturally leads to the formation of an academic "common sense" whereby, as van Kessel observes, 'populism is habitually associated with xenophobic politics and parties of the extreme radical right (and therefore considered to be dangerous': 'This is not surprising, since populism in Western Europe has often been expressed by parties characterised by a nationalist and culturally conservative ideology, and hostility towards immigration and multiculturalism. The European academic literature has therefore also mainly considered populism as an element of 'the right'' (2015, 2).

This habitual association of the term *populism* with elements of radical right politics indeed characterises much of the mainstream Western scholarship on populism (Betz 1994; Taguieff 1997; Betz & Immerfall 1998; Akkerman 2003; Rydgren 2005; Jägers & Walgrave 2007; Meijers 2011; Aalberg et.al. 2016; Norris & Inglehart 2017). Reading populism almost exclusively through the experiences with the radical right, this literature treats ‘exclusionary nationalism as an integral part of populist politics’ *tout court* and significantly contributes towards the reification of an association between the two (De Cleen et.al. 2019, 3; Stavrakakis et.al. 2017b). Much like Hofstadter and his intellectual companions, they see little more than exclusivist and extreme nationalism, xenophobia, nativism, and anti-democracy in this “populist radical right” politics. Writing off the ideological transformation *Nouvelle Droite* initiated as a case of “old fascists turning into new populists,” they conclude that it is the “populist turn” radical right has taken which gives these parties a distinct character.

There are multiple problems with this reified association between populism and radical right, resulting, at best, in a conceptual/terminological confusion or, at worst, in a euro-centric and normative bias. Firstly, using populism synonymously with elements of radical right politics impedes the scholarship from discerning the particularity of what actually makes populist politics *populist*, rendering the concept analytically useless. That is to say, what is the point of describing a party populist if the limits of this concept completely overlaps with others that have been in use with reference to similar parties and have more or less agreed-upon meanings in literature, like radical right or extreme nationalism? As Rydgren observes, such an understanding appears as if it is ‘tailored to fit’ radical right and therefore ‘reads more like a (partial) definition of radical right-wing parties than of populism generally’ (2017, 492). At its most extreme, this leads to a complete conceptual chaos whereby fascism itself is defined as a ‘palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism’ (Griffin 2006, 32, 44) and even the most extreme neo-Nazi movements like the British National Party (Baggini 2013, 27-30), English Defence League (Busher 2013) and Greek Golden Dawn (Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou 2013) are described as populist with no clear rationale as to why they must be called so.

Another problem is that such an understanding of populism stands in the way of appreciating the global diversity of populist politics and accurately reading the evermore vibrant arrival of novel populist movements within Europe itself. As De Cleen et.al. observe, reducing ‘the notion of populism exclusively to its exclusionary right-wing form,’ such an understanding renders the concept ‘incapable of covering the often more inclusionary left-wing variants of populism’ as they are observed most frequently in Latin American and South

European politics (2019, 4). Arguably, it would be much harder to read the recently altered picture on the both sides of the Atlantic without taking into account the populist dimension of the rising popularity of left movements (Mouffe 2018; Worth 2019). This leads to a significant normative bias against those and other grassroots left-wing populist movements (such as Morales in Bolivia, Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece) as well, for they are at risk of being deemed guilty by association and delegitimised as constituting a “threat” against democracy.

This all-too-common conceptual association of populism with radical right arguably results from an overlook of the fact that it is actually ‘nativism’ (Mudde 2007) or ‘ethnic nationalism’ (Rydgren 2017), rather than populism, which is the ‘ultimate core feature of the ideology of this party family’ (Mudde 2007, 26). Following Benedict Anderson’s notion of ‘imagined community’ (1983), Mudde maintains that nativeness is always a political construct with some sort of a cultural component, be it ethnicity, race, religion, language or any combination of those (2007, 18-20). Whatever form it takes, the primary function of nativism is to draw an unbridgeable gap that divides society between legitimate natives and illegitimate non-natives on the basis of cultural criteria (Betz & Johnson 2004, 323; Betz & Meret 2009, 318; Meret & Siim 2013, 93). As the ultimate point of convergence for all members of the radical right party family, nativism manifests itself most clearly in the form of an exclusionary nationalism that is ‘structured around an in/out relation, with the ‘in’ consisting of the members of the nation and the ‘out’ comprising different types of non-members’ (De Cleen et.al. 2019, 6). Whereas in Western and Northern Europe it is the Muslim immigrants who are the primary target of this nativist wrath due to their “non-native” religion and ethnicities (Ivarsflaten 2008), in the South and East, Roma people and national minorities scattered across multiple states following the break-up of Soviet Union and Yugoslavia conveniently fit this category due to their “non-native” languages, ethnicity and race (Stewart 2012; Bale 2012, 259). Nativism is also determinant of the economic and foreign policy agenda of the radical right parties in the form of welfare chauvinism and Euroscepticism. They believe that the very birth-right of the native people is violated by the incorporation of non-natives into the welfare system, which should be reserved only to the rightful owners of the state (Kitschelt 1997, 22; Van der Waal et.al. 2010). Their Euroscepticism, on the other hand, is based on a conviction that the EU is essentially a foreign institutional tool designed to maximise the interests of non-native political

and financial entities at the expense of the native people and enterprises (Taggart 2004; Rooduijn 2015; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, 35).⁴

Far from trivialising the fact that there is indeed a disconcerting rise of a nativist, xenophobic and dangerous extreme right across the globe at the moment, the point here is to question whether the category of “populism” is the proper conceptual instrument through which this phenomenon should be perceived, categorised, and debated (Stavrakakis, 2016). In fact, more nuanced accounts of radical right reject equating it with the term populism (Kitschelt 1995, 2002; Ignazi 2003; Carter 2005; Norris 2005; Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2017). Kitschelt considers it as a limiting factor in comparative analysis and considers it a ‘worst-case scenario’ where ‘everything is subsumed under the label of “populism” without appreciating the substantial distance’ between different parties (1995, 90). Ignazi, on the other hand, draws attention to the fact that while the new radical right parties do refer to *the people*, they exclusively do so by attributing it a particular meaning that refers to an ‘ethno-culturally homogenous’ nation. Populism, Ignazi maintains, is a completely different concept, for it is a ‘multifaceted phenomenon according to the meaning attributed to its ultimate source of legitimacy, that is to say, the people’ (2003; 29). For an analytically useful concept of populism that is clearly distinguished from its particular manifestations in different episodes and locations, it can prove more productive to take our cue from this point about the ‘multifaceted’ nature of populism and the people it refers to. This is what will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

2.5. Towards a Working Concept of Populism

As the preceding sections (2.2 and 2.4) show, there has long been a persistent tradition, both in the scholarship and in the public sphere at large, equating populism with anti-democratic politics of radical right. This picture is usually drawn with a very wide brush, which blurs—and is almost designed to blur—those past and present manifestations of populism which hint towards a radically different political tradition based on progressive principles of egalitarianism, popular sovereignty and democracy. Thus the task here is to capture the

⁴ Every single one of these points can be naturally extended to nativist politicians in other continents as well. In the case of Donald Trump’s radical right discourse, for instance, it is the non-white immigrants from Latin America, Mexico and Middle East who largely comprise the non-natives. Determinants of his isolationist and protectionist economic and foreign policy are, once again, nativist ones: WTO, NAFTA and other agreements, along with international bodies and legislations regulating global politics and trade are vehemently opposed due to their alleged rationale of hurting the interests of “native” population and businesses (Mudde 2017).

astonishing ideological and geographical diversity of populist phenomena that spans from the ‘American Populist Party and the Russian Narodniki of the nineteenth century, Peronism in Argentina and the French Poujadists of the 1950s, and leaders such as Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders’ (Aslanidis 2015). Difficulty of such a task is further magnified by the absence of ‘grand visions or comprehensive ideological projects’ (Betz 1994, 107) crosscutting its numerous empirical manifestations: ‘There is no Populist International, no sacred texts upon which populist disciples can draw inspiration, no universally revered populist icons, and no acknowledged historical continuity’ (Aslanidis 2015 quoting Bale et al., 2011; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014; Stanley, 2008; Worsley, 1969).

An ‘ideational’ approach to populism, associated most significantly with the work of Cas Mudde (2004; 2007; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012; 2017), has emerged in response to this analytical challenge, and is often considered to be the most prominent one in academic literature today (Aslanidis 2015; Jäger & Stavrakakis 2018). In an ambitious bid to formulate a ‘minimal’ definition which would not only ‘accurately capture the core of all major past and present manifestations’ but also ‘exclude clearly non-populist phenomena,’ this approach defines populism as: ‘a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people’ (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012, 8; 2017, 5-6).

On the first level, the main advantage of this minimal definition is to be found in what it does *not* include. It deliberately avoids essentializing any particular meaning that would correspond to the core categories of the people, the elite, as well as the way in which the general will is to be expressed in a populist manner. This allows it to expand our understanding of populism so that it would capture the versatile ways in which those categories may be filled in different contexts. For instance, thanks to its refusal to prescribe a populist sort of political mobilisation, this approach captures both bottom-up grassroots populist movements such as Indignados in Spain as well as those based on a top-down personal leadership like Peronism, decisively debunking the classical myth that populism and charismatic leadership always go hand in hand: ‘in fact, only a minority of strongmen are populists and only a minority of populists is a strongman’ (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, 63). The same goes for the categories of the people and the elite, whose meanings are always to be seen as contingently determined ‘as it is the populists who construct [their] exact meanings’ (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012, 9; Stanley 2008). With an attention to historical details and focus on comparative empirical research, this

ideational approach goes a long way in disentangling the reified association between populism and radical right as well, showing, instead, that populism may or may not construct the people in ethno-nationalist terms, and even the presence of these terms may or may not be related to populism:

‘The relationship between ethnicity and populism is much more complex than many accounts portray. Particularly in Europe the two are often conflated, a direct consequence of the predominance of populist radical right parties that combine authoritarianism, nativism, and populism. In Latin America the term *ethnopolitism* denotes a particular type of populism, most notably related to mobilisation by indigenous peoples. While both types of populism use ethnicity to establish their authenticity, they do it in fundamentally different ways. For the European populist radical right ethnicity is not part of the populist distinction between the people and the elite, who are part of the same ethnic group, but rather of the nativist distinction between “natives” and “aliens,” in which the latter are considered to be part of neither the people nor the elite. In the case of Latin American ethnopolitism, on the other hand, the nation is defined as a multicultural unit, within which the people and elite are divided by both morality and ethnicity’ (2017, 72).

This ‘chameleonic nature’ of populism (Taggart 2000) is considered to be one of the concept’s essential qualities, which stems from it being a ‘thin-centred’ ideology, empirical manifestations of which are always to be found in different degrees of combination with other ‘thin’ or ‘thick’ host ideologies such as liberalism, socialism, nationalism, or fascism (Freeden 1998; Mudde 2004; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012; 2013): ‘This implies that in the real world there are few, if any, pure forms of populism (in isolation), but rather subtypes of it that show a specific articulation of certain ideological features’ (Laclau 1977 cited in Mudde & Kaltwasser 2013, 150). In other words, depending on where, when and by whom it is articulated, populism is as likely to appear in varying degrees of intensity in radical left-wing or social democratic parties based on grassroots mobilisation (Morales in Bolivia or Podemos in Spain) as it does in centrist or right-wing ones organised hierarchically under charismatic leadership (Macron’s En Marche or Fujimori in Peru).

On the second level, what this ‘minimal’ definition *does* include is a focal positioning of the people and the elite at the centre of the political topography, locating them in an antagonistic relationship with one another. This takes its cue from Margaret Canovan’s initial observation

that ‘all forms of populism without exception involve some kind of exaltation of and appeal to ‘the people’, and all are in one sense or another anti-elitist’ (1981, 284). Thus without actually saying much about the *content* of the people and the elite, this definition still manages to encapsulate the *form* of populism as a denunciation of the existence of ‘powerful minorities’ who, in one way or another, frustrate the ‘will of the common people’ (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012, 8). Thus, unlike nativism or exclusive nationalism where the line between natives and non-natives is structured radially around an in/out relationship, populism situates its core categories, the people and the elite, vertically in a down/up relationship (De Cleen 2017; De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017; De Cleen et.al. 2019).

Having limited itself within such a formal definition, ideational approach treads rather carefully on the delicate relationship between populism and democracy, accounting for its essential ambivalence whereby populism can be both a ‘friend’ that functions as a ‘corrective’ for democracy or a ‘foe’ posing a ‘threat’ against it (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012; 2013, 168; 2017, 20). This depends on which ‘stage of the process of democratisation’ (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012, 17)—or what level of ‘democratic embeddedness’, as Wolfgang Merkel (2004) would have put it—a given political regime is: ‘Depending on its electoral power and the context in which it arises, populism can work as either a threat to or a corrective for democracy...[P]opulism per se is neither good nor bad for the democratic system.’ (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, 79). Contrary to militantly anti-populist accounts that consider populism ‘blatantly antidemocratic’ (Müller 2016, 6), this enables ideational approach to recognise it as a potentially ‘democratising force’ since populism subscribes to democratic principles of ‘popular sovereignty and majority rule’ and aims for ‘empowering groups that do not feel represented by the political establishment’ (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2013, 17; 2017, 18). Importantly, this positive potential of populism as a ‘corrective’ is materialised especially when democracy itself is in some sort of crisis, which most typically happens in “weak” or ‘unconsolidated’ democracies (O’Donnell 1996) where a populist opposition may delimit authoritarian power-holders who try to dismantle those already fragile institutions of democracy (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012, 22-25).

Yet this does not mean that the ideational approach considers ‘consolidated’ (i.e. liberal) democracies immune to such crises, especially if the political elite become ‘unresponsive’ to citizens and ‘ignore their demands’, at which point, Mudde and Kaltwasser assert, ‘populism becomes active...within the constituencies that feel abandoned by the establishment’ (2017, 101). This is, of course, near identical to the instrumentalist account of populism Hans-Jürgen

Puhle put forth more than three decades ago, conceptualising it as a temporal agent of underlying politico-historical forces: ‘when the system is threatening to rigidify, when the establishment lacks imagination, when there is a need for renewal, times in which such movements and energies have their positive historical function’ (1986, 32). Populism is a dormant beast, in this sense, ready to articulate and mobilise popular frustrations against the political elite, lest the establishment fails to respond to or ignore the citizens’ demands. Ideational approach perceptively notes that a major way in which liberal democracy, by far the most dominant form of political order in Western hemisphere, becomes unresponsive and gets rigidified today is through a mutation of politics into a technocratic and oligarchic form governmentality:

In the past decades unelected bodies and technocratic institutions, such as the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have established control over important policy domains, thereby seriously limiting the power of elected politicians. Because of the widespread implementation of neoliberal reforms...national governments have become heavily constrained by private companies, transnational organisations, and the (in)visible hand of the market. Mainstream politicians have willingly implemented these policies but they have rarely tried to sell them to their citizens. Instead, they often present them as necessary, or even inevitable, forced upon the country by powerful foreign organisations (e.g., EU or IMF) and processes (e.g., globalisation). As a consequence, little time is spent debating the extent to which at least some of these policies are wrong or can have unintended consequences, which might end up producing more harm than good. In fact, elites have used the growing influence of unelected bodies and technocratic institutions to depoliticise contested political issues, like austerity and immigration, and so minimise the risk of electoral defeat (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, 117).

This largely corresponds to what Yannis Papadopoulos identifies as a ‘transition from government to governance’ which, he argues, fostered the first major wave of populist upsurge in Western liberal democracies during the 1990s due to an uncoupling of ‘decisional processes from official democratic circuits’ (2002, 55-57). In fact, for at least since the tail-end of Cold War, scholars of radical democracy like Ernesto Laclau (1996; & Mouffe 2001 [1985]), Chantal Mouffe (2000), Norberto Bobbio (1990), David Beetham (1992), William Connolly (1992; 1995; 2011), Bonnie Honig (1996; 2001), and Simon Critchley (2007) have been drawing

attention to the gradual disarticulation of liberalism from its democratic counterpart, risking to break the dynamic balance between the two which used to constitute the driving force behind democratic regimes (Norval 2001). In the same vein with the so-called “two-tier model” of democracy (Meny & Surel 2002), Mouffe shows that the modern democratic regimes are the result of a combination of two different traditions that dates back to the revolutions of 18th and 19th centuries: liberal tradition with its emphasis on the principles of individual liberty and pluralism, and democratic tradition based on popular sovereignty and equality (2000). Even though these two pillars have always been at odds with one another because of the ultimate impossibility of a final reconciliation between the pairs freedom/equality and pluralism/ popular sovereignty, ‘this struggle has served as a motor for the political evolution of Western societies’ (Mouffe 2005; 53). However, in a fashion that is often coined as “third way” politics (Giddens 1998), this confrontation has been declared over at the dusk of Cold War and politics in its antagonistic dimension is deemed to be something of the past. With the hegemony of the Third Way politics that is based on the ideal of politics without adversaries, reaching at a consensus on all issues among all interest groups has been declared as the ultimate goal of non-partisan democracies (2005, 54). More recent accounts of the current crisis of liberal democracy paint a rather grim picture and demonstrate that such unabated logic of liberalism breaks the dawn of a post-democratic era (Crouch 2004), which is largely characterised by unprecedented level of inequalities and a technocratic-cum-oligarchic rule (Habermas 2013; Piketty 2014).

While it is praiseworthy that the ideational approach—however superficially—recognises this current crisis of liberal democracy and builds a casual relationship between that and populism, it still reduces the reasoning behind populist reaction to a *moral* outrage which, in turn, is judged as an inferior form of political reasoning. Because populism distinguishes the people from the elite in essentially moral terms, Mudde and Kaltwasser assert, ‘all populist actors moralise the political debate’ (2017, 12, 118): ‘[P]opulism is in essence a form of moral politics, as the distinction between ‘the elite’ and ‘the people’ is first and foremost moral (i.e. pure vs. corrupt), not situational (e.g. position of power), socio-cultural (e.g. ethnicity, religion), or socio-economic (e.g. class)’ (2012, 8-9). Populism, in this sense, is conceived as the ‘mirror image’ of elitism (2013a, 152; 2013b, 499; 2017, 7), together constituting the opposite poles of a linear continuum. Whereas populism is understood as a fundamentally moral reasoning that considers the people as the only legitimate source of sovereignty due to their pure nature, elitist reasoning believes that politics should be predominantly an affair of the elite, whose intellectual and moral superiority makes them natural rulers (Bachrach 1967; Schumpeter 2003).

Conversely, elitist demophobia deems the people unfit to rule due to their dangerous, dishonest and vulgar dispositions, while populist anti-elitism is based on a belief that the elite are morally corrupt to an extent that they display a predisposition to abuse power in the service of accumulation of even more (political and financial) power. On the other hand, this approach also tacitly locates democracy in its ideal form on an essentially liberal political reasoning that is based on the principle of ‘pluralism’ (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2013, 152; 2017, 7). Following Dahl (1982), its ideal of pluralist democracy envisions society not as divided into two antagonistic camps but as a ‘broad variety of partly overlapping social groups with different ideas and interests’ and believes that ‘politics, through compromise and consensus, should reflect the interests and values of as many different groups as possible’ (2012, 11-13; 2017, 7-8).

It is interesting to note how populism, with respect to this liberal ideal of pluralist party-democracy, is implicitly located at an inferior level of political reasoning through its supposed association with elitism here. Insofar as populism, in its ‘minimal’ core, is defined as sharing the same ‘moralistic imagination’ (Müller 2016, 19) with an ideology that is as blatantly anti-democratic as elitism, populists cannot possibly lay as strong a claim on their democratic credentials as those who conduct politics on the basis of other “proper” ideologies that share the ideal of pluralism (e.g. liberals, social democrats). This is, of course, a corollary of the Derridean observation that modern Western epistemology, through binary oppositions like mind/body, signified/signifier, phenomenon/noumenon, tends to order the world hierarchically between a privileged, pure essence that is “inside” and an inferior “outside” (Derrida 1997). Limiting the task of scientific inquiry largely with the examination of that privileged essences in and of themselves, such an epistemology overlooks the mutually constitutive relationship between inside and outside. Following Derrida and the ‘affective turn’ in critical theory (La Caze & Lloyd 2011), Emmy Ekhlund chronicles how the emotional and affective character of a populist movement like Indignados in Spain is picked in mainstream political scholarship as somehow inferior to “proper” way of conducting rational politics (2019). This is, Ekhlund shows, a direct continuation of the sedimented hierarchical division between mind/body and reason/mind, which informs the political thought ever since the crowd psychology emerged as a tool to control the masses in 1800s. Thus, she notes, ‘what is considered “proper” politics’ (as opposed to “emotional” or “moral”) ‘often carries the markers of the very traditional political actors’ (i.e. the political elite) and ‘fosters a hostility towards populist “manipulations”’ (2019, iii). Indeed, as Jäger and Stavrakakis show, with its ‘essentially moralistic profile of populist

reasoning' the ideational approach 'bears striking resemblances to the stereotypical treatment of populism first offered in the pluralist canon' by Hofstadter and others discussed above (2018, 11-12). Associating populism with elitism at its very core and positioning it in opposition to a supposedly higher form of "proper" or "ideal" political reasoning that is liberal pluralism, ideational approach ends up giving into this mainstream epistemological tradition and, hence, falls short of its admittedly ambitious premise of providing a 'non-normative' definition of populism as well as its relationship with democracy (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012, 16; 2013, 149).

But even when one accepts the proposition that populism essentially moralises the division between the people and the elite, it is not immediately clear why this must be a phenomenon that is exclusively located on a populism-elitism axis. Insofar as it is understood as a distinction made between an idealised self and a vilified other, moralisation is an excessively ubiquitous form of identification present in almost all 'affective' social relations (Massumi 2002; Gregg & Seigworth 2010). Therefore it is hardly a wonder that claims of purity and corruption can be located all over the political sphere as well. Just as an archetypal populist like Donald Trump constructs his political discourse on a moral division between a pure silent majority and the corrupt swamp of Washington D.C. and criminal others, so does a patently anti-populist and centrist figure like Hillary Clinton who infamously called Trump supporters 'deplorables' and her opponent evil. Rather than being idiosyncrasies of a populist or elitist reasoning, such moral invocations are more or less inescapable in today's politics. Indeed, as the recent upsurge of dynamic grassroots movements in the US, UK, and Southern Europe indicate, particularly in the course of a real or perceived democratic and/or economic crisis, moral indignation becomes the primary way in which those who feel abandoned by the political establishment can articulate their frustrations in the face of the 'structures of financial accumulation and the new enclosures,' and the 'breakdown of the tacit agreement of liberal democracy' (Narotzky 2016, 86). Thus it is difficult to take moralism as a *sin qua non* for populism as the ideational approach suggests, for this is not a feature exclusive to populist form of politics but prevalent in anti-populist politics of liberal pluralist actors as well.

Interestingly, the pluralist ideal Mudde and Kaltwasser privileges vis-à-vis populism-elitism axis largely corresponds to the deliberative model that places reaching a consensus at the horizon of democratic politics and, accordingly, establishes a carefully formulated set of rules needed to reach an agreement through the exchange of arguments between 'free, equal and rational agents' who are 'committed to the values of rationality and impartiality' (Elster 1998,

5-8; cf. Habermas 1996; Renn et.al. 1995; Dryzek 1995). Theoreticians of this model hold that for authentic deliberation to occur, the arguments should be expressed in the absence of barriers excluding agents from debate, and in a non-coercive manner so that no one is prevented from exercising these rights (Dryzek 2000, 2; Chambers 1996). The important thing is that the conditions under which deliberation takes place must emphasise the need for critical reflection and evaluation; acknowledge the moral status of opposing views; cultivates openness; and start from the point of view of reaching possible agreement (Benhabib 1996; Chamber 1996; Warren 2006). Seyla Benhabib summarises the core of deliberative model as the following: ‘legitimacy and rationality can be attained with regard to collective decision-making processes in a polity if and only if the institutions of this polity and their interlocking relationship are so arranged that what is considered in the common interest of all results from processes of collective deliberation conducted rationally and fairly among free and equal individuals’ (Benhabib, 1996, 69).

Critics point out that, contrary to its claims of inclusiveness, the deliberative model is based on several implicit limitations, which effectively grant access only to a particular type of subject that it deems “democratic” and exclude the rest. At a meta-level, Aletta Norval marks that it is based on a circular logic which presumes a shared interest in reaching an agreement on the part of the participants and, thus, makes *agreement* ‘both what is presupposed and what is to be sought throughout the process of deliberation’ (Norval 2007, 26-7 n30). The model further limits access to democratic processes on the basis of rationality and morality. As subjects capable of speech (logos), participants are at the very least expected to articulate their opinion *rationally* and offer arguments in a way that is *reasonable* and *morally justifiable* to others. However, Sanders draws attention to inherently political nature of the ‘epistemological authority’ needed to evoke acknowledgement of any given argument (Sanders 1997, 349): ‘Words are not simply words with inherent, context-free meaning, but are received very differently according to who is uttering them and where they are uttered’ (Hewlett 2007, 97). Lacking such authority, it is likely that most of what one says is ignored or not recognised as speech at all. Disregarding this leads deliberative model to naturalise those relations that are essentially power-ridden as equal. This, in turn, converts deliberation from a supposedly “ideal speech situation” into any other situation where ‘the talk of an identifiable and privileged sector will dominate public dialogue’ whereas ‘views of those who are less likely to present their arguments in ways that we recognise as characteristically deliberative’ will likely be discredited ‘on seemingly democratic grounds’ (Sanders 1997, 349).

What is particularly problematic about *democratic subject* envisioned in deliberative model—and the ideational approach to populism by association—is that it is an already closed category. Norms and conditions of the discourse she is required to respect and internalise for her supposed empowerment establish a rather specific set of entry requirements for democratic subjectivity beforehand. As Mouffe states: ‘far from being merely empirical, or epistemological, the obstacles to the realisation of the ideal speech situation are ontological’ (Mouffe 1999, 751). Thus it is an elaborate illusion that the deliberative model and the liberal democracy as its politico-institutional embodiment are without antagonisms. It is rather that they introduce the line that separates “us” from “them” through the back door, without acknowledging that it exists in the first place. Behind the facade of all-inclusiveness lies a concealed frame that excludes those who do not fulfil the necessary preconditions of being “proper” democratic subjects and renders them invisible.

The problem with such an understanding of politics, which places consensus at its horizon, is that it fails to recognise the constitutive role *antagonisms* play in politics (Laclau & Mouffe 2001 [1985]; Mouffe 2000; Marchart 2018). Without manifest antagonisms, such a consensual regime functions within the order of what Michel Foucault and Jacques Rancière call as *the police*,⁵ which is a form of power that controls access to public space, separating legitimate forms of presence from illegitimate ones, filtering the latter out by rendering them insensible (Foucault 1979; Rancière 1999, 2010). Rather than employing the traditional forms of power such as repression or control, police divides up the sensible through a ‘generally implicit law that defines the forms of partaking’ (Rancière 2010, 36). It separates and excludes while simultaneously allowing participation. As an order of the sensible that determines the allocation of ways of doing, being, and saying, police oversees that ‘a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise’ (Rancière 1999, 29). In other words, ‘a police order distinguishes between those who have a part and those who do not’ (May 2010, 71).

Contrary to police order, *politics*, as Rancière and other post-foundationalist scholars of radical democracy argue, refers to ‘the mode of acting that perturbs this arrangement’ (Rancière 2003, 226; see also Mouffe 1993, 2000; Laclau 1996, 2005; Norval 2007; Glynos and Howarth 2007; Marchart 2009, 2018). It does not primarily concern, as liberal democratic model presupposes, differing views over an issue, but whose voice counts, who actually has a voice,

⁵ Both Rancière and Foucault use the term in a much broader sense than the familiar one of a repressive organ of state, one closer to that identified by Foucault in seventeenth-century Italian and German discourses on the state.

who is capable of speech: 'The political act proper changes the very framework that determines how things work' (Žižek 1999, 199). It is a disconcertment of, what Fredric Jameson calls, the 'cognitive mapping' that assign identity or reference to the parts of a whole (Jameson 1990). It begins with an act of impropriety which blurs the line between the sensible and the insensible, making visible what had no business to be seen. This is, as Rancière, Laclau, and Mouffe argue, the 'essence of politics,' i.e. antagonism or dissensus (Rancière 2010, 37-40; Laclau 1996; Mouffe 2000).

For Mouffe, inspired by Carl Schmitt, *the political* proper cannot be confined within the limits of institutions or social spheres but, instead, must be conceived as 'a dimension that is inherent to every human society, determining our very ontological condition' (1993, 3). In order to acknowledge the existence of the political in its complexity, it is imperative to recognise all that makes human social conduct possible is 'necessarily plural, discursively constructed and entangled with power relations,' especially those which liberal democratic framework deems necessary for partaking in decision-making process such as rationality or morality (Ibid., 7). There is always a *disagreement* over the possible meanings of political values and identities, and their very utterance is the result of a political articulation, including some and excluding others:

Political is concerned with the relations of friend and enemy, it deals with the creation of a "we" opposed to a "them." [...] Its subject matter is conflict and antagonism. [W]hile politics aims at creating a "we", at constructing a political community, a fully inclusive political community can never be achieved since in order to construct a "we" it must be distinguished from a "them", and that means establishing a frontier, defining an "enemy". There will therefore exist a permanent "constitutive outside", as Derrida has shown us, an exterior to the community that makes its existence possible (Ibid., 111-14).

Mouffe warns that to ignore this constitutive role antagonism plays in the political, as liberal democratic model does, 'leads to bewilderment in the face of its manifestations and to impotence in dealing with them' (Mouffe 1993, 140). This is particularly why our contemporary European liberal democracies are toothless in dealing with the radical right parties. Their criticism of liberal hegemony, i.e. that it depoliticises more and more issues which are essentially political and therefore breed antagonisms that can not be accommodated within the liberal democratic framework, in principle, is a legitimate one.

Rancière, in turn, looks for the source of this account of dissensus as the essence of politics in ancient Athens, as it emerged after Solon's reforms of 594 BC abolishing enslavement for indebtedness (Labelle 2001). This led to the emergence of a class called *demos* who, as Aristotle described them, 'had no part [share] in anything' since they lacked any of the traditional entitlements required for active involvement in the political process, i.e. wealth, birth or moral excellence (Rancière 1999, 9). What is scandalous about the birth of democracy, and politics for that matter, is that *demos* nevertheless claimed not only to participate in decision-making process as equals but to be the only source of sovereignty. This fundamental claim to govern is *demos*' reply to the systematic "wrong" they are hitherto done by the police order which, in its reservation of the right to govern to those with a traditional entitlement, effectively proclaims that they do not "count": 'It is in response to this "wrong" which would reduce their political existence to nothing that they make the claim to be, in political terms, everything' (Davis 2010, 80). This response by those who are 'part of no-part' [*le part sans-part*], as Rancière calls them, is given in the name of equality, claiming that the only legitimate basis for the exercise of political power is 'the equality of anyone with everyone' (Rancière 1999, 123). It is important to note that this makes wrong the opposite of what it might otherwise be associated with, i.e. victimisation. While victimisation presupposes that the responsibility to actualise equality lies with the party who does the wrong in the form of compensation, the politics proper puts the weight on the shoulders of *demos*, obligating them to act on their own behalf. By expressing their equality, *demos* displays for all to see that they are hitherto denied it. This is, indeed, a position occupied by various different groups throughout the history, including *the plebs* in ancient Rome, *the Third Estate* in pre-revolutionary France, African-Americans during civil rights movements, and immigrants, ethnic/religious/sexual minorities, and precariat of today in Western hemisphere. As Carlos De la Torre observes, such claims for equality epitomise 'the saga of the people, the proletariat, the indigenous, or the nation' (De la Torre 2015, 10).

This constitutive role of antagonism/disagreement and the aesthetic aspect of politics in terms of "who counts" as visible is also the point of departure for Ernesto Laclau's work on the politics in general and on the concept of populism in particular (Laclau 1990, 2005a). In *On Populist Reason*, Laclau argues that the category of "demand" is the minimal unit of social analysis, which presupposes that a social group is not homogeneous, but rather 'its unity should [...] be conceived as an articulation of heterogeneous demands' (Laclau 2005a, 171). Initially there is nothing specifically political about a demand as it is addressed in the form of a "request"

to the institutions of power. It is, in Rancière's terms, a police matter: If they are dealt with, 'this is the end of the matter.' If, however, they remain 'ignored or not responded to' (in other words, if they do not "count"), they are turned into popular demands and, only then, they become *political* (Laclau 2005, 73-4). As Norval explains, 'this process involves both the constitution of the identity of the claimants and that of the "enemy", the addressee of the claim' (Norval 2007, 156). In their shared negativity as those whose demands are not recognised or count, they become popular demands and emerge as part of a broader social subjectivity; *the people* (Laclau Ibid., 74). Just as Rancière's category of *part of no-part* is synonymous with *demos*, Laclau's popular demands potentially constitute *the people*. They both hold the key for the emergence of a political subject – a subject which is a part but nevertheless functions as a whole. As discussed above, for Rancière, democracy is the 'paradoxical power of those who do no count' (Panagia and Rancière 2000, 124). It is the rule of those who lack any entitlement [a part] to rule [as whole]. Similarly for Laclau, as well as for Canovan, the primacy of the people as the sole sovereign emerges from the antagonistic division between *the people* as the holders of popular demands and the unresponsive power (the elite, establishment etc.) as its nemesis. Acting out on the presupposition that they have equal footing in power, *the people* as an oppressed part of a divided society claim the right to stand in for society as a whole, deposing the parasitic minority who illegitimately cling to power:

'Here we begin to see why the *plebs* sees itself as the *populus*, the part as the whole: since the fullness of the community is merely the imaginary reverse of a situation lived as *deficient being*, those who are responsible for this cannot be a legitimate part of the community; the chasm between them is irretrievable' (Laclau 2005, 86 emphasis in the original).

2.6. Conclusion

Exploring the politico-historical roots of populism as well as intellectual accounts about the phenomenon, this chapter first demonstrated that it has long been in the process of being turned into a new sort of *fascism*, mere utterance of which is enough to exclude its supposed proponents from the legitimate sphere of body politics. As a concept so widely used yet so poorly understood, populism was first conceptualised most influentially in the 1950s by a group of American liberal scholars who developed a deeply pejorative understanding of the concept as an antinomy of democracy. With its supposed conspiratorial reasoning, deep conservatism and

anti-intellectualism, latent and expressed xenophobia and anti-Semitism, populism was defined as an essentially irrational, proto-fascist protest ideology utilised by authoritarian demagogues to rally ignorant masses against the values, advocates and institutions of democracy.

This chapter further argued that though nearly all the “findings” and presumptions of this anti-populist approach and the modernisation theory it is based on, have been since widely discredited, it still seems to constitute the blueprint on which the “new” mainstream of populism research is developed. The ideational approach—arguably the most prominent one in contemporary scholarship—with its inclusion of ‘essential moralism’ into the ‘minimal’ definition of populism, gets ominously close to the “old” mainstream. Despite considering populism at least potentially ‘compatible’ with democracy, this new mainstream still effectively delegitimises it as an inferior form of political reasoning compared to that of supposedly “rational” liberal pluralism. Aside from being oblivious to the ‘affective turn’ in social sciences that undermines the very existence of binaries like rational vs. moral, more crucially, ideational approach with its ‘essential moralism’ fails to help us differentiate populist manifestations from non-populist ones, for it is a ubiquitous feature of all politics. Though it scratches the surface of the current crisis of liberal democracy and even rudimentarily links manifestations of populism to this crisis, this approach fails to offer a definition that travels smoothly through time and place, capable to capture what makes populism *populist* in different political contexts. This, as the fifth section above showed, is because it fails to situate populism at an ontological level, that is to say, as a ‘political logic’ posing a challenge against the hegemonic discourse—whatever it happens to be in a given context.

Although the new mainstream acknowledges that the core categories of populism, the people and the elite, are essentially ‘empty signifiers’ (Laclau 2005, 69-72; 161-63) whose contents are discursively filled by populist actors, it is unclear on how exactly populism does that, i.e. how populist agents lay their claim to represent the people against an elite. This is precisely where the analytical value of a post-foundationalist theory of populism lies: it situates populism at an ontological level and accounts for the underlying mechanisms behind a distinctly populist articulation of popular demands under the concept of “the people” united against “the elite.” The following chapter will introduce this approach, along with the analytical tools and methodology it offers.

Chapter 3: Populism as a Discourse: Post-Foundationalist Approach

3.1. Introduction

As an alternative to the pathological understanding of populism that is detailed and criticised in the previous chapter, this dissertation utilises a radically different definition, first formulated by Ernesto Laclau (1977, 2005, 2007; & Mouffe 2001 [1985]) and then developed by the so-called Essex school of post-structuralist discourse analysis (Mouffe 2005, 2018; Stavrakakis 2004, 2017a; Griggs & Howarth 2008; Palonen 2009, 2018; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014; Stavrakakis et.al. 2017a, 2018; De Cleen 2017; De Cleen et.al. 2018, 2019; Kioupkiolis 2016; Katsambekis & Kioupkiolis 2019). His discourse theoretical account significantly differs from the other ones because of the level of abstraction at which it tackles populism. Laclau insists that the terminological confusion and scholarly dispute surrounding populism, as well as its essentially contested nature, stem from the fact that the concept is usually presumed to be, what Heidegger calls, an *ontic* category where it actually is an *ontological* one (Heidegger 1962; Laclau 2005b, 34, 44; Glynos & Howarth 2007, 108-9). That is to say, the focus has been overwhelmingly on investigating populism “as it is” and dissecting what makes populism what it is, without being concerned with the political and social phenomena as such, which are implicitly presupposed. Right-wing nativism, essential moralism, industrial transformations and rapid change in social-cultural values that follow modernisation, presence of a charismatic leader and numerous other factors and qualities have all been identified in varying degrees as “what makes” or “what triggers” populism. The fact that there are so many cases of populism that do not fit even the most expansive or flexible frame is mainly because of their shared level of abstraction that belongs to an *ontic* inquiry, offering descriptive definitions.

After the end of Cold War, the Western hemisphere was shocked by an upsurge in populist movements not at the time of systemic crises but at a period so remarkably stable that it was celebrated as the end of all political conflicts (Fukuyama 1992). Experiences in Latin America and Southern Europe have also shown that there are as many left-wing populist movements as there are right-wing ones (March 2011; De la Torre 2015; Katsambekis & Kioupkiolis 2019). Even though charismatic and/or authoritarian leaders have been enjoying a disproportionately wide coverage in media, archetypical populist agents like Eva Morales in Bolivia, Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain seem to follow a diagonally opposed path in political organization, diffusing power away from the leader to the multitude of groups that form the grassroots of their corresponding movements (Anria 2013; Katsambekis 2017;

Kioupkiolis 2016). Furthermore, consolidated liberal democracies in Western and Northern Europe which stand at the top of global lists of political and socio-economic stability, are not any more immune to populism than those at the bottom (Kriesi & Pappas 2015). In Portugal, Denmark, France and Poland, it is the women who lead successful populist movements, not “chauvinistic” or “paternalistic” men of old age (Meret 2015; Rousseau 2010). Whatever their particular choice of criteria for populism is, all these approaches that define populism on the basis of ontic content can be weakened with an avalanche of counter examples that contradict with their ideal types.

Ontological inquiry, on the other hand, is concerned with the categorical and existential preconditions for the very “being” of its object of analysis, as well as the ways in which the subject interacts and gets transformed through these interactions with its preconditions. So an it is not just about ‘*what* sort of things exist, but *that* they exist and *how* they exist’ (Glynos & Howarth 2007, 6; emphases in the original). Such an inquiry on populism, therefore, would have to begin from the beginning and lay its ontological foundations about the political and social as such, before it may be utilized as an analytical tool with explanatory capacity at an empirical (i.e. *ontic*) level. That is to say, it shifts the research focus away from ‘mainly sociological categories, which address the group, its constitutive roles and its functional determinants, to the underlying logics that make these categories possible’ (Laclau 2000: xi). Disentangling populism from its empirical instances, such an ontological inquiry reveal the “logic” behind its functioning in actual cases. Rather than engaging with the manifestations of populist politics as if these somehow represent pre-existing socio-political categories, discourse theoretical approach of Laclau enables the researcher to inquire ‘how such discourses construct the categories they claim to represent’ – in this case “the people” (De Cleen et.al. 2019, 4). In this way, it accounts for the ‘essentially contested’ nature of populism (Woods 2014) by exposing the contingency, historicity and precariousness of social objectivity, for populism is a particular way of making use of this contingency. This is precisely the purpose this chapter serves. It offers a clear definition of populism as a political logic that articulates ‘whatever social, political or ideological contents’ present in any given case under the category of “the people”.

With this aim in mind, the present chapter first introduces the post-foundationalist discourse theory that has been theorized by Ernesto Laclau, along with Chantal Mouffe, and further developed by other scholars that belong to the so-called Essex School of discourse analysis (3.2). The main focus here is mostly on the concepts of discourse and discursivity

(3.2.1), and the political logics (3.2.2), as they form the core of post-foundationalist ontology. Significantly, the political logics also constitute the backbone of a sort of post-structuralist analytical toolkit formulated precisely for applying it to concrete empirical cases like the one this dissertation tackles and, thus, are reviewed in detail. Since they are fundamentally related to populism, political logics of equivalence and difference as well as their uneasy combination, is discussed more extensively. Based on these ontological premises and analytical categories, the chapter then reaches at a fully-fledged definition of populism (3.3) as a particular discourse that is beyond the ontic/empirical contents of its various instances and instead reflects the logic of politics itself. Lastly, the chapter adopts a formal conceptualization of the Laclaudian theory of populism as it has been operationalised recently in various empirical cases (3.4), which makes it finally applicable to the empirical case at hand in the following chapters.

3.2. Post-Foundationalist Discourse Theory

One comes across with the ontological core of the post-foundationalist discourse theory (Marttila 2015; Marchart 2018) usually in the form of a single, provocative statement Ernesto Laclau makes: ‘Society does not exist’ (1990, 89-92; Laclau & Mouffe 2001 [1985], 111; Marchart 2007, 134-38). This is, of course, a sentence most popularly coined by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s as the rhetorical cradle of her New Right program, which postulates individual as the only real subject of politics while simultaneously dismissing “society” as an ideological construct of the Left that creates a ‘culture of dependency’ on the part of the individual to the state through policies of welfare, gradual income tax, labour laws etc. (Crines et.al. 2016, 131-33).⁶ What Laclau means by it, however, is diagonally opposed to Thatcherism and ends up problematizing the categories of individual, society and politics all together. The main assumption of the post-foundationalist ontology on which Laclau’s statement relies, is that there is no objective foundation that could serve as the basis for any particular understanding of the world: ‘[S]ociety will always be in search for an ultimate ground, while the maximum that can be achieved will be a floating and contingent *grounding* by way of politics – a plurality of partial grounds’ (Tønder & Thomassen 2005, 8). In order to get a firm grip on how post-foundationalist discourse theory reaches to this conclusion, it is fundamental to examine its relationship with structuralism and essentialism, because as David Howarth puts: ‘the elaboration of a novel theoretical approach...is best explicated by exploring the problems

⁶ Thatcher’s exact quote was: ‘There is no such thing as society.’ See Crines et.al. (2016), 131-33.

to which it has responded, as well as the range of philosophical and analytical resources its protagonists draw upon in its development' (Howarth 2015, 3).

Having initially stemmed from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's seminal work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2001 [1985]), post-foundationalist discourse theory has given birth to the so-called Essex School and eventually become a well-recognised branch of social and political science, with proponents conducting research on fields as diverse as area studies, political organizations, gender studies, international relations, election studies, education systems, development studies, historiography, ethnography, media studies and anthropology (e.g. Hansen 2006; Carpentier & Spinoy 2008; Cederström & Spicer 2014; da Costa & Saraiva 2012; Glasze 2007; Kenny & Scriver 2012; Jones & Spicer 2009; Marttila 2013). It is possible to distinguish two main intellectual reservoirs from which post-structuralist discourse theory has been nurtured in the course of 1960s, 70s and 80s: Gramscian Post-Marxism and French deconstructivism (Howarth & Torfing 2005, 10). While it is Antonio Gramsci's concept of *hegemony* that helps post-structuralist discourse theory to overcome the problem of essentialism, Derrida's deconstructivist approach provides the key to understand the ultimately contingent character of all objectivity, paving the way for a novel definition of *discourse*.

Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (1985) can be summarized, certainly in a crude manner, as an attempt to tackle the problem of *essentialism* in classical structuralist account of Marxism. Throughout the several decades following the end of World War II, Marxist scholarship succumbed to different versions of class reductionism and economic determinism, envisioning society topographically as a closed totality formed by a strict division between the economic base and political superstructure (Ibid., 95). All that goes on at the level of superstructure, including configurations and practices of political institutions, cultural value systems, subject positions and identities, were viewed as being completely determined by the material economic conditions within society, that is, the class-based ownership of the means of production. The point of scientific inquiry, for structuralist Marxist thinkers such as Louis Althusser (1965), was to "unearth" the ways in which this determination occurred in various cases. Thus, their analyses were characterized by an intrinsic adherence to rationalist essentialism, which is the idea that "society," along with all its components including human subjects and objects they encounter, have fixed essences that can be understood rationally, if only the correct theoretical and empirical methods are applied in scientific endeavours to discover them.

Although having taken their cue from the structuralist tradition, post-structuralists point out that essentialism also characterizes other schools of thought in social sciences such as positivism and realism, which share a similar conception of social relations as partial processes of an “object” that is out there to be grasped. The fact that the Hegelian notion of an underlying causal “law of history” determining all subjects and objects has largely been demoted in contemporary Western thought does not mean that our search for a “blueprint” that would turn “society” into an intelligible whole has also ceased. In his *Alchemies of the Mind*, for instance, Jon Elster develops *causal mechanisms* as an alternative to causal laws with not predictive but explanatory capacity over the relationships between phenomena and events (1999). Unlike causal laws, mechanisms are *indeterminate* processes that can trigger one or many causal chains, each of which may end up having different effects (Ibid., 8-9). Elster uses the example of a child born into a family of alcoholics: “We cannot know ahead of time what will become of [him/her], but if he or she turns out either a teetotaler or an alcoholic we may suspect we know why” (Ibid., 1). The use of causal mechanisms is, thus, strictly explanatory, for they enable us to grasp retrospectively why something happened the way it did. However, similar to causal laws, mechanisms emerge as fully constituted givens in Elster’s model, which does not concern itself with their conditions of possibility. Causal mechanisms are conceived as the ‘atomic’ units of social explanation, preceding all phenomena and applicable to different contexts without modification (Glynos & Howarth 2007, 7). As part of a general social science toolkit, they can be combined to form larger ‘molecular mechanisms’ that are suitable to explain more complex social events (Elster 1999, 32-36). And, in turn, their *explanandum*, social phenomena, is ultimately recognised as an unmediated objectivity existing out there, whose essence and *modus operandi* can be revealed with the use of right combination of *explanans*.

Post-foundationalist discourse theory belongs to the neo-Gramscian tradition that emerged in 1970s to solve this problem of essentialism found in classical and structuralist Marxist scholarship as well as other rationalist accounts of social explanation. Opposing the presumption that the subjects of political action, along with their political and ideological struggles are all secondary effects of a set of pre-given, essential interests determined by either their corresponding positions at the economic level or deeper, pre-formed causal mechanisms at work, Antonio Gramsci (1971) considers political as the primary force, constitutive of the “society.” It is not a “necessary evil” to be eventually ridden off as classical Marxists hoped or resultant of molecular causal mechanisms, but a field of constant struggle where collective wills are formed around different ideological and moral standpoints that either reinforce or

problematize the status quo in varying degrees. Gramsci considers this struggle as the one for, what he calls, *hegemony*, i.e. political and moral-intellectual leadership. It is the hegemonic struggles at the level of politics, not non-political economic “base” or causal mechanisms, which construct the institutional forms of state, society and economy, as well as the relations between them. Rather than being a given objectivity, any “society,” together with the intra-societal relations it encompasses, is a construct of concrete political struggles for hegemony that foreclose all other, equally possible forms of social configuration. Therefore it is indispensable for any social explanation to begin from the struggles of power and antagonisms, and work its way through what kinds of “society” these processes construct. This ontological principle for the *primacy of the political* constitutes the core of post-structuralist category of hegemony, which has come ‘to mean the formation and organization of consent’ (Ives 2004, 3):

‘[H]egemony emphasizes the ways in which power operates to form our everyday understanding of social relations, and to orchestrate the ways in which we consent to (and reproduce) those tacit and covert relations of power. Power is not stable or static, but is remade at various junctures within everyday life; it constitutes our tenuous sense of common sense, and is ensconced as the prevailing epistemes of a culture’ (Butler 2000, 14).

Primacy of the political is, in a way, directly related to the second intellectual source of post-structuralist discourse theory that is the French deconstructivism. Built upon the structuralist blueprint of linguistics as it had been developed initially in early 20th century by Ferdinand de Saussure (1983 [1916]) and later extended to the social sciences by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969, 1972), Jacques Derrida’s conceptualization of discourse provides vital insights into understanding and analysing social and political relationships (1971, 1981, 1982). Saussurean linguistic theory, at its core, emerges as a bold challenge against the prevalent understanding of language as a neutral medium made up of words (signifiers) that directly correspond to real or thought concepts in the world (signifieds). Contrary to positivist or empiricist accounts that ascribe centrality to the categories of individuals, facts and objects (Culler 1974, xii), it emphasizes the constitutive role a shared system of signs plays by providing the overall common context in which those categories emerge and attain meanings. This is captured *in nuce* in Saussure’s definition of language as a ‘system of signs’ that provides the underlying structure of rules one must adhere to in order to communicate meaningfully (1983 [1916], 14-

15). In this sense, language is no different than, say, the game of football where a player has to internalise the rules before being able to play it properly.

As the building blocks of language, signs tie a signifier and a signified arbitrarily, which means that there is no intrinsic reasons for why sounds such as /'bɔ:l/ or /'gəʊl/ must be associated with the concept of a “ball” or “goal.” Language, Saussure maintains, is ‘form and not substance’ so it does not simply connect signifiers and signifieds as isolated and autonomous entities but constitutes ‘a system in which all the elements fit together, and which the value of any one element depends on the simultaneous coexistence of all the others’ (Ibid., 111-13). Much like “ball” in the game of football, words have no inner value outside the context of language. A “ball” ‘becomes a ‘real, concrete element... identified with its value’ only within the game where its meaning and function are determined by the rules of football, and formal relations it has with the other components such as players, goal, pitch and lines (Ibid., 108). Childhood experiences stand witness to the fact that what makes something a “ball” or even a “foot” has nothing to do with their material characteristics either. Two children can easily play “football” on a dinner table, where one uses her little fingers as the “goal” and middle finger as the “goalkeeper” while the other takes a shot at a pea as the “ball” using his index finger as the “striker.” One can still play football insofar as the *form* governing the movements and relationships of the components remain the same, regardless of their actual *substance*. A word denotes an entity exactly like a pea can be exchanged for a ball, but for this to happen it must also simultaneously be distinguished from other words that stand in relation to it, just as the meaning and function of the “ball” is determined by the set of rules which regulate the working of other elements in the game of football. Saussure sums this aspect with the principle that in language there are no positive terms but only differences:

‘In all...cases what we find, instead of *ideas* given in advance, are *values* emanating from a linguistic system. If we say that these values correspond to certain concepts, it must be understood that the concepts in question are purely differential. That is to say they are concepts defined not positively, in terms of their content, but negatively by contrast with other items in the same system. What characterises each most exactly is being whatever the others are not’ (Ibid., 115).

To use a well-known example, in order to be able to grasp the meaning of the term “father,” one has to understand the meaning of “mother,” “son,” “daughter” etc. “Father” has a meaning insofar as it is both related to and differentiated from these other terms that are part of the same system, not because it refers to a real or though object. Contrary to a realist or essentialist

perspective that fixes identities to objects in the world, this particular understanding of language conceptualizes it in relational and differential terms, concluding that ‘the identity of any element is a product of the differences and oppositions established by the elements of the linguistic system’ (Howarth 2000, 22).

Jacques Derrida’s critique of this model is predicated on Saussure’s privileging of speech over writing and, consequently, his dismissal of the latter as an inferior, and ultimately disruptive representation of the first: ‘A language and its written form constitute two separate systems of signs. The sole reason for the existence of the latter is to represent the former. The object of study in linguistics is not a combination of the written word and the spoken word. The spoken word alone constitutes that object. But the written word is so intimately connected with the spoken word it represents that it manages to usurp the principal role. It is rather as if people believed that in order to find out what a person looks like it is better to study his photograph than his face’ (Saussure 1983 [1916], 24-5). This particular analogy Saussure evokes between the duos speech/writing and person/photo leads Derrida to show any ‘binary opposition’ between the “real” thing and its inferior “representation” is incompatible with a purely formal linguistic model based on differences with no positive terms (Derrida 1981, 1997). For speech to be considered closer and more faithful to thought than writing, as Saussure does, there would have to be some sort of positive essence to be transmitted. On the contrary, Derrida argues that writing is not a supplement to speech but is actually required in order to define what speech and language is. If words are distinguished from sounds by what permits writing, i.e. consonants and articulation, then a speech without writing would not be speech but an ‘inarticulate and purely natural cry,’ and a speech completely subsumed by writing, on the other hand, would be equal to a ‘dead language’ (Derrida 1997, 313-16). Thus writing, both as the horizon and origin of language, does not undermine but constitutes its condition of possibility.

It is possible to see the deconstructivist reading of Saussurean linguistic model as more faithful to its principles than Saussure himself, for Derrida embarks upon a mission to salvage them in several of his works by unleashing a general attack on the binary oppositions which, he insists, have pervaded the modern Western thought (Derrida 1981, 1982, 1997). He argues that through binary oppositions like good/evil, life/death, noumenon/phenomenon, signified/signifier, speech/writing etc., Western thinking has long ordered the world between a privileged, pure essence that is *inside* and an inferior, threatening *outside* (1997, 315). Just as speech and writing, the relationship between any inside and outside is deeply symbiotic and impossible to separate in a clear-cut manner without losing both elements. Memory, for

instance, exists by the virtue of forgetting, Derrida asserts, for without the latter imposing limits to it there would be no memory ‘but infinite self-presence’ (2004, 111). Thus forgetting as the outside does not simply pose a threat to the memory that is the inside but also partially constitutes it.

This deconstruction of the binary hierarchy between inside and outside leads to the conclusion that ‘it is impossible to maintain a stable hierarchy between the essential and the accidental, the original and the supplement, the present and the absent, the reasonable and the unreasonable, etc. Although the world appears to be organized in terms of an endless series of binary hierarchies, the deconstructive destabilization of these hierarchies reveals an ultimate undecidability’ (Howarth & Torfing 2005, 11-12). Any system of meaning manages to make sense not because it is built upon underlying essences or complete structures that can be rationally grasped in their totality. Post-foundationalist ontology as unfolded in Derrida’s work is a radical call to break away from the very idea of a transcendental blueprint—whether in the form of enlightenment, nature, economic structures, causal mechanisms or God—determining the course of social interactions, history and human identities. The “social” rather stems from contingent decisions, what Derrida calls “play of differences,” made on an infinitely open terrain, which, in each instance, privilege certain meanings as inside over others that are excluded as outside.

For instance, in the course of the foundation of modern Turkish Republic in 1910s and 20s, “Turkishness” was affirmed as the collective identity of ethno-religiously heterogeneous population of Asia Minor in differentiation from both the Western Christianity and the Ottoman legacy. “Turk” was not a positive but differential identity denoting those who were not Christians or Ottomans. But Turkishness also emerged as a contingent identity that was premised on the active deferral of other possible identities such as Kurdish, Anatolian, Alevite or proletarian, which could emerge in the historical context but were not actualized by any particular project due to the suppressive and assimilative policy of “Turkification” (Aktar 2010). This is to say, “Turkishness” is not only a purely differential identity whose meaning depends on the borders constructed between itself and other identities that are deemed external, but it also lacks any essence, for it is resultant of a struggle for hegemony and depends on contingent decisions that could be different (Sayyid 1997; Çelik 1999; Yeğen 2007). This principle of ultimate undecidability of meaning leads to a particular understanding of *discourse* that constitutes the backbone of the post-structuralist discourse theory, to which this chapter now turns.

3.2.1. Discourse and Discursivity

The concept of discourse plays an ever more important role in various branches of contemporary social sciences and humanities including, but certainly not limited to, history (Jóhannesson 2010), social psychology, political science, international relations (Torfing 2005), sociology (Cicourel 1973; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974; Sudnow 1972) and anthropology (Geertz 1971; Turner 1974), where it has been frequently utilized to explain wide array of problems. As David Howarth puts, this inflation of interest in discourse is due to a series of connected transformations in social sciences such as a ‘growing dissatisfaction with mainstream positivist approaches’ and the consequent ontological shift towards language in Western philosophy and theory, what Richard Rorty labelled as the ‘linguistic turn’ (1967), which has given way to the emergence of new approaches like critical theory, post-structuralism and hermeneutics (Howarth 2000, 1-2; cf. Sherratt 2006). This has been accompanied simultaneously by the emergence of a distinct field of study of discourse analysis in linguistics, which has been quickly taken up by various disciplines in social sciences and has become a cross-disciplinary endeavour ‘to integrate central insights from linguistics and hermeneutics with key ideas from social and political science’ (Howarth & Torfing 2005, 5). Even a brief glimpse at the exponentially growing literature on discourse analysis indicates that there are at least six different approaches to discourse, which vary both according to the focus and objective of their analyses as well as their ontological presuppositions: Rhetorical Political Analysis; Discourse Historical Analysis; Interpretive Policy Analysis; Discursive Psychology; Q Methodology; and Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory (Glynos et.al. 2009). Accordingly, the very meaning of discourse has been contested and diversified, ‘ranging from natural language, speech, and writing, to almost anything that acts as a carrier of signification, including social and political practices, to discourse as an ontological horizon’ (Ibid., 5).

Following David Howarth and Jacob Torfing, it is possible to cluster these approaches to discourse under three ‘generations,’ in the course of which the understanding of discourse deepens and expands in such a way that the points of convergence between linguistic and political dimensions increase significantly (Howarth 2000, 6-8; Howarth & Torfing 2005, 6-9). First generation discourse theorists are concerned solely with the examination of language as it is actually used by individuals in forms of talk and text. As discourse, according to them, is strictly limited to linguistic units that are connected set of sentences, the purpose of discourse analysis is to render explicit those silent rules governing the ways in which individuals utilize language in their everyday speech and writing. While content analysis and socio-linguistics

(Holmes 1992; Hudson 1996) examine the relationship between social groups and their corresponding vocabularies as characterized by certain phrases and words, speech-act theorists and discourse psychologists problematise the distinction between speaking and acting, and aim to reach at the intended meanings lying under simple utterances by analysing the framing and style of the dialogue (Searle 1969; Austin 1975). Conversation analysis, on the other hand, focuses on the ways in which linguistic interactions between speaker and listener are structured; when and how they begin, pause, switch sides and end in relation to factors such as moments of silence, body language, tone of speech, eye contact and ritualized words (Schegloff & Sacks 1973; Trask 2007, 55). Finally the critical linguistics examines discourse as an ideological tool often calibrated to distort the reality by picking and merging various linguistic expressions and styles (Fowler et.al. 1979; Fowler 1987).

Going beyond this self-imposed limitation of analysing discourse semantically as a purely linguistic category of speech and text, the second generation significantly expands the scope of inquiry to include a wider set of social practices under the category of discourse (Howarth & Torfing 2005, 6-7; Howarth 2000, 7-8; Howarth 2015, 5-6). Critical discourse analysts, in turn, largely subscribe to the Foucauldian notion of discourse as constituted primarily through relations of power and social structures, maintaining that it includes all sorts of linguistically mediated practices social actors turn to while producing and interpreting meaning in a given context (Fairclough 1992, 1995; Fairclough & Wodak 1997; De Cillia et.al. 1999; Wodak 2005). They hold that social practices we deem ordinary or natural are predicated on the existence of an ideology and, therefore, resultant of a 'dialectic relationship between a particular discursive event and...situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s)' (Fairclough & Wodak 1997, 258). Social actors constantly engage in discursive practices either to perpetuate those structures and relations of power which benefit them or transform those working against their dominance. Thus the focus of a critical discourse analyst is on the roles 'structures, strategies or other properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events play...in the (re)production and challenge of dominance' (Van Dijk 1993, 249-250). In their work on the contemporary Austrian national identity, for instance, De Cillia et.al. (1999) demonstrate how the discursive construction of *homo austriacus* in written and spoken language functions as a significant myth to justify a certain status quo that is ingrained with socio-political relations of dominance in the face of global complexities and late-modern insecurities.

Even though the scope of discourse has been considerably widened through the works of second generation discourse theorists in such a way that the productive dimension of discourse

and its constitutive relationship with power are incorporated, they impose some sort of limit to the field of discursive and maintain a, however minimal, loyalty to the essentialist and positivist traditions. While Foucault considers discourses as those explicitly linguistic or symbolic practices such as ‘speaking, writing, representing or communication, which can ought to be distinguished from other activities...as well as the “real” objects and entities that compose such actions and practices’ (Howarth 2015, 5), critical analysts build their works on a critical realist ontology that reduces discourse ‘to a linguistic mediation of the events that are produced by the causal powers and mechanisms embedded in the independently existing structure of society’ (Howarth & Torfing 2005, 7; cf. Bhaskar 1978; Sayer 1984).

Third generation of discourse theory constitutes the radically anti-essentialist step where this minimal distinction between discursive and non-/extra-discursive is eliminated, and discourse, rather than being a subset of a broader range of social practices, is understood as coinciding with the social per se (Howarth & Torfing 2005, 8-9). Insofar as, following Derrida, their meaning depends not upon an underlying essence that is given in and by itself but a play of differences within a decentred system of contingent rules and limitations, all social phenomena (linguistic and non-linguistic) is considered as discursively constructed. In the absence of a transcendental foundation such as God, human nature, economic infrastructure, causal mechanisms or laws of history, social meanings and identities cannot be established once and for all but remain eternally open to multiple and often conflicting definitions. Discourse is the name post-structuralists give to such system of meaning-assigning practices, or articulations, generated through political interventions. A discourse like Orientalism, for example, constitutes the historically and contextually variable conditions of possibility of what one says, thinks, and do about “the Orient,” for it establishes the very horizon for the construction of any meaningful object within “the Orient” (Said, 1979). Yet, Edward Said’s own work also stands as the proof that it is a *contingent* horizon that can be challenged, undermined and ultimately transformed.

In this sense, following Saussure and Derrida, Laclau and Mouffe hold that all objects are objects of discourse, imbued with meanings that depend entirely upon the particular ways in which they are articulated within a discourse (2001 [1985]). As the pioneers of third generation discourse theory, they define discourse in a way akin to what Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, calls a ‘language game’ (1983, 5). A discourse or a discursive structure is the ‘whole’ that consists both ‘language and the actions into which it is woven’, as in Wittgenstein’s example of a builder and an assistant building with assorted stones, where a

builder utters the words “block”, “slab”, “beam” and “pillar”, and his assistant passes the stones for him to insert them into the wall. Elements that comprise subjects, words and actions are identified and rendered intelligible within the context of the activity of constructing the wall. This is, of course, not to say that those stones, words and individuals do not exist independently of discourse but simply their meanings do not:

‘The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of ‘natural phenomena’ or ‘expressions of the wrath of God’ depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence’ (Laclau & Mouffe 2001 [1985], 108).

This is precisely the reason why, following Gramsci and Derrida, post-structuralist discourse theory defines discourses as intrinsically *political* systems of social relations and practices striving for hegemony, for their very formation is an act of radical institution of frontiers that privileges certain meanings as “inside” and exclude others as “outside”. Defining an earthquake as wrath of God is not simply an interpretation or reading that is “out there,” so to say. In pre-modern world, this was rather a radical political act that situated earthquake within an extensive set of relational meanings and practices, which, in turn, instituted and reproduced the *hegemonic* status of the Church discourse and the clergy, while excluding the subscribers of other competing discourses—be it scientific or religious—as heretics. It gave way to a specific set of social configurations with concrete effects in the areas of economy, government and judiciary, establishing patterns for institutional and personal relationships between divergent actors while claiming countless lives in the process. It actively constructed a “society of insiders” that was pitted against excluded “outsiders”, whom it violently dismissed, suppressed and often annihilated.

This is the point where Laclau’s provocative statement “society does not exist” fits. In the ‘infinite of the social’ where ‘any system of meaning is contingent, contextual, and relational’, discourses offer us stability through assigning meanings to social subjects, objects and relations between them at the expense of infinite others that are left out (Howarth 2004, 266). They provide us with what Frederic Jameson calls ‘cognitive mappings’ (1990). As John

Dryzek suggests, discourses are a ‘shared way of apprehending the world’ enabling us to ‘interpret bits of information and put them together into coherent stories and accounts’ (Dryzek 1997, 8). But the very concept of “society” is predicated upon the idea that it is possible to reach at an intelligible and unified whole providing exhaustive patterns of relationality between all social meanings, a ‘founding totality’ upon which knowledge can be originated (Marchart 2007, 2018). Be it base-superstructure model, causal mechanisms or rational choice model, all epistemological visions of “society” is misconducted insofar as ‘the fact that any structural system is limited, that it is always surrounded by an “excess of meaning” which it is unable to master and that, consequently, “society” as a unitary and intelligible object which grounds its own partial processes is an impossibility’ (Laclau 1990, 90). Thus there is no such thing as *a* society or *the* society but multiple *societies* that are politico-discursive constructs locked in a perpetual struggle for *hegemony*.

In their interventions to understand Turkish politics beyond the essentialist binaries of state/society, Islam/secularism, East/West and so on, a generation of discourse theorists affiliated with the Essex School studied Kemalism as such a phenomenon (Sayyid 1997; Çelik 1999; Yeğen 2001; Arısan 2006). Analysing Kemalist actors, thoughts, and projects through the lenses of discourse theory, they have offered a critical interpretation of it as a political discourse which has ceaselessly strived for achieving the impossible goal of a totally grounded Turkish society. Arısan’s work, in this sense, accounts for the Kemalist perception of political power as all-encompassing, omnipotent, and founding force (Arısan 2006). Çelik, in turn, shows that Kemalist policies, as dictated by their guiding myth of *founding* such a unitary whole that would perfectly account for all its components, often took the form of social engineering in a two-fold attempt to both construct a completely homogenous society devoid of any divisions *and* eliminate counter-hegemonic discourses that could reactivate the heterogeneity of its outside (Çelik 1999). While Sayyid’s work (1997) investigates the far-reaching implications of such Kemalist attempts to render counter-hegemonic discourse of Islamism invisible, Yeğen (2001, 2007) chronicles the Kemalist nationalism’s turbulent discursive trajectory as it has repeatedly failed in subduing the counter-hegemonic challenge posed by the Kurdish political cause. The analysis undertaken in the following chapter incorporates these studies into a novel reading of Kemalist notion of “the people” [*halk*] which accounts for the epistemological and ideological roots of its discursive re-articulation with “the nation” [*millet*], resulting in a peculiar principle of *halkçılık* [populism].

3.2.2. The Political and Its Logics

Unlike anti-foundationalism, post-foundationalism does not consider this impossibility of society ever reaching at a final grounding as a gateway to ultimate relativism but rather sees it as the very condition of possibility for *the political*. This is because the residual excess of meaning that is bound to remain out of the frontiers of any one social also paves the way for an ‘infinite play of differences’ which Laclau and Mouffe calls the discursive (Laclau 1990, 172; Glynos & Howarth 2007, 113-117; Mouffe 2005). The political, in this sense, functions on an infinite terrain of discursivity, instituting and contesting social regimes and practices.

In the first place, *the political*, following Derrida, is an attempt to fixate the “social” by drawing its frontiers, to create, however temporarily, a finite order of meanings, a hegemonic discourse within an infinitude, that strives to ‘proceed to a relative fixation of the social through the institution of *nodal points*’ (Laclau 1990, 90-1). As the privileged condensations of meaning, these points partially fix the identities of chains of signifiers and, consequently, make it possible to form a temporarily stable discourse around themselves (Torfing 1999, 98). As Marchart (2007) and Marttila (2015) both argue, the *post-* rather than anti- prefix in post-foundationalism implies that reaching such a temporary and relative fixation is not only possible but necessary, for we need a stable system of meaning so that we can avoid getting lost in a ‘psychotic’ universe where there is no fixed meaning at all (Laclau 2005, 70-71; Laclau & Mouffe 2001 [1985], 112-113). The process of reaching a temporarily stable system of meanings corresponds to what post-foundationalist discourse theory, following Husserl, calls discursive *sedimentation*, which consists in forgetting the contingent origins of the social and mistaking them as mere objective presences (Laclau 1997, 34-5; Marttila 2015, 42-50; Marchart 2018, 90-93). Disarticulating socially meaningful practices, institutions and objects from those discourses which gave rise to them in the first place, the process of sedimentation temporarily stabilises hegemonic discourses and the prevailing social orders they generate. That is to say, it naturalises the prevailing social order by equalising what it is, i.e. objectivity, with what it has always been. Thus sedimentation-qua-forgetting, as Glynos and Howarth emphasise, reproduces the hegemonic discourse by restraining the capacity of social subjects to recognise, evaluate, challenge and replace the prevailing social order (2007, 116). A socially ritualistic practice such as male circumcision, for instance, has been so deeply sedimented into contemporary Turkish Islamic “tradition” that its contingent discursive roots in pagan religions and Judaism—along with the fact that it is not even mentioned in Quran itself and, unlike Jewish circumcision, there is no rules regulating timing or procedure—are all but forgotten, turning it

into a ritual whose repetition alone has been maintaining this practice and, by extension, reproducing the hegemony of ‘Turkish-Islamic synthesis’ discourse (Çetinsaya 1999). So much so that forced circumcision of Armenians, Greeks and Yazidi Kurds at various points of the 20th century was part and parcel of the infamous policy of Turkification (Bobelian 2009, 28-9; de Zayas 2007; Jwadih 2006, 20).

Nonetheless, the political comprises of not only sedimentation but also ‘reactivation,’ which denotes processes that give way to a revival of the subjective appreciation of the contingent and anything but self-evident character of socially meaningful objects, practices, institutions and the like (Laclau 1990, 34-5; Laclau & Mouffe 2001 [1985], viii). In its reactivating dimension, the political gives way to the ‘rediscovery of the contingent nature of the so-called “objectivity”’ (Laclau 1990, 35), whereby social subjects, usually in the course of socio-political and/or economic crises, come to realise that things have not always been the way they currently are and ‘thus disclosing the potential for different constructions’ (Glynos & Howarth 2007, 116). That is to say, as Mouffe formulates it in Lacanian terminology, the political in its reactivating dimension corresponds to the ‘return of the repressed’ – reinvigoration of what is negated/suppressed in the original moment of institution of the hegemonic social order (Mouffe 1993). In order to illustrate this point more clearly, let us briefly recall another dimension of the official discourse of Turkish nationalism: its categorical denial of the Armenian genocide despite vast amount of evidence gathered from first-hand accounts of the survivors and perpetrators, historical research on various national archives, international conventions and the like conclusively showing that at least about a million Armenians were annihilated by the Ottoman Empire during the course of World War I (Akçam 2012). Let alone acknowledging what happened, Turkish state often goes out of its way to lobby foreign governments not to utter the word “genocide” in their annual statements of remembrance (Hudson 2015; Zarifian 2018), and even prosecute Turkish citizens who publicly call it so (Aybak 2016). The reason why it is of such vital significance for Turkish state to eradicate the signifier “genocide” from public discourse is that, in Laclaudian terms, it could potentially trigger a ‘reactivation’ process revealing ‘the terrain of the original violence’ through which the ‘instituting act’ of Turkish national identity took place (Laclau 1990, 34) – which, in turn, could lead social subjects to start questioning the necessity of the prevailing statist social order as well as the ultra-nationalist and conservative discourses motivating it.

If the political is about the institution and contestation of the social regimes and practices through contingent acts and decisions that either ‘normalize and naturalize social relations’

(Torfing 1999, 35) or ‘attempt to disarticulate...[the prevailing discourse] in order to install another form of hegemony’ (Mouffe 2014, 181-82), political logics are the analytical tools offered within the post-foundationalist discourse theoretical framework to unveil the underlying grammar of those acts and decisions in two opposing yet interconnected categories. While the *logic of equivalence* involves formation and reinforcement of new frontiers that simplify the political space by splitting it into two opposing camps, the *logic of difference* is concerned with acts and decisions that are aimed to impede or shatter this process of drawing frontiers by expanding and complexifying it (Laclau & Mouffe 1985 [2001], 129-30; Howarth et.al. 2000, 11-12).

To clarify these logics, Glynos and Howarth (2007) invoke the example of a struggle between national liberation forces and an occupying colonial power. While the nationalists would characteristically try to ‘cancel out the particular differences of class, ethnicity, region, or religion in the name of a more universal nationalism that can serve as a common reference point,’ colonialists would ‘attempt to break down these chains of equivalence’ through ‘the age-old practice of divide and rule,’ aimed at separating ‘nationalist groups into particular communities’ (Ibid., 144-45). Although the political space depicted by an equivalential logic is a crudely simplistic one in which the meanings are condensed around two antagonistic poles, it serves the goal of national liberation perfectly. The logic of difference, conversely, provides such a complex picture that it weakens the sharp antagonistic polarity between the occupied and the occupier. Leaving no space for a collective mobilisation between different communities, it is best suited for the purposes of colonialists.

In his study on the changing Kurdish political discourses in Turkey from the 1960s onwards, Cengiz Güneş (2011) skilfully identifies the co-presence of both these political logics. Utilizing Glynos and Howarth’s approach, Güneş shows that the success of the Kurdish national liberation discourse—most prominently voiced by the illegal Kurdish Workers’ Party [PKK]—laid in its equivalential capacity to ‘articulate the demands of various sectors of the Kurdish society, including students, the newly urbanised Kurdish workers and...peasants’ who experienced a drastic dislocation under market reforms and rapid industrialisation: ‘The suitability of the PKK’s national liberation discourse to address the problems experienced by these groups and offer a convincing interpretation of their plight enabled it to hegemonise Kurdish resistance against the state’ (Güneş 2011, 34). Through such an equivalential logic articulating these otherwise differential ‘Kurdish masses of rural peasants, workers, and students’ antagonistically against both the Turkish state and the Kurdish feudal elites, the

PKK's nationalist discourse aimed at 'uniting Kurdistan and constructing a socialist society' (Ibid., 30). In the later pro-Kurdish democratic discourse, conversely, Güneş identifies the predominance of a 'differential articulation of Kurdish national demands as part of numerous other democratic demands,' which assisted pro-Kurdish political actors in their attempts to 'weaken the antagonisms' between the Kurds and Turkish state, and instead 'promote political reconciliation and democracy in Turkey' (Ibid., 30, 142). Emphasising the historical unity of the two "peoples," pro-Kurdish parties of the 2000s pursued a policy of greater cooperation with other, non-Kurdish groups 'who also advocate political change and democracy', rearticulating what used to be Kurdish national demands as demands for the recognition of cultural rights, 'without putting forward a proposal to construct a Kurdish nation state': 'Instead, Kurdistan's national unity has been conceived within the Democratic Union of the Middle East and a civic and a pluralist model of citizenship based on territory – 'citizenship of Turkey' – is proposed as a common identity' (Ibid., 142).

The logics approach is utilised also in the studies of protest movements in Turkey. Analysing the government and opposition discourses surrounding the Gezi Events, Mercan & Özşeker (2015) and Mert (2019) identify the equivalential logics at work on both sides of the conflict. Mert's work, on the one hand, utilises it to explain how the protests managed to unite the 'demands of the protestors in the park and other democratic demands in the society' in opposition to the AKP government by bringing 'semantic constellations of ecological conservation, cultural pluralism, and democratisation' together. (Mert 2019, 597). Having successfully emptied out of the signifier 'Gezi Park' through their collective decision to stop using political party banners, Mert maintains, protests managed to expand its appeal to 'various groups that did not stand together before but were all antagonised by the establishment' (Ibid., 600-601). Rather than attempting to rearticulate the protestors' demands in a differential way so that it could break the equivalential chain in-between by addressing them individually, Mercan & Özşeker present that the government discourse doubled down on the equivalential logic by offering a 'total, uniform image of the opposition' that only consolidated the antagonistic relationship protest discourse fostered further: 'In Erdoğan's discourse, all of them were opposed to the rise of Turkey and lacked morality, doing nothing but burning and destroying' (Mercan & Özşeker 2015, 101).

3.3. Laclaudian Notion of Populism

Relying on the post-foundationalist ontology and discourse theoretical conceptualisation of politics outlined above, we can propose that the relationship between these logics of equivalence and difference ought to be seen as one of a ceaseless struggle for predominance over the terms of political vocabulary, exerting their articulatory influences simultaneously to determine how any given politics is arranged—a struggle which accounts for the radical contingency of all political arrangements (Gürhanlı 2015, 170-75; 2018, 58-62). This would be in harmony with the way in which Laclaudian notion of politics as ‘operating at the diverse points of a continuum’ between two theoretical extremes: ‘pure institutionalism’ and ‘pure populism’ (Laclau 2005, 45). It is imperative to note that, for Laclau, both of these “pure” discourses constitute the inaccessible extremes of politics, that is, ‘points of logical impossibilities whose concurrent presence and tension are nonetheless prerequisites of the very existence of politics and its perpetual movement on that continuum’ (Gürhanlı 2018, 59). In Laclau’s words, ‘[t]ension and reflection’ between these poles ‘can be contingently combined in unstable equilibria, but neither is entirely able to eliminate the other’ (Laclau 2007, 120).

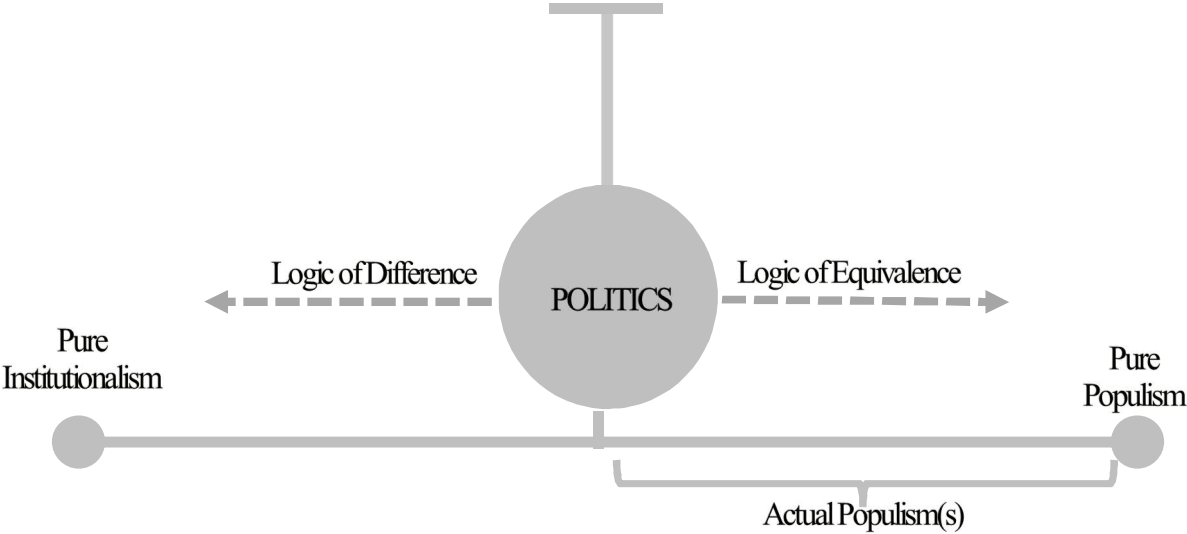


Figure 1 - Laclaudian Continuum of Politics

The figure above may help us explain our original understanding of Laclaudian theory of politics and populism better. At one impossible end we can locate *pure institutionalism*, which is exclusively predominated by a logic of difference which brings forth only the disparities between particularities and therefore eliminates any ground for their partial identification with one another (Laclau 2007, 62-63; Laclau 2005, 45). Laclau argues time and again that a social determined by the institutionalist discourse alone would amount to ‘the dismissal of politics

tout court’ and reduce it to the level of administration (2007, x). It would liken those totally reconciled, utopian imaginaries such as Platonic republic, Disraelian “one nation” or, indeed, Marxist communism, where the particular elements constituting a “society” are absorbed into the system in a completely individual manner and transformed into objective differences with absolutely nothing in common but their existence under one community. As the positive nature of all its terms is established within an infinitely static structure, there would be absolutely no ground for ‘dislocation’, hence for politics (Laclau 1990, 71-72; 2007, 78). In actual cases, nevertheless, the political arrangements where the logic of difference prevails—left half of the continuum in the figure above—liken more of the consensus seeking, post-political regimes of contemporary Western Europe where popular interests and demands tend to be dealt with in a technocratic and/or legal manner as part of the supposedly non-political universal discourses of human rights and free market economy, leaving little space for the formulation of collective political identities (Mouffe 2000; Crouch 2004; Habermas 2013; Wilson & Swyngedouw 2014).

At the opposite end of Laclaudian political continuum, we locate an equally impossible discourse of *pure populism*. It is a discourse articulated solely through a logic of equivalence, proclaiming the complete collapse of all social differences into a singularity and, therefore, leaving no room for a differential presence of particular identities (Gürhanlı 2015, 172). Laclau raises the Freudian notion of libidinal groups whose members are tied to one another solely through their love for the narcissistic leader as an example of this impossibly wholesome presence of equivalential logic (2007, 52-60, 82). Placing the leader into the place of his/her ego-ideal, each member of such groups reach a point of complete identification with one another, resulting in a total consumption of their particular identities under ‘the name of the leader’ (2005, 40): ‘The equivalential logic leads to singularity, and singularity to the identification of the unity of the group with the name of the leader’ (2007, 100). On a macro-political level, we can maintain that, at this impossible extreme that Laclau calls “pure populism,” political discourses conceive the social as a homogeneous whole whose coherence would be exclusively determined by the presence of a frontier separating the “people” from its constitutive outside. This is analogous to the discourses of religious and political groups constructed around personality cult whereby total identification with a messianic figure of the leader alone constitutes the identity of the movement and incredulous “others” its outside (Downton 1973; Bass 1988, 50–52; Kets de Vries 1988, 242–45; Dawson 2003). The world here is so infinitely separated between a righteous movement and its negative reverse evil-

incarnated that there exists no difference within those camps. Each and every element constituting either of these groups becomes identical with one another, bearing no particularity of their own.

Contrary to general assumption that its theoretically dense account renders Laclaudian conception of populism somehow confusing and inaccessible, this close reading that lays out its ontological premises enables us to see it as a rather straightforward definition: Populism is a *discourse* in which the logic of equivalence prevails over that of difference—right half of the continuum in the figure above. Like all discourses, populism institutes the social by imposing a finite and intelligible whole of meaning: a totality. Nevertheless, what makes a discourse distinctively populist is that the totality it institutes is predominantly articulated around an antagonistic division. It is concerned primarily with the construction of a political identity around the *nodal point* of “the people” (Stavrakakis 2017a), which functions as a ‘privileged discursive point that partially fixes meaning within signifying chains’ (Torfing 1999, 98). Welding an equivalential chain between various differential elements whose shared “lack” is conceived as resulting directly from the existence of an “other”, “the people” is juxtaposed to a *constitutive outside* that is at once its nemesis and necessary condition of possibility of its existence. The “people” of populism is, therefore, a partial component that aspires to be conceived as the only legitimate totality by instituting a frontier of exclusion, ‘a part which identifies itself with the whole’ (Laclau 2007, 82; Canovan 2005, 78-79; Rancière 1999, 123). Content of those elements and the collective identity that emerges from their equivalential articulation, of course, depend on the particular situation in which a populist discourse takes place. It is the financial and political EU elite and its domestic collaborators which functioned as the constitutive outside and negatively brought together the dispossessed, unemployed and indebted Greeks and Spaniards under the banner of “λαός” [the people] for Syriza and *indignados* for Podemos (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014; Ekhlund 2019). In French politics, on the other hand, *le peuple* gets articulated with *la nation* and becomes the name that represents many behind the populist radical-right discourse of the National Front, some longing for a safer social environment, others ethno-culturally and linguistically homogenous society, still others better economic conditions or more transparent political institutions, but all against the Parisian and European “elite” and non-native groups, policies, and values those elite promote at the expense of the French nation (Stavrakakis et.al. 2017b, 430-32; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, 34-5).

This original bidimensional depiction enables us to see the reasoning behind Laclau's controversial claim that equalises populism with politics *tout court*. The ineradicable presence of populism in politics stems from the impossibility of ever reaching the point where the logic of equivalence is entirely absent, i.e. pure institutionalism. There is always an excess of meaning that destabilises its coincidence with the limits of the social. This is why, he insists, 'there is no political intervention which is not populist to some extent' and, thus, the question is not if, but 'to what degree' populism is present in a given discourse (Laclau 2007, 81, 154; 2005, 45).

Yet a peculiarity arises when we consider the supposedly impossible point of extreme that is pure populism. Here, Laclau's argument implies that logic of equivalence and populism is one and the same thing, hence his naming of the limit case in which equivalential logic runs unabated as *pure* populism. But in the same breath he also maintains that by its very essence, the equivalential logic—which is the same as populism—necessarily leads to 'singularity' and singularity, in turn, to the 'identification of the unity of the group with the name of the leader' (2007, 100). Emphasising the conceptual overlap between logic of equivalence and populism compels us to conclude that Laclaudian approach tacitly, and only so, acknowledges the presence of a fundamental predisposition towards personification in populism. This is also the point Nadia Urbinati (2013) raises in her critical account of populism, taking an issue with the Laclaudian theory's overtly optimistic take which, according to her, not only overlooks the 'problem of Caesarism' in populism, but also tends to identify populism 'with democracy itself' as a 'more egalitarian and democratic politics than the one obtained through representative procedures' (Urbinati 2013, 142). It is indeed true that the Laclaudian approach consistently downplays those democratically unsavory instances where populist discourses take the personalist forms like Peronism. Laclau insists that it is not personalisation that qualifies populism but the egalitarian instinct a discourse like Peronism puts into motion 'through dichotomies such as the people versus the oligarchy, toiling masses versus exploiters, and so on' (Laclau 2007, 18). Relatedly, his approach often assigns populism an emancipatory mission to 'postulate a radical alternative' and offer a 'choice at the crossroads' (Laclau 2005, 47). Which leads us to suspect that his theory shares the 'emancipatory apriorism' Oliver Marchart detects in some other post-foundationalist thinkers like Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière, who are willing to categorise "political" as such only insofar as it refers to egalitarian and emancipatory endeavours (2007, 156-59). In other words, Laclaudian account seems too close for comfort to committing a similar fallacy to those who conceptualise populism on the basis

of Western European experiences and, reduce the notion of populism exclusively to its right-wing form (discussed above in 2.4.)—just from the left-side of the ideological spectrum.

This latent feature of the Laclaudian theory—i.e. its tendency to downplay populism’s predisposition towards personalisation for the benefit of promoting an emancipatory definition—remains largely unaccounted for within the discourse theoretically informed studies on Turkish politics. Due to their inadvertent adoption of this tendency, they operationalise the theory exclusively vis-à-vis emancipatory and left-leaning instances of popular mobilisation such as the Gezi Park protests, where it can be most seamlessly applied (Merican & Özşeker 2015; Özen 2015; Damar 2016; Onbaşı 2016; Tekdemir 2016; Mert 2019). Conversely, having accounted for it in this chapter, our own analysis examining the discursive trajectory of the AKP in the chapters 5 and 6 demonstrates populism’s predisposition towards personification *in action* and argues that rather than being a mere limit concept, Laclaudian notion of “pure populism” is an actually realisable political arrangement that is observed most clearly when the AKP’s discourse reaches at its nativist and authoritarian zenith in the form of *Erdoğanism*.

3.4. Discourse Theoretical Methodology and Materials

As detailed throughout this chapter, rather than taking politics as merely representing pre-existing socio-political categories, a post-foundationalist discourse theoretical approach invites us to focus on how political discourses *construct* those categories they claim to represent. Since all social meanings are constructed in a relational manner and at the expense of others that are excluded, the task here is to recognise signifiers that are actually included in a given discourse, roles they play and the way in which they interact, so that the resultant structures of meaning can be consistently identified. In communist discourse, for instance, while ‘class struggle’ plays such a central role that it functions as a *nodal point* through which other signifiers like ‘society’, ‘democracy’, ‘freedom’, and ‘state’ acquire their corresponding meanings, the signifier ‘individual’ hardly means anything (Žižek 1989, 96). This is related to the fact that discourses assign meanings also to individuals by allocating them certain *subject positions* with which to identify—like in the above-mentioned cases of hegemonic discourse of the Catholic Church (‘Christian’ or ‘heretic’) and Turkish-Islamic synthesis (‘Turk’ or ‘infidel’)—pitting those identities against ‘*constitutive outsides*’ in each instance (Howarth et.al. 2000, 12-13).

While some recent works in the general field of discourse analysis have already turned this discourse theoretical framework into a solid methodology (Angermüller 2014; Angermüller

et.al. 2014), others from the so-called Essex school have gone even further and employed it in various empirical studies on populism (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014; Katsambekis 2017; De Cleen 2016; De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017; Stavrakakis et.al. 2017b; De Cleen et.al. 2019). For the purposes of this dissertation, discourse-theoretical conceptualization of populism these latter works have developed offers a suitable methodological framework. As part of their attempts to free the concept of populism from its reductionist association with radical-right politics, these studies tackle populism and nationalism as two distinct discourses, which *construct*, rather than simply represent, the categories of “the people” and “the nation” through welding other, secondary signifiers such as state, democracy etc. around these *nodal points* (De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017; De Cleen et.al. 2019). In parallel with our own depiction of Laclaudian theory of populism developed above, they define it as:

‘a dichotomic discourse in which ‘the people’ are juxtaposed to ‘the elite’ primarily along the lines of a down/up antagonism in which ‘the people’ is discursively constructed as a large powerless group through opposition to ‘the elite’ conceived as a small and illegitimately powerful group. Populist politics thus claim to represent ‘the people’ against an ‘elite’ that frustrates their legitimate demands, and presents its demands as expressions of the will of ‘the people’ (Stavrakakis & De Cleen, 2017; De Cleen et.al. 2019, 6).

The fundamental question in the formulation of a research agenda utilising the discourse theoretical approach to populism is, therefore, whether the particular discourse under investigation is articulated around the nodal point “the people” or other non-populist nodal points (nation, class, etc.). Also of significance is the extent of the predominance of the equivalential logic that divides the social antagonistically between “the people” and “the elite.” The most innovative dimension this recent discourse theoretical framework brings into the studies of populism, however, is their inclusion of *political architectonics* into the discussion (Dyrberg 2003, 2006). Concerned with the different ways in which discourses can and do construct socio-political antagonisms around various spatial metaphors—like left/right, up/down, inside/outside, front/closed and so on—political architectonics examines how signifiers get articulated into producing particular structures of meaning through such metaphors. Populist discourses, in this sense, do not merely pit the people and the elite antagonistically against one another as equals, so to say, but do so in *vertical* spatial-orientational terms, whereby the people is articulated as a *down-group* (the underdog, the non-

privileged, the ‘many’) in opposition to the *up-group* of the elite (the establishment, the ruling class, the power bloc, the few) (De Cleen et.al. 2019, 7).

Divergently, nationalism, in its attempt to conceal the constructed nature of “the nation” (Anderson 1983 [2006]) and arrest its radical contingency (Sutherland 2005), relies on a *horizontal* division:

Nationalism is a discourse structured around the nodal point “nation”, envisaged as a limited and sovereign community that exists through time and is tied to a certain space, and that is constructed through an in/out opposition between the nation and its out-groups (De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017, 308; De Cleen et.al. 2019, 6).

As a discourse that is far less ‘thin’ than populism (Freeden 1997, 2018), nationalism represents the world as consisting of distinct nations that reside in their distinct territories separated by distinct borders. Constructing “the nation” as an organic, rather than imagined, community that all its members are presumed to be part of, nationalism bestows upon it a shared sense of past, present, and future, which serves to separate members from non-members horizontally between an *in-group* and an *out-group* (De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017, 309-10).

Formal Criterion	Populism	Nationalism
Nodal Point and claim to represent	The people-as-underdog	The nation and/or the people-as-nation
Subject position offered	Member of the people	Member of the nation
Constitutive Outside	The elite/establishment	Non-natives and/or other nations
Orientation of relationship between nodal point and constitutive outside(s)	Vertical: Down/Up (on the basis of hierarchy, power, recognition, incorporation, socio-economic identity)	Horizontal: In/Out (on the basis of national identity or membership, with a socio-cultural component,)

Source: Adapted from De Cleen & Stavrakakis (2017) and De Cleen et.al. (2019)

Table 2 - Discourse Theoretical Conception of Populism & Nationalism

It is significant to remember that, in accordance with the presuppositions of post-foundationalist ontological inquiry discussed above, populism and nationalism here are conceptualised as discourses functioning on a higher level of abstraction than those political agents (parties, leaders and so on) which are generally classified as “populists” or “nationalists” on an ontic level. The aim here is instead to identify their discursive structures that *makes* them populist or

nationalist in isolation from all other dimensions (De Cleen et.al. 2019, 5). Crucially, this is not to say that populist and nationalist political actors function on mutually exclusive discursive domains but, conversely, that a conceptual distinction clear enough to delineate those two would enable us to account for the complex relationship between populist and nationalist dimensions of a given discourse.

This means that when a particular discourse such as the AKP's articulates elements of populism and nationalism—as we suspect it does—our investigation into them should concentrate around an analysis of the 'respective location of the populist and nationalist signifiers, of the degree to which those discourses revolve around the vertical down/up or horizontal in/out axis respectively, and of the signifying relations that are forged between the populist and nationalist signifiers' (De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017, 313). Identification of nodal points and a focus on the political architectonics can assist us in discovering the nature of the relationship between populism and nationalism, as well as the relative significance of each to the discourses of Kemalism and the AKP. Though both “the people-as-underdog” (along with its constitutive outside “the elite”) and “the nation” (and its outsides) would be present in all discourses that articulate the two, they would function at varying degrees of centrality in each case. Thus in order to understand how Kemalist and AKP discourses produce meanings, we need to ask which of those signifiers is situated at the heart of these discourses. Since articulating nationalism with populism entails combining the vertical orientation of the first with the horizontal orientation of the latter, the question is: Which axis is most central in Kemalist and AKP discourses? If populism plays a central role, the vertical antagonism between “people-as-underdog” and “the elite” would have the primacy, assembling a multiplicity of demands and opposing them to “the elite” *up there*. In contrast, in cases where nationalism stands at the hearth of a discourse—as in the populist radical right politics—vertical antagonism would be largely determined by the horizontal one: ‘positions on the down/up axis (who belongs to “the people-as-underdog” and why, and who belongs to “the elite” and why) are derivative of positions on the nationalist in/out axis (Ibid., 314).

This discourse theoretical framework offers a particularly suitable methodology for the purposes of this research, which analyses the discursive trajectories of Kemalism and AKP. This is primarily because it accounts for the fluidity of the relationship between populism and nationalism with a special emphasis on the varying degrees of centrality they may enjoy depending on the discourse in question. As discussed in Chapter I and revisited at the end of the previous section (3.3.), the main argument we put forth in this dissertation vis-à-vis the

Laclaudian theory of populism relies on an examination of the AKP's discursive path from populism to radical-right, which could be most fittingly accomplished through the methodological framework introduced above. While the relative centrality "the people-as-nation" enjoys more and more at the expense of "the people-as-underdog" as the nodal point of the AKP's discourse hints at a discursive move away from populism to nationalism, the switching subject position from "member of the people" to "member of the nation" and finally to "Erdoğanist" enables us to discern the discursive juxtaposition between the nation and the name of the leader. Similarly the trajectory *constitutive outside(s)* have followed from its initial identification of the Kemalist elite and the establishment with the "other of the people" all the way to "anti-Erdoğanists" indicates at an extreme logic of simplification at work whereby insubordination to the "leader" alone becomes the criteria for a subject to be excluded from the "the nation."

Before we move on, a cautionary note on this particular methodology would be needed: By their own admission, these scholars aim at cultivating not just empirical and analytical but also a 'normative' benefit through such a conceptual differentiation between populism and nationalism, which would allow them to avoid 'the amalgamating tendency to denounce' instances of left-wing populism for posing as equal a threat as their right-wing counterparts to democracy (De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017, 304). They lament that the 'dangers of *ultra-nationalism*' that are predominantly displayed in right-wing variants of populism are often instrumentalised to 'denounce forms of populist politics that have very little to do with such ultra-nationalism' (Ibid.). Justified as it is, considered jointly with the latent emancipatory apriorism of the Laclaudian approach to populism these studies are based on, this normative dimension should serve as a reminder for this dissertation to thread rather carefully in its analysis and not to fall into the same pitfall where populist, democratic and emancipatory politics would become virtually indistinguishable from one another.

As part of its investigation through the intellectual roots of the Kemalist notion of populism [*halkçılık*] in Chapter 4, this research relies heavily on the works of the most prominent scholars of late Ottoman and early Turkish political thought, including Şerif Mardin (1962[2000]; 1964[2008]), Şükrü Hanioglu (1995, 2001), Bernard Lewis (1968), Niyazi Berkes (1959, 1964[1968], 1975[2019]), Taha Parla (1985), and Zafer Toprak (1984, 1995, 2011, 2013), all of which are almost universally utilized as reference works due to invaluable archival research they are based on and translations they provide of the texts written in Ottoman alphabet. Additionally the chapter makes use of a variety of primary sources where the notions

of people [*halk*] and populism [*halkçılık*] were formulated as part of the Kemalist ideology, including Mustafa Kemal's own speeches between 1919 and 1937 that are collected in three volumes (Atatürk 2006), CHP party programs (CHP 1927, 1931, 1935, 1939), as well as the writings of the two leading theoreticians of Turkish nationalism, Ziya Gökalp (1911[1999]; 1913[1972]; 1918a[2007]; 1918b[2007]) and Yusuf Akçura (1912[1976], 1913a, 1913b, 1925[1984]) when these are available in modern Turkish. The examination of the AKP's discourse undertaken in Chapters 5 and 6, in turn, makes use of a number of primary sources. Having visited the AKP headquarters in Istanbul in early 2013, I have obtained an extensive collection of speeches Erdoğan delivered in formal occasions between 2002 and 2007 in digital format. These include his addresses to the nation (2008b), speeches delivered at parliamentary group meetings (2006b, 2008a), domestic (2005b, 2006d, 2007, 2008d) and international occasions (2006c, 2008c). Hasan Sarı's collection of 550 speeches Erdoğan delivered between 2002 and 2010 provides an additional, conveniently edited resource that contains speeches Erdoğan made at less formal occasions. Unfortunately, my subsequent requests to receive his more recent speeches were denied by the staff at the AKP library. Though I can only speculate on why, the timing of my requests—in the aftermath of the turbulent period of Gezi Events and graft probes—could have had an influence. Thus, for the later years, this research relies on open news sources listed below. In addition to Erdoğan's speeches, the research utilises the AKP party programme (2002a), and election declarations (2002b; 2007; 2011; 2015a; 2015b). Of particular interest in the case of examining the AKP's early discourse are writings of the party ideologue Yalçın Akdoğan (2004, 2005, 2006, 2010) who, as an academic well-acquainted with the mainstream Turkish political science literature, had an immense role in formulating the so-called "conservative democratic" ideology of the party. Thus, his ideas are scrutinised in detail in Chapter 5. The next group of primary sources used in the analysis of the AKP's discourse consists of a selection of op-eds by the most vocal supporters of the government (Bayar 2014; Bulut 2016; Diler 2014; Eseyan 2016; Kıran 2018; Metiner 2016; Önal 2014; Ramoğlu 2016; Yılmaz 2015, 2016). Expectedly, they all appear in the pages of the staunchly pro-government dailies that are owned by politically affiliated conglomerates like Yeni Akit, Sabah, Star, Akşam, and Takvim and constitute an organic part of the AKP discourse in the later years, reverberating the party's rhetorical points and manufacturing popular consent for its policies (Tunç 2015). Finally, regarding the party's post-2007 discourse, these chapters also rely on non-affiliated Turkish and international news media (BBC, Deutsche Welle, Reuters, New York Times, Financial Times, Al-Monitor, Hürriyet and Hürriyet Daily News, Radikal, Milliyet) in

order to gather *only verbatim* statements from the AKP leadership, members, and supporters. These types of sources are categorised under the “News Items” in bibliography.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter presented the post-foundationalist discourse theoretical approach to populism as an alternative to the pejorative understanding of populism in mainstream political science scholarship. Relying on the body of work by Laclau, Mouffe, and others who are associated with the Essex School, it first offered an ontological, non-moralistic conceptualisation of populism as a distinct discourse that cross-cuts its empirical instances in various times and places. Following Derrida, the emphasis here was on the radically contingent and differentially constructed nature of social meanings and the productivity of this “openness” for the political, which is understood as a field of perpetual contestation over those meanings and antagonisms between competing discourses attempting to fixate them. Having conceptualised populism as a discourse operating on such an open field of discursivity, the chapter also drew the attention to the equivalential way in which it assigns meanings to otherwise differential elements through its privileged point of reference, its nodal point, that is *the people* and against a constitutive outside, that is *the elite*. This, in turn, led us to a rather straightforward definition of populism. Crucially, the chapter also presented an original reading of Laclaudian theory of populism that drew attention to a conceptual overlap which, in turn, leads his theory to mistakenly identify populism with emancipatory politics and overlook personalised forms of populist politics. Having accounted for the ever-present risk of personalisation in populism and extreme polarisation that comes with it, the chapter finally introduced a compatible methodology with a set of criteria that would assist us to operationalise the post-foundationalist approach in our analysis over the populist phenomenon in Turkish politics.

Chapter 4: Roots and Early Accounts of Populism in Turkey

4.1. Introduction

Populism in modern Turkey has a history that is longer than the country itself, dating back to the II. Constitutional Era [*II. Meşrutiyet*] in the Ottoman Empire during early 20th century. Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to undertake an exhaustive analysis of the developments of this period in Turkish political history, providing a however brief account of its intellectual turning points is indispensable for understanding the building blocks of today's populism, for the key terms, categories and limits of contemporary political discourse in Turkey owe their formulation to this era.

As though the vast conceptual ambiguity and seemingly unresolvable scholarly disagreements surrounding populism in global literature (discussed in chapter 2) is not enough, the peculiarities of Turkish language adds up yet another layer of complexity over its uses in Turkish literature. In the particular linguistic—and hence political and scholarly—context of Turkey, the word populism is a contronym. Also known as “Janus-words” contronyms are those words signifying two meanings that are each other's reverse, like the English word ‘fast’ meaning both ‘firmly fixed’ and ‘moving rapidly’ (Herring 1962). In contemporary Turkish language, there are two synonyms for the word populism, which are in fact reverses of one another: *halkçılık* and *popülizm*. As detailed in the following chapter, much of the literature on Turkish populism in the multi-party era (1946-onwards) uses the Turkified loanword *popülizm*, while situating its instances in a binary opposition to the Kemalist notion of *halkçılık* in single-party era (1923-45). Even further, they frequently identify the causes and characteristics of this later *popülizm* as outcomes of its reactionary origins against the earlier *halkçılık* (Mert 2001, 46). Having remained stuck within the “contronymous” limits of the term as meaning both *halkçılık* and *popülizm*, populism in the literature on Turkish politics is employed frequently, yet rarely in the company of a proper conceptual and theoretical discussion that would overcome this peculiarity and, hence, the “Turkish exceptionalism” along with it (Baykan 2014).

As we shall see in this chapter, the idea of *populism-qua-halkçılık* was first formulated and subsequently transformed within the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP), the umbrella organization of opposition against the Ottoman regime between 1889 and 1908, and the governing authority during II. Constitutional Era (1908-18). In its struggle against the Sultanate, the nationalist separatist movements, and the imperialist threat of European Great

Powers, the CUP developed an idiosyncratic ideology that gradually distanced from its early elitist positivism closer to a peculiar populism. Envisioning a distinct concept of “the people” [*halk*], leading intellectuals of this generation considered populism as their shared ‘political doctrine’ (Berkes 1959, 306). Insofar as ‘virtually every political leader in Turkey during the late 1920s’ as well as its first three presidents until 1960s were former CUP members, the modern Turkish state and its official ideology, *Kemalism*, are heavily indebted to this politico-intellectual legacy (Hanioğlu 1995, 4). So much so that *populism-qua-halkçılık* was included among the six pillars of Kemalist ideology (so-called ‘six-arrows’), along with laïcité, republicanism, revolutionism, etatism, and nationalism (Parla 2008).

Having been amended to the first constitution of Turkey in 1937, the six-arrows are still represented in the emblem of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) today. Most importantly, this particular brand of populism constituted the backbone of the single-party regime of CHP [1923-45], when the party formulated and justified its rule as well as the tremendous socio-political reforms and top-down modernising efforts it undertook with constant reference to the “populist principle”. This crucial role of populism has largely been overshadowed partly due to the disproportionate attention paid to another Kemalist principle, laïcité, despite the fact that ‘[i]n republican social engineering, “populism” offered as powerful an ideological tool as “laicism” did’ (Findley 2010, 280).

Interestingly enough, *Kemalism* and six-arrows are among those few empirical cases Laclau discusses in detail in *On Populist Reason* (2007, 208-14). Through a discussion over each arrow, Laclau argues that despite being a ‘radical, ruptural discourse,’ *Kemalism* was ‘never populist’ (Ibid. 208). On the contrary, because of the ‘homogenous’ way in which ‘the people’ were conceived of under the Kemalist principle of *populism-qua-halkçılık* as ‘a seamless community without internal fissures,’ he concludes that it had to be located ‘at the antipodes’ of populism (208-9). Rather than a truly populist ‘mass mobilisation,’ Laclau concludes, *Kemalist* rupture from Ottoman past and its revolutionary goal to ‘reshape’ a modern Turkish society had relied on ‘authoritarian imposition,’ attempting to ‘construct a “people” without popular support’ (213).

Although it reaches to a similar conclusion with Laclau by the end, this chapter provides a much more substantial account of the Kemalist principle of *populism-qua-halkçılık* as it was initially conceived, developed, transformed and finally incorporated into official ideology of modern Turkish state. It traces the ideological roots of populism in contemporary Turkish

politics first by examining its instigators, namely the CUP or Young Turks, as they desperately searched for a common political identity that would fit the populace of remaining territories in Anatolia and ignite a new sense of belonging among them.

The chapter then shows that their populist ideas were nourished mainly by two external sources: Russian Narodniki and Émile Durkheim's solidaristic ideas of society. These ideational resources were articulated most sophisticatedly by Turkish sociologist Ziya Gökalp into a peculiar populist doctrine in his writings during II. Constitutional Era, which strongly affected the founding fathers of modern Turkish Republic. Gökalp's early conceptualisation of populism in Narodniki lines was gradually transformed into Durkheimian model of society based on a solidarity between a strong middle class and a corporatist government. It was this peculiarly solidaristic notion of *populism-qua-halkçılık* which was eventually incorporated into the government programs of single party era [1923-1946], and constituted the backbone of official Kemalist discourse on Turkish nationalism.

Interestingly, the strongest challenges against the hegemony of Kemalism based on this solidaristic *populism-qua-halkçılık* principle would later be posed by those political actors who were subscribed to Gökalp's earlier, more Narodnik-influenced ideas. The following chapters demonstrate that the Turkish populism à la AKP in the 21st century build their discourses in opposition to Kemalist model and instead depict society as antagonistically divided between the ordinary, powerless people and corrupted, illegitimately powerful Kemalist elite.

4.2. "Save the State": Westernisation and Its Discontents

Taking over the city of Constantinople from the Byzantine Empire in 1453, the Ottoman Empire used to rule the Balkans, Anatolia, North Africa and much of the Arab world from the comfort and beauty this city provided for nearly a half millennium. At the peak of its power during the 17th century, the Empire controlled a vast territory, stretching from the outskirts of Vienna in Northwest Europe to Caspian Sea in the Northeast, and from Algeria in Southwest to Persian Gulf in the Southeast, incorporating all the land and people in between. Its approximately 35 million subjects included 21 million Muslims (Sunni and Shia) as well as 14 million Christians (13 million Orthodox and 1 million Catholic) and 150 thousands Jews (Elibol, 2007).

By the late 18th century, however, the Empire had long past its prime and already started to suffer through a period of major loss of sovereignty due to severe domestic and foreign

threats, which constituted the stimuli for opening a reformation era in the Empire's history. Externally, it suffered a series of disastrous military defeats against the Great Powers and failed to subdue nationalist movements in Balkans, losing much of its territories in Black Sea region and Southeast Europe. It was, however, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 which hammered the last nail in the military's coffin, triggering a process of rapid decline in Ottoman history where it ceased to be a European state and turned into a Middle-Eastern one (Shaw & Shaw 1971, 182-187). Internally, the greatest threat against the sovereignty of Sultanate was posed by the notables [*âyan*], 'a powerful, semi-feudal aristocracy' who 'possessed centrally-controlled taxation systems' as well as the right to 'recruit and maintain [their] own private army' (Turfan 2000, 47, 104). These notables had become so well-entrenched by the late 1700s that the Ottoman government had to give in to their demands in order to gather much-needed military resources against the culminating threat posed by the Great Powers (İnalçık 1977, 32). The Empire failed also economically during this period, finding itself unable to meet the new challenges of rapidly expanding global markets and industrial capitalism (Genç 2000, 88-9). Combined with hefty war reparations and a drastic decrease in state revenues, Ottoman economy had more and more difficulty to pay back its debts, and by the late 1800s 80% of state revenues went towards financing them (Hanioglu 2008, 19-24).

In the face of these challenges, modernisation became the utmost priority throughout the 19th century and remained as the 'driving force behind the whole complex of reforms' which, overall, aimed to imitate 'apparently successful ways' of European states (Zürcher 2010, 60-1, 73). Most significantly, the Empire officially initiated the Reformation Era [*Tanzimat*] in 1839 in order to stop the loss of sovereignty over non-Muslim territories and eventually save the state (Findley 1980). The era was characterised by the explicit goal of creating a modern conscripted army as well as a strong 'centralised government' in the European model that would be 'based on the New Ruling Class, the bureaucrats' (Shaw and Shaw 1977, 71).

Besides obvious infrastructural transformations, these reforms also necessitated modern education institutes in order to generate qualified manpower to carry the Ottoman state and military up to the European level (Zürcher 2010, 61). To meet this need, the Reformation Era established new schools and fundamentally restructured existing ones, replacing religiously oriented structure with 'a system of secular and utilitarian education to train all Ottomans from the elementary to the most advanced stages' (Shaw & Shaw 1977, 106-8). To acquire Western knowledge, promising students from these institutions were sent to Europe and for a short period there was even an Ottoman school in Paris (Findley 2010, 90-91). By the second half of

the 19th century, graduates of these modern institutions filled much of the Empire's new Weberian civilian and military bureaucracy, which was characterised by 'clear hierarchical relationships, division of labor, endless regulation and regular pay' (Zürcher 2010, 61).

It is important to note that these reformations were initially undertaken only as a means to prevail over the West, and thus thought to remain confined within the sphere of military and administrative technologies. However the intellectual spillover of a prolonged interaction with Europe produced some other, rather unexpected results. Most significant of which, as Şükrü Hanioglu observes, was 'the emergence of a distinguished group of intellectuals who envisaged an ideal society antithetical to the one they inhabited' (1995, 8). Humbled in the face of Western superiority, these young intellectuals considered their position in comparison with Europe as 'that of an uneducated child beside an accomplished scholar' (Hanioglu 2008, 104). For the first time they began not only to admire the Western values and traditions but compare them with their own in a realistic manner, which was no less than a 'turning point' in Ottoman intellectual history:

'Until then Ottoman political writers had analyzed every situation relative only to their own political system, and their proposed solutions were consistent with the boundaries of the status quo...Most of these analyses were based on the presumption of an ideal state of affairs in a bygone era [...] and current woes were contrasted with that paradigm. Solutions were drawn from the examples of that earlier time' (Hanioglu 1995, 9-10).

While most became integral cogs of the new Ottoman bureaucracy, some of this new elite 'became the self-appointed critics of the system' (Berkes 1959, 201-252). The most vocal of these groups, the Young Ottomans, formed in 1865 among former bureaucrats and immediately caused a stir in public opinion through their propaganda criticising the reformations mainly as a 'capitulation to European dictates' (Mardin 2000 [1962]; Hanioglu 2008, 103). Unlike more conservative critics of the time, Young Ottomans acknowledged the superiority of Europe but insisted on combining it with aspects of the Islamic tradition to keep the diverse ethno-religious elements under the Ottoman umbrella and "save the state": 'The solution, in their eyes, lay in introducing representative, constitutional and parliamentary government in the empire, thus instilling a true feeling of citizenship and loyalty to the state among all Ottoman subjects, Muslim and non-Muslim' (Zürcher 2004, 68).

Thus the Young Ottomans evolved from an opposition to Tanzimat bureaucracy into a wider political front brought together behind a unitary struggle for a constitutional regime based on the principle of “unity of the elements” [*ittihat-ı anasır*] (Mardin 2000 [1962]). Transforming all subjects into equal citizens before law under the doctrine of *Ottomanism*, such a constitution was considered to be the key to “save the state” by easing the strained relationships between Muslims and non-Muslim minorities, eradicating the grounds for ethnic nationalism, abolishing the privileges of notables and staving off the Western imposition of pro-Christian reforms (Hanioglu 2008, 110-121). That is to say, to put it in Laclaudian terminology, in the course of a ‘dislocatory’ systemic crisis that opened up cracks in the Sultanate’s hegemony, “constitutionalism” functioned as a nodal point in the Young Ottomans’ discourse, constructing an equivalential chain between otherwise differential ethno-religious identities and popular demands that had hitherto remained excluded and frustrated, uniting them under the empty signifier of “Ottomans” against the imperial regime and its elite. In the atmosphere of total political and financial chaos, Young Ottomans finally gained the upper-hand, dethroned Sultan Abdülaziz, and promulgated the constitution in December 1876. Establishing Ottomanism as the official doctrine of the state and *ittihat-ı anasır* its fundamental principle, the subsequent First Constitutional Era [*I. Meşrutiyet*] declared the Empire a constitutional parliamentary regime under the Sultan’s absolute authority (Shaw & Shaw 1971, 174-178). Although just after two sessions the new Sultan Abdülhamid II suspended the parliament indefinitely, this brief experiment paved the way for the next generation of intellectuals who carried out the constitutional revolution in 1908, eventually playing a far greater part in the ideological and political developments of the coming era: the Young Turks.

4.3. CUP and the Early Young Turk Idea of the People

The history of the Young Turks as a distinct movement can be traced back to 1889, when the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) was formed among five students at Royal Medical Academy as a secret society with the aim of reinstating the constitutional parliamentary regime. Members considered themselves as the heirs of Young Ottomans, constituting a ‘link in the long chain of struggle against conservative groups’ (Hanioglu 1995, 7-32; Ramsaur 1957; Ahmad 1969). However, despite their enrolment to the Ottomanist ideal of constitutional parliamentarism based on the unity of elements, they were not pious Muslims like their predecessors but members of a super-Westernised intelligentsia who believed that ‘[t]here is no

second civilization; civilization means European civilization, and it must be imported with both its roses and its thorns' (Cevdet 1911 quoted in Lewis 1968, 236). They were convinced that Western civilisation was synonymous with contemporary science, which they believed was main the cause of European states' superiority.

As Hanioglu (1995) convincingly shows, intellectual environment at the Royal Medical Academy played the most important role on the development of the Young Turk ideology, introducing the CUP founders to the ideas of French and German scientific materialism, social Darwinism and positivism. They took part in regular meetings where religion, metaphysics, poetry and other "empty imaginings" were bitterly criticised. Instead, it was two 19th century thinkers whose ideas shaped the early Young Turk ideology most decisively: Ludwig Büchner and Gustav Le Bon.

In his "materialist Bible" *Force and Matter* (1855) Büchner protested against romantic idealism and instead propagated a crude monism based on the idea that all changes and events follow mechanical laws and forces built into matter itself (Gregory 1977, 100-121; Lefèvre 2003, 594). Assigning extreme importance to biology, he believed that all human activity were 'explicable in terms of the same mechanical laws which governed the interactions of inanimate matter' (Curd 1979, 339). Just like their European counterparts, young Ottoman intellectuals too discovered a 'rational and empiricist *Weltanschauung* on the basis of natural science' in Büchner's work (Heidelberger 1998). In his propagation of Darwinism and staunch anti-religion stance, early Young Turks discovered the "scientific" basis for transforming their society. Through Büchner they came to believe that since society was a massive organism and social progress an 'essentially biological fact,' obstacles religious dogma posed against this progress could be eliminated by applying 'laws of science' to every aspect of social life, like medicine applied to a patient (Mardin 1964 [2008], 191).

If Büchner's *Force and Matter* paved the way for the early Young Turks to form a materialist-positivist epistemology, it was Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1895[2002]) that formed the basis of their methodology. As a response to mass politics after French Revolution, Le Bon conceptualised 'the crowd' as a peculiar mental universe where individuals were fused into a common mind (Nye 1975; Graumann & Moscovici 1985). In this state of 'mass hypnosis' members could not resist being possessed by any passing idea or emotion to the extent that they could sacrifice themselves for it (Le Bon 1895[2002], 6-7; Moscovici 2010, 49-106). However, according to Le Bon, this extreme 'suggestibility' was but a symptom of the

inherent primitiveness of the crowd whose members shared ‘the spontaneity, the violence, the ferocity, and also the enthusiasm of primitive beings’ (Le Bon 1895 [2002], 8; Reicher 2001). If they thoroughly grasped the psychology of the crowd, it could also provide a fertile ground for political elite to harness their energy for political ends. Political elite had to follow a “scientific method” whereby they would first formulate a simple idea in ‘well-chosen terms’ so that it would not disturb the crowd’s ‘fixed beliefs’ and ‘enter into its mind’ through ‘affirmation’; then they would turn the idea into an ‘unconscious belief’ through ‘repetition’; and finally let the nature run its course as the belief possessed the whole crowd through ‘contagion’: ‘When an affirmation has been sufficiently repeated and there is unanimity in this repetition...what is called a current of opinion is formed and the powerful mechanism of contagion intervenes. Ideas, sentiments, emotions, and beliefs possess in crowds a contagious power as intense as that of microbes’ (Le Bon 1895[2002], 77-8).

The influence of Le Bon over the Young Turk ideology can hardly be overrated. It was widely translated into Turkish and Le Bon was considered as the ‘greatest living sociologist’ with ideas as essential for intellectuals as anatomy and physiology for a physician (Mardin 2006, 175; Polat & Durmuş 2015). Following him, the early Young Turks came to conceive the “common people” [*avam*] as ‘the masses’ who were ‘senseless’, ‘fanatical’ and deserved to be oppressed by the Sultanate because of their incapacity to ‘appreciate the efforts of these distinguished individuals [i.e. Young Turks]’ (Hanioglu 1995, 206). But it was possible to apply Le Bon’s “scientific method” to implant ideas into the mind of *avam*, who would accept them without judgement or analysis as long as those ideas were repeated constantly. Thus, the early Young Turks like Abdullah Cevdet began to reformulate their ideas by stitching them ‘into an Islamic jacket’ so that they would not disturb *avam*’s fixed beliefs:

‘How should one make modern ideas and progress penetrate into the Muslim soul? The Muslim spirit will close all the doors to the light if it comes from the Christian world. We must then search and find all the progressive principles in Islamic institutions themselves’ (quoted in Mardin 2006, 175-76).

Contrary to their own, deeply irreligious beliefs, the Young Turks used a heavily Islamised discourse to appeal to the Muslim people. In titles taken from Islamic terminology, such as *Meşveret* [consultation], *Ezan* [call to prayer], *Ictihad* [religious verdict], they introduced modern ideas as essentially Islamic concepts. Abdullah Rıza traced the roots of the idea of popular sovereignty back to the Islamic ceremony called *bay’ah* (quoted in Mardin 1964[2008],

190), and even argued that the parliament was the ultimate embodiment of the Quranic order called *mushāwara* (quoted in Hanioglu 1995, 201). Having discovered some striking “parallels” between the ideas of classic Islamic scholars and modern materialists, the early Young Turks believed that ‘Islamic scholars had defined philosophy as the sum of sciences such as palaeontology, ethnology, geology, philology, and sociology, just as Buchner done’ (Mardin 1964[2008], 234).

Politically, the early Young Turks had a single concrete objective: dethroning Abdülhamid II and reinstating the constitutional parliamentary regime. But the ideas of “constitution” and “parliament” were nothing more than ‘romantic symbols of western modernity’ for them, since they fostered a deep-rooted mistrust of “the people” and had very little knowledge of the content of the 1876 constitution (Zürcher 2010, 213-4; Hanioglu 1995, 31-2). The CUP disseminated its ideas through illegal journals and recruitment quickly gained momentum both within and outside of Ottoman territories. It managed to appeal bureaucrats, military generals and intellectuals, forming a fairly heterogeneous opposition movement in terms of the ideological stands of its components. Having established communication channels that loosely banded various factions in the capital, provinces, Egypt and Europe, the CUP managed to connect almost all anti-Hamidians within the state under a single network by 1897 (Akşin 2001). Thereafter the Committee spread its message through secret publications that called for a united action against the Sultan.

It can be argued that the early opposition movement followed a twofold strategy which was in line with Büchner’s materialist epistemology and Le Bon’s elitist methodology. On the one hand they tried to ease their way into the “psychology” of the *avam* by rearticulating their ideas through an Islamically-informed discourse, writing pamphlets and teaching at schools (Berkes 1964 [1968], 305-6). Besides they also worked to convince the military and civilian bureaucrats of the “scientific truth” of their political goals (Hanioglu 1995, 7-33, 200-12). Through this twofold strategy, they attempted to put Le Bon’s “methodology” into practice and trigger an ideological “contagion” not only among the common people but also bureaucrats and military officers. They envisioned that once a new class of enlightened elite took over the government, they would be able to further those initial efforts for educating the masses via progressive agenda that would eradicate the ignorance and fanaticism off the Ottoman people.

In his seminal work on the Ottoman opposition movement, Hanioglu identifies the lack of a ‘strong revolutionary praxis’ as the main problem of the early Young Turks: ‘The coalition

confined itself to publications and awaited the moment when a few readers of these publications would carry out a miraculous revolution' (2001, 173). Other scholars of the late Ottoman era agree that they were preoccupied with the questions related to science and detested 'pure politics' (Zürcher 2010, 214; see also Mardin 1964[2008], 255-90). They scarcely gave any thought to the actual practice of revolution because they genuinely expected the process of ideological contagion to take over the masses. As this "scientific experiment" failed yielding to the expected results in a botched coup attempt in 1902, it became clear that a regime change could not be achieved 'by propaganda and publications alone' but needed the participation of the masses and armed forces who would undertake the actual act of revolution (Lewis 1968, 202).

Under the new leadership, the CUP gradually put the "scientific" ideal of a society aside and instead began to pursue a highly pragmatic agenda whereby recruiting activist elements into the movement became the utmost priority. They employed multiple and often conflicting discourses in correspondences between 1902 and 1908, each pragmatically tailored according to its addressee. While writing to the leaders of pious Muslims in Balkans, the CUP used a strong Pan-Islamist tone that urged their 'brothers in religion' to follow the orders of sharia and join the jihad, with non-Muslim groups it promoted an Ottomanist cooperation 'without distinction of religion, faith and ethnicity' towards the happiness of 'the Albanians, Turks, Kurds, Armenians, Bulgarians, [and] Greeks' (Hanioglu 2001, 175). While in letters to Tatar groups Turks were praised as one of the 'greatest nations' whose ancestors 'brought law and order to all of Asia,' opposition groups in Sofia were told that 'the origins of Bulgarians and Turks' were essentially 'the same' (Ibid., 174). Simultaneous with attempts to bring Socialist revolutionaries on board for a struggle for freedom from the exploitation by 'upper classes,' the CUP leaders urged members to recruit 'notables' and collect money from the 'capitalists' (Ibid., 175-6).

This pragmatic strategy succeeded in creating a revolutionary organizational network among Turks and Muslims in Balkans and Anatolia. Most significantly, the CUP merged with activist organizations that had already infiltrated the officer corps of Ottoman armies in Thessaloniki, providing the Committee with much needed revolutionary vigour to initiate a coup d'état from the Balkan territories. Unable to suppress the turmoil and under the threat of opposition forces marching on the capital, Abdülhamid II gave in to the CUP demands and issued the imperial decree restoring the constitutional regime on July 24, 1908. Gaining a landslide victory in the elections later in 1908, the CUP managed to launch the so-called Second

Constitutional era [*II. Meşrutiyet*] by establishing a government that would hegemonise the political scene until the end of Empire and beyond (Zürcher 2010; 31-3).

4.4. Populism as the Lifebuoy of *II. Meşrutiyet*

As discussed above, the CUP sidelined the scientific elitist dimension of their ideology in favour of a more pragmatist strategy only after an extended period of trials and errors. In other words, the very idea of harnessing not just the bureaucratic and intellectual elite but also the “popular support” for political aims first appeared in the late Ottoman political thought largely out of necessity. As their struggle intensified and the future of the opposition looked ever gloomier, the Ottoman intellectuals felt increasing pressure to win the “common people” they used to despise. Accordingly they became responsive to more radical ideas with the hope of discovering a formula that would solve the decades old question that perplexed previous generations of Ottoman intellectuals: how to stop the disintegration of the Empire and “save the state” in the face of the ever-growing feelings of separatism among its subjects and intervention by the Western powers on their behalf (Lewis 1968, 212)?

Initiating the so-called Second Constitutional Era, the 1908 revolution constituted a crossroads in the development of political ideas in Modern Turkish history when the Ottoman intellectuals suddenly found themselves in an unprecedented climate of freedom. Hundreds of periodicals and newspapers started to get freely published and distributed to a much larger audience than before in Balkans and Anatolia, covering discussions on subjects including politics, economy, sociology, religion, literature and education (Koloğlu 1986). Consequently, this period of freedom also witnessed the first glimmers of the ideas that would dominate the late Ottoman and early republican political scene in coming decades. In pages of their new journals and newspapers, Ottoman intellectuals frantically searched for ways to “save the state” and discussed the virtues of a wide range of ideologies including Ottomanism, socialism, Pan-Islamism, Pan-Turkism as possible candidates. And it was precisely during this period when they had both the freedom to express their ideas as well as a government that was willing to implement those ideas, Ottoman intellectuals began to give serious thought to “the people” [*halk*] for the first time and Turkish populism [*halkçılık*] as a distinct intellectual tendency emerged.

Initially the populist ideas were not the most prominent ones held by the Ottoman intellectuals and statesmen in their endeavours to save the state. They were rather undercurrents

discussed mainly among the intellectual circles which came to fore only gradually when the “official” policies of the Ottoman state, namely *Ottomanism* and *Pan-Islamism*, were proven ineffective. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Ottomanism had been the official state policy of the Empire since the initiation of Reformation Era in 1839. Emphasising loyalty to the ruling Ottoman dynasty and establishing a strictly civic identity of Ottoman-ness that would guarantee the equality between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens, Ottomanism aimed to safeguard the integrity of the Empire and curtail the surging feelings of separatist nationalism prevalent especially among the Christians communities in Balkans. But as Yusuf Akçura demonstrated in his oft-cited pamphlet *Three Kinds of Policy* published even before the 1908 revolution, most of those communities had already gotten quite far, both intellectually and politically, in their individual pursuits of attaining distinct national identities in expense of Ottomanism by the beginning of 20th century (Akçura 1912[1976]; Akçura & Fehmi 1981). Further losses suffered against newly independent nations in the Balkan Wars (1912-13) confirmed that, despite being maintained as the official state policy until collapse of the Empire, Ottomanism was of little use for the II. Meşrutiyet intellectuals’ mission to “save the state”.

Pan-Islamism was equally prominent during the long reign of Abdülhamid II (1876-1909), who constantly emphasised his status as the Caliph not only to maintain the loyalty of his own Muslim subjects against the threats posed by “atheist provocations” of the CUP opposition, but also to rally the Muslims living outside the Empire as a defence against the European states: ‘As long as the unity of Islam remains intact, England, France, Russia and Holland are all in my pocket, because a word from the Caliph, that is I, would suffice to initiate Jihad among their Muslim subjects and this would be a disaster for Christians’ (Sultan Abdülhamid 1974, 164-5). As the Empire kept losing its non-Muslim population rapidly, this policy seemed attractive. But insofar as it signalled a return to theocracy, Pan-Islamism also meant abandoning those reforms undertaken in the areas of political and religious freedoms. This, Akçura warned, would be equal to ‘say good-bye to European-type constitutional government,’ which would in turn ‘lead to an increase in uprisings’ and ‘reinforce European antagonism’ towards the Ottomans (Akçura & Fehmi 1981, 8). Before long, the Balkan Wars proved Akçura right, and enabled the feelings of ethnic and nationalist separatism to reach to the Albanian Muslims and Arabs—two of the biggest remaining Muslim elements after Turks and Kurds.

Only when these official and state-sanctioned policies patently failed in constructing a common political identity among the remaining subjects of the Empire and “save the state,” II.

Meşrutiyet intellectuals embraced the ‘lifebuoy’ of populism in the form of a peculiar populism that was *halkçılık* (Toprak 1995, 39).

4.4.1. People [*Halk*] and Populism [*Halkçılık*]

In his authoritative work on the emergence and transformation of the idea of *populism-qua-halkçılık* among the founding cadres of the republican era, *Populism in Turkey: 1908-1923*, Zafer Toprak notes that the birth of *halk* [the people] as a distinctly political term coincides with the 1908 revolution and marks the ‘opening of a new era in the intellectual history of Ottomans’ (2013, 165). Hitherto, *halk* in Ottoman language was a term with strong metaphysical connotation, related to creation—as in Genesis. Etymologically, *halk* is a derivative of the Arabic كَالِق [kalq], sharing the same root with *hilkat* [creation], *hâlik* [creator], *mahlûk* [creature], and *hâlika* [nature]. Intellectuals of earlier Reformation (1839-76) and I. Constitutional eras (1876-1908) had instead preferred to use much more terrestrial terms like *ahali* or *avam*. Whereas *ahali* corresponded to the overall aggregate of residents living in a given place much as the word “population” in English, *avam* meant “the commons” in the third estate sense of the term. For instance, in the standard French to Turkish Dictionary published in 1882, the word *peuple* [people] was translated as ‘lower class(es) of *ahali* living in a town or country, *avam*’ (quoted in Toprak 2013, 161).

Along with the 1908 revolution, *halk* started to gain a more secular, earthly meaning and gradually replaced *ahali* in the writings of II. Meşrutiyet intellectuals. This was directly related to the emergence of sociology as a distinct scientific discipline in France and England by the second half of 19th century and the gradual arrival of new sociological ideas, especially those of Émile Durkheim, to the Ottoman territories. Discussions over sociology [*ilm-i ictimaiyye*] among the intellectuals of the time followed the footsteps of their European predecessors, focusing initially on the evolutionist and organist concepts of society developed by Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, before eventually landing on Durkheimian solidarism. Published monthly in Istanbul between 1908 and 1911, *Economic and Social Sciences* [*Ulum-ı İktisadiyye ve İctimaiyye*] was the leading journal of positivist sociology at the time. Its mission was to spread the ‘unprecedented developments achieved’ by social sciences, which, according to the journal's founders, were ‘indispensable’ for the state elite to successfully undertake any reform and development policy (Toprak 2013, 94-97). Following Comte and Spencer, they saw society [*cemiyet*] as a complex organism comprised of interconnected elements that function in

accordance to natural principles such as evolution and, therefore, could be examined and understood only through a proper scientific methodology. In articles titled “Organisms and Societies” and “On Psychology”, biological organisms and societies were identified as two phases of the same phenomenon, with varying degrees of cooperation among and division of labour between their components (Ibid., 100). In a piece arguing for the independence of Ottoman National Bank from capitulations, for instance, credit was likened to the missing ‘hearth’ of society that was vital for the economic ‘circulatory system’ to pump blood to several organs, including ‘limbs’ of the state and the cabinet as its ‘brain’ (Şahinkaya 1999). Although such an organicist approach initially seemed complementary to the Ottomanist principle of the unity of elements, as described above, this would not suffice to “save the state”: ‘What needed under such circumstances was a different sense of solidarity. The one who would find a scientific solution to this was Durkheim’ (Toprak 2013, 146).

Unlike Spencer and Comte, Durkheim’s ideas arrived first not to Istanbul but Thessaloniki, where the CUP held its congresses annually until the city was lost in Balkan War (1912-13). As a vibrant port with sea and land connections to the rest of Europe, it was by far the most liberal, cosmopolitan city of the Empire, providing the ideal atmosphere for the exchange of not just goods but ideas as well (Parla 1985, 11). Having established himself at Thessaloniki following the CUP congress in 1910, Ziya Gökalp, a member of CUP central committee and a leading intellectual of II. Meşrutiyet era, initiated the founding of the Journal of New Philosophy [*Yeni Felsefe Mecmuası*] and introduced Durkheim for the first time to Ottoman circles. Accepted as the ‘founder of Turkish sociology’ (Berkes 1959), Gökalp was a devout follower of Durkheim. Rejecting Le Bon’s model for being a ‘racial psychological’ rather than sociological one (Parla 1985, 51), he had the manifest goal to build New Philosophy on the basis of his master’s ‘method’ as it had been detailed in *Rules of the Sociological Method* (1982 [1895]).

In order to become a truly scientific discipline, Durkheim had argued that sociology would have to rely on a consistent method which would identify and study ‘social facts’ as sui generis phenomena ‘coercing’ and constraining the acts of individuals in the form of laws, religion, morality, family, values etc. Determined only by other, antecedent social facts, they made individuals act or not act in certain manners, thereby effectively shaping the ways in which society as a whole behaved and looked like (Schmaus 1994). Most significantly for Gökalp and his companions in Thessaloniki, Durkheim had stated that social facts could be either ‘normal’ or ‘pathological.’ While any social fact observed regularly from the necessities

of life in a given society and harmonious with its functioning and gradual transformation was ‘normal’, ‘pathological’ facts were those not in tune with other social facts and, therefore, could lead to social disintegration. Depending on the ‘types’ of society, a social fact could be ‘normal’ in a society and ‘pathological’ for another, or even gradually become so as a society evolved over time (Durkheim 1982[1895], 85-107).

Conceptualizing sociological ‘method’ in terms of social facts, Durkheim’s ideas provided Gökalp with the essential tools to formulate a ‘social revolution’ that would follow the political one achieved in 1908. In order to have a truly lasting effect, 1908 had to be reinforced by a ‘social revolution’ that would transform the Ottoman society by engineering nothing less than a ‘new life’ with matching set of new ‘normals’ and would rid of old pathologies:

‘A new life means a new economic order, new family structure, new arts, new philosophy, new morality, new legal code, and a new politics. The only way to change the old life...is the creation of a completely new way of living. The essence of life is hidden in the values it holds dear. Not appreciating the old life means a refusal to validate its values. Attempting to create a new life means to search for true values that would correspond to each of those branches and validate them instead. We do not appreciate the old life and old values. We want a new life and new values’ (Gökalp 1911 [1999]).

Despite its idealism, this ‘social revolution’ and ‘new life’ were ‘conditioned by time and realities’, and would therefore have to derive from and in harmony with prevalent opinions that were ‘reflections of centuries long social habits’ (Parla 1985, 57). Gökalp had borrowed this from what Durkheim called ‘collective consciousness’ (Durkheim 1984[1893]). As the totality of beliefs, practices and sentiments common to the average member of a society, collective consciousness was constantly reproduced through social interactions and held a society together. In simple, homogenous and clan-like societies, this common consciousness was shared by virtually all members, creating a mechanical solidarity among them through mutual likeness in terms of their work, education or belief system. In more complex and heterogeneous societies of modern industrial era, however, collective consciousness took the form of organic solidarity that held larger number of dissimilar components together on the basis of their fundamental reliance on one another to perform highly specialized tasks as part of their work.

On the basis of this Durkheimian blueprint, Gökalp, in his famous 1918 article titled Populism [*Halkçılık*], argued that societies evolved through particular stages of social development, each displaying a more complex basis for social stratification; ranging from the simplest clan stage to feudal one, followed by class, and ending finally at profession stage (2007a[1918], 56-62). He classified Ottoman society above the feudal one but still below the Durkheimian ideal with organic solidarity based on a division of labour and profession. For Gökalp, it was located at what he called the ‘class stage’ where “the people” [*halk*] emerged as the common name of the post-feudal political subject. Reformation era had effectively raised commons [*avam*] to the level of notables [*âyan*] by abolishing the political privileges of the latter. Gökalp believed that commons had become the people [*halk*] once it got level with notables [*âyan*]:

‘Having abolished privileges and protection, Reformation took two great steps towards populism [*halkçılık*]. Those steps essentially granted *avam* those adjectives of privilege and freedom, as well as the right to vote on the common administration of the country the notables [*âyan*] already had...Reformation and Revolution elevated all to the level of notables in terms of the old political classes. In the new era, once it became equal to notables, the mass that was called commons acquired the name the people [*halk*].’ (Gökalp 1918a[2007], 61-2).

Gökalp considered the 1908—what can be called in the Marxist terminology—a bourgeois revolution that extended the political privileges of notables to the larger segments of the society. In his words, the revolution had achieved the goal of ‘political populism’ [*siyasi halkçılık*] but, despite being a remarkable accomplishment in its own account, it was only the beginning of what Gökalp called ‘social populism’ [*ictimai halkçılık*]. Following Durkheimian corporatist model (Kaufman-Osborn 1986), the ideal of social populism was to reach the final level of social evolution where not only political but also ‘educational and economical privileges’ between classes would be abolished in a truly solidaristic, organic society based on middle-class professions:

‘[In Ottoman society today] there are no political stratus but some economic ones called classes. These are ‘big bourgeoisie’ [*büyük eşraf*], ‘petit bourgeoisie’ [*küçük eşraf*], and ‘labourers’ [*gündelikçiler*]. Solidarist movement of today, also known as social populism [*ictimai halkçılık*], is working towards the abolishment of these classes just like the political stratus of old eras. Political populism elevated all to

the level of notables in respect to political privileges. Social populism, on the other hand, aims to make all equal to bourgeoisie in terms of educational and economic privileges. The essence of populism lies in the fact that there is no privileged or exclusive groups and stratus in a society on the basis of clan, cast, profession, family, and class. Populism strives to replace such divisive groups with professional ones, which would unite members of society tightly to one another...As the societies evolve, therefore, division of labour and areas of specialization get deeper, while the significance of as well as the solidarity between guilds increase' (Gökalp 1918a[2007], 62).

Thus, in a parallel and symbiotic way to the evolutionary progress of Ottoman society from feudal to class-based and finally a corporatist one, the collective name of its subject moved from "the subjects" [*tebaa*] to "the populace" [*ahali*] divided between "the commons" [*avam*] and "the notables" [*âyan*], finally to be homogenized under the all-inclusive name of a middle-class "the people" [*halk*] (2013, 166). The Ottoman society following the "political populist revolution" of 1908 was nevertheless still a far cry from Gökalp's ideal. This was because the fact that despite formal and politico-legal conditions necessary for its birth were in place, *halk* would have to be "delivered" through a social revolution that would place it to the hearth of a truly populist society based on organic solidarity.

4.4.2. Russian Narodniks and *Halka Doğru* Movement

This birth, as mentioned above, was the beginning of the "new life" and the task of those who would undertake 'social revolution' was to locate, examine and reformulate its values in harmony with the 'collective consciousness.' And this was precisely where that crucial link between Russian Narodniki and II. Meşrutiyet intellectuals came into play in the form of a movement called Towards the People [*Halka Doğru*]. As detailed in Chapter 2, Narodniki movement had emerged during the second half of the 19th century as a reaction of young intellectuals against the abolishment of serfdom in 1861 and brutal modernisation efforts of the Tsarist regime, both of which had left the Russian peasantry at the mercy of richer landowners and threatened their very livelihood. For Narodniks, the roots of a new social order that would replace monarchy laid in the people [*narod*] as it existed in village community [*mir*] and it was their call of duty to find those roots in the hearth of the motherland. Russian intellectuals had to go 'towards to people,' enlighten them and trigger a revolution in them.

Most scholars agree that the roots of populism [*halkçılık*] in II. Constitutional Era lie at the Narodniki movement (Berkes 1975[2019], 231-2; Toprak 2013; Odabaşı 2005; Karaömerlioğlu 2009, 272-83). Several founders and prominent members of the CUP, including Crimean Tatars Yusuf Akçura, and Ismail Gaspıralı, as well as Azerbaijani Ali Hüseyinzade and Ahmed Ağaoğlu were born in Tsarist Russia and deeply influenced by the ‘populist and revolutionary tendencies’ prevalent among Russian intellectuals of the time. Gaspıralı had read the works of Chernyshevky, Belinsky and Herzen while studying in Moscow and others, who would later join *Halka Doğru*, had even took part in Narodnik meetings in Tbilisi (Ağaoğlu 1940, 79). Most remarkably, Hüseyinzade, the original founder of the CUP, had had a first-hand experience of the Narodniki student communes during his studies at the St. Petersburg University and, by his own admission, replicated their revolutionary organisation model with fellow students once he started his medical degree in Istanbul, launching the committee in the first place (Berkes 1975[2019], 231-2).

During the Second Constitutional Era, *Halka Doğru* was a movement of these same intellectuals, who disseminated their ideas in their journal named after the famous Narodniki motto “going to the people” [*khozhdeniye v narod*]. Published by Turkish Homeland Society [*Türk Yurdu Cemiyeti*] along with its sister journal Turkish Homeland [*Türk Yurdu*], *Halka Doğru* was home to not just Russian-born intellectuals but also to Ottoman ones including Ziya Gökalp, Hamdullah Suphi, Mehmet Emin, Ali Cânip and Halide Edip. In a way akin to *narod* in Narodniki movement, *halk* constituted the core of the overall vision of *Halka Doğru*, holding the key for the birth of a new social order. But unlike their Russian counterparts, Ottoman intellectuals did not want this new order to be a socialist one divided into classes but a Durkheimian solidaristic one formed around a homogenous people with no internal divisions:

‘Political profession shall not favour or disfavour any class. Capitalist politics is detrimental to equality and freedom because it disfavours the worker and the peasant. Bolshevik politics, on the other hand, stands opposed to justice and humanity insofar as it considers the people [*halk*] comprised solely of workers and peasants. Real populism is to consider all as belonging to the people. The sovereign and his family are of the people and so are the industrialists, landowners, philosophers and poets. It is necessary to establish a true sense of equality and freedom among the people. But one shall not victimize the innocent while doing these; since Bolsheviks have committed such cruelties, real populists are justifiably condemning them today’ (Gökalp 1918b[2007], 234).

It was such a definition of populism in contradistinction to both capitalism and socialism that led Taha Parla to call Gökâlþ's approach as 'the Turkish "Third Way"' (1985, 108-116). Devoid of any seeds of antagonism, the political subject of his populism, i.e. the people, was also the basis of a new 'Turkish nation' [*millet*]. Following Gökâlþ, *Halka Doğru* intellectuals believed that it was impossible to 'speak of a nation represented by the elite but separate from the people', for the latter with its 'tastes, emotions, beliefs and opinions' was the 'creator of nation's nuclei' (Toprak 1984, 70):

'In the future Populism and Turkism will always march hand in hand towards the realization of our ideals. Every Turkish will remain a Populist in politics and every Populist will be a Turkish in the field of culture [...] Our doctrine in politics is Populism; in culture it is Turkism' (Gökâlþ 1918b[2007], 288-89).

Like their Russian counterparts, *Halka Doğru* writers defined the people in contemporary Ottoman reality as those poor 'countryside folk', artisans and unskilled labourers with a 'little or no land of their own', struggling to make ends meet under dire circumstances and 'needed the guidance of educated men' to overcome those difficulties (Akçura 1913a). It was true that the people were ignorant but this was because the intellectual elite had long abandoned and forgotten them. A 1913 editorial titled "Ben Halk'ım" [I am the people] read:

'I am the people, on whom you conveniently put all the blame as you see fit. I've preserved my life and my own traditions by making true laws of mine as you have written such rules and laws that only serve you to bury yourselves in paper. You have published volumes and volumes in languages I do not understand, written deeply scientific, philosophical, mystical and wordy books. Since I got none of that stuff, I struggled to learn my religion from catechisms and hymns. You have not called for me just as I have not understood you. Having lost all my hope in you, I will not pay attention to anything you have done or will do in the name of so-called "reformation". I need a language of my own and a literature to start with...a body of knowledge on religion, morality, economy and society. I will obtain these on my own' (quoted in Özden 2011, 113).

Abandoned by the elite residing in the capitals of Empire, the people in countryside were left at the mercy of corrupt 'tax-farmers and usurers', lacking the 'intelligence and ideas' to fight against them (Maraşlıođlu 1913 quoted in Özden 2011, 114). Ottoman elite, on the other hand, were as ignorant as the people when it came to the latter's way of life, problems, as well as

those values and traditions they held dear. Within the Durkheimian terminology reformulated by Gökalp in Ottoman context, this meant that they were ignorant of the “social facts” that constituted the basis of the organic society they wanted to build. Accordingly, another *Halka Doğru* editorial in 1914 identified the widening gap between intellectuals and the people as the reason behind Turks’ failure to build a successful common political identity like European nations had already achieved. Whereas the patriotic intellectuals from civilised nations of Europe had ‘carefully collected and preserved their songs, tales and myths,’ for example, Turks had ‘lagged far behind in this regard just as in other avenues’ (quoted in Özden 2011, 114). *Halka Doğru* writers looked up to those idealist Serbians, Bulgarians, and Greeks who had already started to go ‘towards the people’ within the Ottoman Empire. Travelling to remote corners of the countryside, those young teachers and doctors had been ‘dispelling darkness with light,’ ‘healing wounds’ and teaching the people not just ‘manners, work-ethics, ways to grow rich’ but also how to become Serbians, Bulgarians, and Greeks (Akçura 1913b).

To address this deficiency, Turkish Homeland Society organized trainings and discussion on ‘aspects of the people’s life that needed observation and studying’ where its members focused on ‘causes of sicknesses the people suffered’ and ‘reasons behind poverty and misery of the people’ (Toprak 1984, 66). As Gökalp noted, Turkish intellectuals would have to study the people’s way of life to identify those normal and pathological facts (Gökalp 1913[1972]). The task before *Halka Doğru* movement was to bridge the gap between intellectuals and the people in order to establish a *homogenous Turkish nation*. Reaching out to the people as the patriotic youth of other nations had been doing, intellectuals would have to learn from the people while simultaneously educating them.

By the summer of 1913, *Halka Doğru* approach had triggered the first wave of Turkish Narodniks who embarked upon a journey “towards the people” in Anatolia. Just as their Russian predecessors, these were medical students with a desire to experience, examine and ultimately improve the lives of the people. Armed with army maps, compasses and medicine against malaria and smallpox, they wanted to ‘prove the world that the will of Turkish youth was omnipotent’ (Toprak 1984, 70). As true believers of the CUP ideals, *Halka Doğru* writers believed the “union” that would arise from such journeys was the *sin qua non* of “progress.” Another 1913 article titled “Our Greatest Deficiency” clearly identifies what this “union” would ideally look like:

‘It is always the earners in a country who make all progress possible and improve the education, arts and trade. In each country, these constitute a class of their own, which is the (middle-class) tradesmen. Contemporary civilization of Europe that astonishes us today exists thanks to those classes of artisans and tradesmen. Populace living in countries with such a class in place would be educated and wealthy. States with such a class in place would have a full treasury. Always relying on this class, the government would never have any trouble’ (quoted in Özden 2011, 114).

Even in its early stages, the vision of *Halka Doğru* movement was therefore in line with Gökalp’s solidaristic ideas of organic society, for they expected intellectuals to join forces with the people and eventually transform them into a singular, solidary middle-class under *the nation*. In this regard, the most interesting development was the formation of *Halka Doğru* Society in 1916 by the CUP members in Izmir. As perhaps the second most significant port city in the Empire, Izmir was a rich and cosmopolitan hub where most of wealth was concentrated in the hands of tradespeople who had traditionally been non-Muslim Greeks and Armenians. In the aftermath of catastrophic Balkan Wars, *Halka Doğru* Society had been founded in line with the CUP government’s ‘national economic policy’ of facilitating the conditions for the emergence of a strong Turkish middle-class by overturning the situation in the city (Kasaba 1988). Defining the people as those who ‘constitute the middle-class’ in terms of their ‘level of education, manners, intelligence and knowledge,’ the Society aimed to inform them of their ‘national identity and economic presence’ (Toprak 1984, 78). Giving up the hype of ‘going towards the people’ in impoverished corners of the empire, *Halka Doğru* Society’s discourse rearticulated populism through a concern about the formation of a new middle-class:

‘Unlike [earlier] Narodniki trends towards Anatolia, this time around, those who were going “towards the people” were concerned with protecting common economic interests of Turkish-Muslims. *Halka Doğru* movement was now one of middle-class, relying on a material basis and trying to melt economic interests with cultural categories in the same pot. From here on out the CUP members were populists [*halkçı*], who were united with Anatolian middle-class, believed in the need to establish a ‘national market’ and stood against the foreign capital. That was the reason why populism had to be coordinated with nationalism’ (Toprak 2013, 197-98).

4.5. Kemalist Populism

It was precisely this “coordination”, i.e. rearticulation, of populism with nationalism which would happen under the Kemalist discourse of *populism-qua-halkçılık*, as the latter would appear among the six ideological principles of Modern Turkish nation-state. Articulated with the other five principles, populism as it had been formulated during the II. Constitutional Era had a profound effect on the official Kemalist ideology, spreading through the veins of modern Turkish nation state.

The actual content of Kemalist principle of *populism-qua-halkçılık* could be most aptly unfolded through the statements of Mustafa Kemal himself, as well as through the official decisions and statements of his organisation, Republican People’s Party (CHP). The fact that the Turkish founding cadres dedicated precious time and energy—especially during intense years of Independence war (1919-22)—to formulate a detailed understanding of “people” and “populism” indicates that there had been indeed well thought definitions of those terms as they constituted the basics of the new Turkish state (Eliçin 1970, 306). It was indeed the case that the founding cadres of the Modern Turkish state had a clear-cut understanding of populist principle even during the War of Independence. As early as July 1920, Mustafa Kemal stated at the National Assembly in Ankara: ‘I think that the fundamental reality of our present-day existence has demonstrated the general tendency of the nation, and that is populism and people's government. It means the passing of government into the hands of the people’ (Atatürk 2006, 55). This republican and proto-democratic notion of populism had been prominently displayed as the blueprint of an independent Turkey-to-come throughout the war years. This found one of its earliest embodiment in the September 1920 parliamentary proposal known as the “Populism Programme”, part of which read: ‘Government of Turkey believes that it would ensure its survival and independence, and honourably serve its mission by liberating the sacred people of Turkey from dominance and oppression of imperialism and capitalism, and appointing them as the sole holder of their will and sovereignty’ (quoted in Toprak 2011, 24). Yet as the ideological influences of Soviet regime had increased, in order to pre-emptively foreclose the possibility for the emergence of class-based antagonisms that could threaten the “unity” of “the people,” this anti-capitalistic articulation of populism, in a seamless ideological alignment with Gökalp’s “Third Way,” was balanced with an equally anti-socialist one: ‘As well-known, our point of view and principles are not those of Bolshevism, which we have never attempted or even contemplated of forcing our nation to accept. [...] Our point of view, which

is populism, means that power, authority, sovereignty, administration should be given directly to the people, and should be kept in the hands of the people' (Atatürk 2006, 65-66).

In perhaps one of his most quoted passages in the course of a heated argument in the parliament during the Independence War, Mustafa Kemal pushed against the democratic and socialist alternatives from both ends and, instead, argued for the *sui generis* nature of the parliamentary government as the model most suitable to the nature of Turkish people. Rejecting even to compare the new regime-in-the-making, he clarified and defended its fundamental principles as they had been recently accepted in modern Turkey's first constitution of 1921. It was in this speech in 1921, that the character of modern Turkey's political regime in-the-making was most unequivocally declared as populist:

'Our government is neither a democratic nor socialist one. In fact, in terms of its scientific nature it does not resemble the types of government listed in books...If we must define our government sociologically, we would call it "people's government"... We are toiling people, poor people, who work to save their lives and independence. Let us know what we are! We are people who work and who must work to be saved and to live. For this every one of us has the right and the authority, but only by working do we acquire that right. There is no room, and no right, in our society for men who want to lie on their backs and live without working. Populism is a social principle that seeks to rest the social order on its work and its law. Gentlemen! We are men who follow a principle that entitles us, in order to preserve this right and to safeguard our independence, to struggle as *a whole nation* against the imperialism that seeks to crush and the capitalism that seeks to swallow our very *nationhood* ... that is the basis on which our government rests, a clear sociological basis ... But what can we do if we don't resemble democracy, we don't resemble socialism, we don't resemble anything? Gentlemen, we should be proud of defying comparison! Because, gentlemen, we resemble ourselves!' (Atatürk 2006, 115).

That is to say, this particularly nationalist articulation of *populism-qua-halkçılık* was taken simply as a "natural" outcome of who the people were, their inherent characteristics, as well as the circumstances they had found themselves in. Following the victory gained in the Independence War in 1922, Mustafa Kemal would embark upon a nationwide tour for the establishment of The People's Party [*Halk Fırkası*] with a "populist" program that would strive for the 'happiness of all classes' (Atatürk 2006, 285). Perfectly in line with Gökalp's

solidaristic definition, he would propose that this new party would have to correspond with realities of the new people, which did not have ‘classes with competing interests’ but complementary groups that were ‘in need of one another’ (Ibid., 269). In his visits, Mustafa Kemal would repeatedly argue that despite being populated predominantly by peasants, Turkey had ‘no large landowners’ who ‘supposedly stand against those peasants’, just as there were ‘no millionaires’ in opposition to ‘artisans and shopkeepers doing business in little towns’:

‘We will certainly not turn against those with some money. On the contrary, we will work for our country to grow many millionaires and billionaires. When it comes to the workers, for the development of our country we need them to work in factories and, hence, shall take care of them too. Then we have the intellectuals and scholars, whom we cannot imagine as turning against the people. Their duty is to mix with the people, showing them the right way to development, progress, and civilization. This is how I see our nation. Since the interests of various occupational groups are in harmony with one another, it is not possible to separate them in classes but to see them all as collectively constituting the people’ (Ibid. 292).

When the People’s Party was finally founded in September 1923, its charter contained the oft-cited second clause whereby Gökalp’s solidaristic conceptualization of the people got repeated and the party officially self-identified itself as a populist one:

‘The Party understands the people not in terms of any specific class but as all members of the population who sees themselves as absolute equals before the law with no claim of privilege. Refusing the privilege claims by any family, class, group or individual, populists recognises the absolute independence and freedom of individuals’ (TBMM 1923).

Following proclamation of the Republic on 29 October 1923, the party name was changed into the *Republican* People’s Party and similar descriptions had been repeated almost verbatim in the subsequent charters (CHP 1927, 1931, 1935). Among these, the 1931 party program in which the “six-arrows” doctrine had become official was particularly important. It was here that the Kemalist principle of *populism-qua-halkçılık* had been most concretely and concisely articulated with the nationalist arrow:

‘The nation is the source of sovereignty and willpower, which shall be practiced in consideration of the reciprocal duties of the state and the people. We count those who accept the absolute equality before law and refuse any sort of privilege on the

basis of person, family, class or group as one of the people and as a populist. One of our principles is to consider the people of Turkish republic not in terms of separate groups but as interest communities based on the division of labour. Proper functioning of all is the prerequisite for the survival and happiness. What our party hopes to achieve by this is to establish a social order and solidarity instead of class conflict, and a harmony of interests insofar as they do not conflict with one another (CHP 1931, 31-32).

In other words, Kemalist rearticulation of populism, in the way it had been formulated by Mustafa Kemal himself and institutionalized in his CHP programs, conceived of the people as a ‘community of hard-working and producing citizens constituting the overwhelming majority in a nation state’ (Aykut 2008, 38). Described always ‘in unison’, ‘hand in hand’ and ‘as a single individual’ (Parla 2008, 211), the people forged a seamless unity among all who collectively worked towards a rupture from the “past”: ‘The term “people” carried the connotation of a union between various social forces against the ancien regime, primary task of whom was to defeat and demolish that regime, and establish a new one in its place. Insofar as such a task requires absolute unity between the elements constituting the people, there was no room for a conflict of interest (class) there’ (Ahmad 1999, 164).

All this meant that the Kemalist *populism-qua-halkçılık* culminated into a ‘naturalisation’ of the single-party regime by tying the legitimacy of government directly to its capacity to not only represent but also construct such a harmonious and solidaristic community in its entirety. That is to say, the particular way in which the relationship between the Turkish people and political establishment was institutionalised under the principle of *populism-qua-halkçılık* made the connection between “nation–people–state–party” tetrad appear “natural”. Functioning precisely as the processes of *sedimentation* do in post-foundationalist ontology (Laclau 1997, 34-5; Marttila 2015, 42-50; Marchart 2018, 90-93), it concealed the contingent roots of single-party regime, rendered multiplicity of counter-hegemonic struggles invisible, and naturalised the prevalent social order, thereby reinforcing/reproducing the hegemony of Kemalism.

It is important to emphasize here that the narrative above does not imply that populism-qua-halkçılık, that is to say the nationalist rearticulation of populism in the form of *halkçılık*, was a pure discourse ‘closed onto itself’ so-to-say, but a heterogeneous one constructed through a series of political struggles Kemalists had against various counter-hegemonic forces and

projects during the course of the foundation of the Turkish nation-state. In fact, as discussed above (4.4), populism itself entered the politico-intellectual realm of the II. Meşrutiyet era as part of a larger, heterogeneous counter-hegemonic contender against Ottomanism and Pan-Islamism, raising to prominence only when the latter had decisively lost their credibility and, therefore, relevance in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars. Furthermore, even at its very moment of conception, Turkish populism was an already contaminated discourse thanks to its originators like Akçura and Gökalp, who introduced it to the Ottoman/Turkish political thought in a heavily modified form in which its anarcho-socialist roots were largely replaced with Durkheimian solidarism, giving way to a nationalist rearticulation that ultimately rendered the category of the people (*halk*) synonymous with the Turkish nation (*millet*). Far from being a seamless process, construction of this politico-discursive equivalence was accomplished only after a series of protracted struggles the founders of Republican Turkey had against two main counter-hegemonic projects which rivalled their own hegemonic project of a modern nation-state ruling over a homogenous, centralised and secular society: Kurdish and Muslim identities.

In terms of its repercussions on the future trajectory of the modern Turkish nation-state building, the most significant outcome of the wars between 1912 and 1919 was the ‘abrupt Muslimification of Anatolia’ as the two main non-Muslim populations, Armenians and Greeks, disappeared as a result of the policies of deportation, massacres, and population exchanges (Yeğen 2007, 125; see also Akgündüz 1998). Along with the post-Balkan Wars demise of Ottomanism, i.e. the conviction that the Ottoman state could be saved by rendering all Ottoman subjects with different ethno-religious origins “citizens,” this religious homogenisation led to a particular mindset among the CUP cadres—who restored political power in the form of a national independence movement following the collapse of the Empire—whereby a Turkishness amalgamated with Muslimhood became the new ‘spiritual ground’ upon which a political community would be established on Anatolian territory (Yeğen 2007, 125; Yıldız 2001). Accordingly, during the War of Independence, the parliamentary government self-identified as ‘of the Kurds as much as of the Turks’ and forged a war-time alliance on the basis of shared religion (Beşikçi 1969[1992], 399). Mustafa Kemal himself declared Kurds and Turks as ‘brothers’ under the ‘nation of Islam’ who fought ‘for the common purpose and the ideal,’ and eventually shared a victory against infidel [*gavur*] invaders (Beşikçi 1969[1992], 400-1; Özcan 2006, 77-79).

Once the war successfully ended the occupation of Anatolia and restored the political power of the nationalist cadres, however, the official discourse of the new Republican regime

took a decisive turn towards a policy of Turkification, which was to be formulated in the well-known Kemalist maxim that ‘principally perceived Kurds as future-Turks’ (Yeğen 2007, 119): ‘*Ne mutlu Türküm diyene*’—Happy is the one who calls himself a Turk (Özcan 2006, 82). This was crystallized in the first Republican constitution of the 1924, which declared Turkey as a state constituted by a single nation: ‘The state does not recognise any nation other than the Turks. There are others who come from different races...[y]et it is not possible to give rights to them in accordance with their racial status’ (quoted in Yeğen 1999, 118). That is to say, despite acknowledging the existence of non-Turkish ethnicities, the republican regime made a point of not recognising their rights, thereby denying the legitimacy of Kurdish political subjectivity as such, and, instead, “invited” them to become Turks. In the following year of 1925, İsmet İnönü, Mustafa Kemal’s closest confidant and successor, pronounced this systemic shift towards a policy of forced assimilation in clearest terms: ‘In the face of a Turkish majority other ethnicities have no kind of influence. We must Turkify the inhabitants of our land at any price, and we will annihilate those who oppose the Turks. More than anything else, what we seek in those who wish to serve the country is to become Turkish’ (quoted in Yildiz 2001, 155-6).

Incorporated with the other principles of nationalism, etatism, revolutionism and secularism under the Kemalist six-arrows, *populism-qua-halkçılık* also entailed ‘the mobilisation of the people from above for the construction of a secular modern rational society’ (Çelik 1999, 195). Following the blueprints of Gökâlâp’s “new life” and with the iron-hand of the single-party state, the Republican government embarked upon an ambitious mission of modernising and secularizing nearly all aspects of the society in order to ‘reach the level of contemporary civilizations,’ i.e. the European nations (Alaranta 2014, 73-84). Through a series of top-down, Jacobinist policies, the entire administrative structure of the state was centralised; religious courts, ministries, convents, foundations and schools were closed and banned; Caliphate abolished; Gregorian calendar, Latin alphabet, and European style dress-codes were introduced. While the family law was completely secularized by abolishing religious marriages and polygamy, the Swiss civil code and Italian penal code were adapted in their entirety (Zürcher 2004, 173). Generations of children and adults all over the country were also systematically enrolled into Western education programs in hundreds of newly established “People’s Houses” [*Halk Evleri*] and “Village Institutes” [*Köy Enstitüleri*] (Karaömerlioğlu 2006).

Unsurprisingly this dual policy of Turkification and top-down modernisation was not welcomed by, above all, the Kurds, whose growing discontent in the face of ever-intensifying reforms aimed at transforming the society into a homogenous whole governed by a modern

nation-state in the years following the foundation of the Republic often took the form of revolts against the state power. Insofar as they refuted the foundational logic of Turkish nation-state through their defiant claim for political existence as non-Turks, series of intermittent Kurdish uprisings that broke in 1925-38 were regarded as posing the single greatest threat against its survival and prosperity.⁷ Thus, following the outbreak of the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925, Turkish state adopted a much more radical and long-lasting version of nationalism that not only denied the very existence of Kurds but also read the entire Kurdish question essentially as a struggle between archaic remnants of the *past* intended to undo the *present*, ‘political reactionaries, bandits, landlords, and the sheikhs, in brief, a gang of evil’ resisting the ‘Republican Government and Republican army promising progress and prosperity’ (Yeğen 2007, 128). Befittingly, as one of the leading intellectual architects of Turkish *populism-qua-halkçılık*, Yusuf Akçura would perceive the 1925 rebellion in the same terms as a struggle between the forces of progress and reactionaries: ‘while the Turkish Republic is endeavouring to become a contemporary state, legal, social, economic, traditional and diplomatic obstacles have been encountered. [...] Now those individuals, institutions and groups representing these obstacles have constituted a sort of front in opposition to the efforts of the Republic. [. . .]. As it was observed in the last Kurdish reaction, the Turkish Republic is bound to eliminate this reactionary front in a very short time’ (Akçura 1925[1984], 18).

Bobby Sayyid emphasizes that the abolition of the Caliphate as part of the Kemalist modernisation project was particularly significant because it ‘ended the possibility of establishing an a-national political space’ around the shared identity of Muslimhood, shattering the above-mentioned “spiritual ground” necessary for the construction of a multi-national, multi-ethnic political community on Anatolian territory (Sayyid 1997, 60). As a ‘nodal point’ around which a Muslim political identity transcending the boundaries of nationhood was structured, the Caliphate posited an existential threat for the newly formed nation-state due to its symbolic power in mobilising the regime’s political opponents and, hence, became the target of a ‘systematic campaign of vilification’ (Ibid., 58). Like the Kurds, whose very existence was negated, whose unrest was attributed to a reactionary past and/or to foreign incitements by the Kemalist discourse, the Caliphate too was simultaneously deemed non-existent or pre-modern and got articulated to the “outside” of the modern Turkish nation-state. Just as those who

⁷ Though it is possible to start this wave of Kurdish uprisings with the Kurdish-Zaza Alevi rebellion of Kocgiri (6 March-17 June 1921), large-scale revolts against the state power in the early Republican era truly began with the Shiekh Said rebellion in 1925, which led to the death of approximately 15-20 thousands of Kurds (Olson 1989), and ended with the bloody suppression of another Kurdish-Zaza Alevi rebellion of Dersim in 1938, claiming the lives of over 13 thousand Kurdish Alevis and displaying almost as many (Köse 2013).

revolted against the new regime were registered not as Kurds but primitive tribes and criminal bandits, the Ottoman Sultans' claim to the title of the Caliph was dismissed as 'nonsense' since, Kemalists maintained, the office had practically ceased in 1258 (Hanioglu 2011, 147; Erdem 1996): 'Caliphate was only a title of the Ottoman Sultans and nothing more than that. A ruler called himself caliph, that was it!' (Nuri 1923 quoted in Turnaoğlu 2017, 229). While the Kurdish ethno-political cause was scorned as 'nothing but a resistance of the past to the present' (Yeğen 2007, 128), the Caliphate was similarly derided for being an anachronism in a modern world of nation states, which, Mustafa Kemal himself insisted, could amount to little more than 'a laughing stock in the eyes of the civilized world' (Atatürk 1983 [1927], 10 quoted in Sayyid 1997, 59). That is to say, besides having negated the very existence of Kurdish and Muslim political identities, Kemalist discourse also located the underlying ethos upon which those identities were founded at the "outside" of the modernity paradigm, thereby rendering them senseless or invisible. Finally, the Kurds and the Caliphate were both similarly articulated to the 'outside' of the Turkish nation through their alleged conspiratorial links to various foreign powers, who were believed to be inciting and/or assisting their causes as part of their own, greater geopolitical ambitions, which necessitated a weaker or, ideally, broken up Turkish nation and the state. Whereas the Kurdish unrests following the War of Independence were declared as being incited by the Western imperialist powers, particularly Britain, which aimed at destabilising south-eastern Anatolia to further their 'interests in the Middle East' (Yeğen 2007, 130-31), the sultan-caliph was accused of putting the 'armies of the caliphate' into the service of invading Greek army and dropping enemy propaganda leaflets which condemned the nationalist forces and their leaders (Sayyid 1997, 58).

It is therefore of little surprise that by the time the Turkish state had run its six-arrows program for over two decades, categories of the people and the nation, as well as populism and nationalism had morphed into a massive singularity under the hegemony of the single-party regime. They were weaponised as pre-emptive measures to maintain the equivalence drawn between the single-party regime and the nation, and against any attempt to unearth those potentially "political" cracks under the surface of a united, homogenous whole. As Mahmud Esat Bozkurt, one of the leading ideologues of extreme Turkish nationalism and a long-time minister of single-party era, succinctly put:

'No party in the civilized world has ever represented the whole nation as completely and as sincerely as the Republican People's Party. Other parties defend the interests of various social classes and strata. For our part, we do not recognise

the existence of these classes and strata. For us, all are united. There are no gentlemen, no masters, no slaves. There is but one whole set and this set is the Turkish nation’ (Bozkurt 1938 quoted in Toprak 1977, 28).

It is thus plausible to argue that what we have here in the case of Kemalist populism-*qua*-*halkçılık* is an exemplary one in which the once proto-populist nucleus of *halkçılık* discourse being rapidly and decisively transformed into a nationalist one (De Cleen et.al. 2019, 5). If we recall the set of questions put forth in the preceding chapter (3.4) as the criteria through which this dissertation aims to establish whether a political discourse is populist or not, the following concluding observations can be made regarding the Kemalist articulation of *populism-qua halkçılık*:

Formal Criterion	Populism	Nationalism	Kemalism
Nodal Point and claim to represent	The people-as-underdog	The nation and/or the people-as-nation	Turkish nation or Turks-as-nation
Subject position offered	Member of the people	Member of the nation	Member of the Turkish nation
Constitutive Outside	The elite/establishment	Non-natives and/or other nations	Non-members and/or other nations
Orientation of relationship between nodal point and constitutive outside(s)	Vertical: Down/Up (on the basis of hierarchy, power, recognition, incorporation, socio-economic and/or socio-cultural position and identity)	Horizontal: In/Out (on the basis of national identity or membership)	Horizontal: In/Out (on the basis of national identity)

Table 3 - Discourse Theoretical Conception of Populism, Nationalism & Kemalism

Articulated into the official ideology of the Kemalist single-party regime following the War of Independence, its ephemerally populist nodal point “people-as-underdog,” as it had been crafted in opposition to the intellectual and political elite of the Ottoman state during the Narodniki phase, gave way to an unmistakably nationalist one, i.e. “people-as-nation,” whose members were antagonistically situated against several constitutive out-groups of the Turkish nation, be it the ancien regime, the Caliphate, Western imperial powers, or competing ethno-religious identities like Kurds or Islamists. That is to say, Kemalist *populism-qua-halkçılık* conceptualized the political essentially around a *horizontal* struggle between *in-group* members of the Turkish nation and its external *out-groups* on the basis of national identity (Sutherland 2005), rather than a *vertical* one between a ‘large powerless group’ of the people at the *bottom*

and a small ‘illegitimately powerful group’ of the elite at the *top*. This is why we can categorise Kemalist *populism-qua-halkçılık* as an unmistakably nationalist discourse.

4.6. Kemalist *Halkçılık* vs Laclaudian Populism

In *On Populist Reason*, Laclau devotes several pages to a discussion on Kemalism as well (2007, 208-214). This is most likely due to his encounters with Nur Betül Çelik who studied Kemalism under him at the University of Essex during 1990s. Indeed, Laclau’s reading of Kemalist discourse is almost identical to that of Çelik, who conceptualises it as a radical discourse of discontinuity that emerges as a reaction against the Ottoman past and articulates the latter to its constitutive outside (1996, 1999, 2001). According to this reading, one of the key features of Kemalism is its ruptural conception of politics that aims to overcome the past through a sudden, momentary break. In Kemalist discourse, they maintain, ‘piecemeal engineering as a method of social change is radically excluded’ on the basis of a revolutionist belief that the ‘constitution of the “people” has to be a sudden and total event’ (Laclau 2007, 210; Çelik 2001, 88). This is particularly why the Kemalist project of Turkish nation-building took the Jacobinist form of top-down reforms to construct a brand new “people” of modern Turkey. Accordingly, Çelik identifies the point where Turkish *halkçılık* departs from the populist path and becomes overdetermined by nationalism in the founding moment of the republic that starts revolutionary epoch (1996, 123-77; 2001, 76-8). This is the point, she asserts, when *halkçılık* gets untangled from the ideal of popular sovereignty and is ‘identified with an elitist nationalism’ that seeks to establish a government “for the people, despite the people’ [*halkı, halk için, halka rağmen*]: ‘The discursive strategy of the Republican era clearly differs from that of pre-Republican era regarding its understanding of *halkçılık*...Based on positivist ideals, the 1920s *halkçı* [populist] discourse emphasises the intellectuals’ role in “social engineering”, thereby precluding the idea of “going to the people” from becoming a significant political maxim’ (Çelik 2001, 77-8). Thus, Laclau asserts, Kemalism was ‘unable to follow a populist route...because its homogenisation of the “nation” proceeded not through the construction of equivalential chains between actual democratic demands, but through authoritarian imposition’ (Laclau 2007, 212). Had it not picked this authoritarian route, Kemalism would instead leave room for ‘concepts that are compatible with democratic ideals such as “pluralism” and “popular government”’ (Çelik 2001, 78). Relying on ‘mass

mobilisation,' it would strive for a populist 'construction of equivalential chains between actual democratic demands' that were left unfulfilled by the establishment (Laclau 2007, 212-3).

There are two main problems with this reading of Kemalist *populism-qua-halkçılık*. Firstly, it is plain to see the underlying "emancipatory apriorism" of Laclaudian theory at play here. Presented in contradistinction to the authoritarian nation-building ethos of Kemalism, populism is yet again tacitly imbued with a democratic and emancipatory essence. Secondly, this account also treats the Kemalist discourse almost like a *sui generis* phenomenon, minimizing its feature of being situated on the continuous pattern of a specific process of political articulation. As another student of Laclau observes in Çelik's account, Kemalism appears 'ahistorical' from such perspective because it 'fixes Kemalism as a discontinuous emergence and mostly ignores the fact that Kemalism is one of the many political fronts that appeared as a result of the socio-political dislocation and dispersion caused by the "Ottoman projection" of modernity' (Arısan 2006, 90-91). If we were to follow the Laclaudian reasoning, we can infer that the populist route after the War of Independence would require Mustafa Kemal and his companions to attempt at articulating the ethno-political, religious, and cultural demands of various identities into the political milieu of new Turkish Republic. Thus, rather than categorically denying the existence of Kurdish and Islamist political subjectivities and violently suppressing their representations, for instance, a truly populist discourse would work towards incorporating their demands (along with other, equally unfulfilled demands) through mass mobilisation. Yet as we have demonstrated tracing the intellectual roots of Kemalist *populism-qua-halkçılık* all the way back to the First Reformation Era in mid-19th century, formulating inclusive discourses that were articulated through an equivalential incorporation of various elements into a singular frontier had been a recurrent yet ephemeral rhetorical tool Ottoman and Turkish intellectual elite employed for generations. Since at least the Young Ottomans, they simultaneously employed multifaceted discourses in order to appeal to various groups with often conflicting goals and demands, attempting to wield an equivalential chain between those demands in order to unite them under a singular front against a common enemy, be it the Great Powers, Christian Crusades, Sultanate, ethno-linguistic or religious separatisms or imperialisms. These attempts, however, were desperate measures of a last resort they had taken to trigger a sudden and momentous "political revolution" through mass mobilisation—which, in turn, would hopefully bestow upon them the political power needed for the accomplishment of their ultimate task; "social revolution." That is to say, a complete restructuring of society according to the blueprints they meticulously drew through their

intellectual endeavours had constituted the ultimate horizon of their political deeds. This meant that for the Ottoman and Turkish intelligentsia, the gap between the *actual* people and the *ideal* people constituted a paradox. With their parochial interests, utter ignorance and almost natural disposition towards superstition and demagoguery, the *actual* people were a “basket of deplorables” those generations nevertheless could not forsake. This was not just because of the indispensable role they were expected to play in the political revolution. It was also due to the fact that a transition from the actual to the ideal people was pretty much the lone *object of study* of their intellectual work. For decades they incessantly hypothesised that the *actual* people possessed the “evolutionary” potential to become the *ideal* people—if only the right political “formula” could be applied. In case the sheer level of romantic ambition and naïve enthusiasm of *Halka Doğru* movement somehow fails to constitute enough of a testament to that belief, perhaps the following entry from Mustafa Kemal’s own diary from 1918 could:

If I obtain great authority and power, I think I will bring about by a coup—suddenly in one moment—the desired revolution in our social life. Because, unlike others, I don’t believe that this deed can be achieved by raising the intelligence of others slowly to the level of my own. My soul rebels against such a course. Why, after my years of education, after studying civilization and the socialization processes, after spending my life and my time to gain pleasure from freedom, should I descend to the level of common people? I will make them rise to my level. Let me not resemble them: they should resemble me (quoted in Jung & Piccoli 2001, 79-80).

In *On Populist Reason*, Laclau quotes this exact same passage (2007, 213). However, situating the point of departure from the populist path at the moment of authoritarian imposition that characterized the single party-regime, this account overlooks the intellectual groundwork and dispositions its ideologues inherited from their predecessors and eventually carried to a zenith with the foundation of the republican Turkey. Thus the so-called six arrows, or ‘pillars of Kemalist ideology’ as Laclau calls them, including the principle of *populism-qua-halkçılık* were only the most recent, fully-fledged manifestations of ‘those ideas Ziya Gökalp had been writing since the 1910s’ (Parla 2008, 37). But as this chapter has shown, this tradition goes much further back than Gökalp and his solidarist-nationalist rearticulation of populism. Through the bio-organicist ideas developed in the second half of 19th century by Büchner, Spencer and Comte, earlier generations of Ottoman and Turkish intellectuals had developed an internally consistent, deeply positivist understanding of their society as a complex organism subject to evolutionary processes. Le Bon’s elitist social psychology and Durkheim’s solidarism, on the other hand,

had provided them with the “methodology” through which (they believed) they could initiate, accelerate and give direction to those evolutionary processes. That is to say, at almost no point in their politico-intellectual trajectory, Ottoman and Turkish intellectual elite regarded the “people” as the constitutive *subject* of politics, but rather an *object* of their own politico-intellectual endeavours *to save the state* by overtaking it.

Thus, it was perhaps a bit naïve of Laclau to even entertain the possibility that, as the descendants and loyal disciples of those generations of intellectuals, ideological and political architects of modern Turkey could somehow “follow down the populist route.” Considering the intellectual reservoirs it nurtured from, it is hardly surprising that Kemalist “populism” turned out to be the way it did. Laclau and Çelik are nonetheless clearly justified in their final verdict that as ‘the only Kemalist principle that can provide a better understanding of the internal logic of the Kemalist discourse’ *populism-qua-halkçılık* must be located at the ‘antipodes’ of the notion of populism (Çelik 1996, 170; Laclau 2007, 209). Presupposing a completely homogenous “people” that corresponds with the limits of the society, Kemalist *halkçılık* left little place for the legitimate formation of equivalential chains. Through a nationalist rearticulation of the people, it envisioned a society where only a differential integration of demands were allowed and eventually imposed this impossible vision top-down through authoritarian means.

4.7. Conclusion

This chapter explored the historical and intellectual origins of Turkish populism as those were first invented by groups of young Ottoman intellectuals in late 19th and early 20th centuries, and eventually embedded into Kemalist ideology of the single-party era. Critically engaging with the ideas of its original theoreticians and actions of first generation “populists”, it demonstrated that populism entered into the intellectual and political universe of Ottoman Empire as a desperate measure when they frantically searched for ideas that would somehow capture the hearts and minds of those ever dwindling numbers of “the people” and generate a common sense of belonging strong enough to “save the state.” To paraphrase Gramsci, Turkish populism was born in the course of a protracted crisis, a political interregnum when the ancien regime was dying but the new nation state could not be born yet (Gramsci 1971, 276; Stahl 2019).

It was under these exceptional circumstances that populist ideas were articulated with those of nationalism by the ideologues of republican Turkey like Gökalp, giving birth to a hybrid offspring that was *halkçılık*. Having successfully subdued several counter-hegemonic struggles like that of Kurds which rivalled the Turkish nationalist discourse by articulating them to the outside of itself, *populism-qua-halkçılık* sedimented the hegemony of the Turkish republican elite. Insofar as this peculiar understanding of populism-qua-halkçılık was carved into the core of not just Kemalist national identity but also the state and the CHP in the form of six-arrows, it has kept negatively constituting the limits of possibility for those later generation of Turkish intellectuals and politicians whose ideas and identities are formulated in opposition to it. As we are going to discuss in the next chapter, scholarly debates on populism in Turkey are structured within the confines of a particular framework that is impaired by this epistemological limitation.

Chapter 5: Contemporary Populism in Turkey: From Scholarship to the AKP

5.1. Introduction

Contrary to their late Ottoman and early Republican predecessors, much of the literature on Turkish populism in the multi-party era (1946-onwards) uses the Turkified loanword *popülizm*, but situate its empirical manifestations in direct opposition to the Kemalist notion of *populism-qua-halkçılık* discussed in previous chapter. More interestingly, many habitually identify the causes and characteristics of this later *populism-qua-popülizm* as outcomes of its reactionary origins against the earlier *populism-qua-halkçılık*. As a mere signifier, populism in the literature on Turkish politics is employed far too frequently, yet rarely in the company of a conceptual and theoretical discussion that would establish what is meant by it beyond political acts and agents that are not desirable.

This chapter traces the intellectual roots of this rather pejorative use of populism in contemporary mainstream literature on Turkish politics as a term that corresponds to little more than a derogatory adjective employed to discredit policies and political actors one does not agree with. Tackling the most influential works on Turkish populism, it identifies a single, constitutive theoretical framework that underlies all those seemingly different accounts, namely the famous ‘centre-periphery model’ (Mardin 1973). Tracing the roots of this highly influential model in the elitist conception of society originally theorized by Edward Shils (1956; 1961; 1975), the argument here is that a set of deeply modernist, elitist, and anti-populist assumptions underlying this model were also imported—inadvertently or not—into Turkish political science literature, resulting in a pathological understanding of populism that has become the predominant way the concept has been used ever since. Through a detailed reading of the AKP’s discourse as it is constituted through the official party documents, speeches of its leader Erdoğan and the works of party’s official ideologue Yalçın Akdoğan, the second part of the chapter reveals the near omnipresence of this model, and the pathological understanding of populism that comes along with it. So much so that, the relationship between the mainstream political science scholarship in Turkey and their object of analysis, the AKP, can be understood in terms of what Anthony Giddens calls *double hermeneutic* whereby the “findings” and presumptions of that scholarship have ‘enter[ed] constitutively into the world they describe’ (1986, 20). That is to say, the entire early discourse of the AKP seems to have been constructed to represent the party in the most complimentary way in the eyes of those who have long seen Turkish politics through the centre-periphery model: A liberal party fitting to the “Turkish

exception” that would modernise and democratise the country by overcoming the centre-periphery cleavage without falling into the trap of populism.

5.2. Anti-Populist Roots of Centre-Periphery Model

Perhaps the most striking feature common to both the post-war literature on Turkish *popülizm* and those early 20th century ideologues of *halkçılık* is their tendency to search for the perfect model that is suitable to apply—after some modification of course—in their explanations about the “exceptional” nature of Turkish case. For those earlier pioneers, the latest “models” available on the social sciences “market” at the time were those of first generation, positivist European “brands” such as Büchner, Comte, Spencer, Le Bon and, most significantly, Durkheim. As shown in previous chapter, Ziya Gökalp was by far the most prominent “entrepreneurial” figure among Turkish intelligentsia who successfully “imported” those models and “modified” them according to the characteristics of “domestic market.” So much so that his trademark product monopolized Turkish market under the local brand of *halkçılık* throughout the single-party era.

For the post-war generation of Turkish intellectuals, on the other hand, the latest model on offer was the behaviouralist one named ‘centre-periphery,’ originally invented and developed by Edward Shils, the most prominent American “brand” in the social sciences market during that time (Shils 1956; 1961; 1975). As mentioned in our discussion over the conceptual history of populism in chapter 2, Shils was among the pioneers of post-war scholarship on populism and listed Nazism, Bolshevism and McCarthyism among its typical examples (Shils 1956). ‘Tinged by the belief that the people are not just the equal of [but] better than their rulers,’ populism, for Shils, was an inherently anti-democratic ideology posing a threat against any established social ‘order’ as well as the independence of its guardians, i.e. intellectual and political elite (1956; 100-102).

A few years later, Shils developed his centre-periphery model upon the idea of society as structured around a ‘centre’ that holds it together as a ‘whole’ by providing it with a ‘central value system’, that is the ‘order of symbols, values and beliefs’ which are ‘pursued and affirmed’ by the activities of ‘elites’ and ‘institutions’ (1961). For a society to maintain the common purpose and continuity necessary for it to persist as a ‘whole’, this ‘central value system’ disseminated by elites and institutions had to consist of an ‘affirmative attitude towards

established authority,’ which in turn had to permeate the ‘periphery’ and integrate it to the centre.

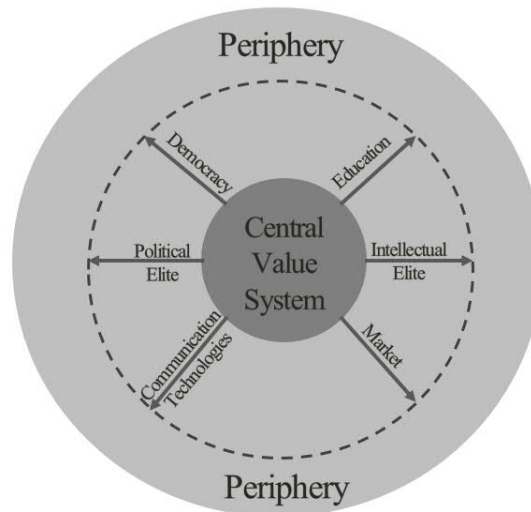


Figure 2: Shils' Centre-Periphery Model

Epistemological paradigm that underlies and informs Shils' model can be comfortably identified as the modernisation theory that enjoyed unprecedented glory during the post-war era. Having shared the ontological presumption of a linear path of historical development that social, economic and political progress and growth follow, proponents of modernisation theory made a moral and hierarchical ordering between traditional (i.e. pre-modern) and modern societies (i.e. Western liberal democracies) (Latham 2000; Gilman 2003). They assumed that:

‘progress and growth follow a common linear evolution which paved the way for the western, industrial and capitalist democracies of the time, which, as a result, signal the only pathway to authentic modernity. Whomever diverged from the dominant rule identified with ‘modern society’ – which according to modernisation theorists was cosmopolitan, secular, welcoming of rapid changes and characterised by a complex division of labor – was discredited and denounced as abnormal, as unable or unwilling to move beyond ‘traditional society’. The latter was depicted as inward looking, passive, superstitious, conservative and economically simplistic. United States and Europe functioned as examples/models of the first ideal type, while Latin America, Asia and Africa were unified under the single category of “traditional”’ (Stavrakakis 2017b, 6).

In perfect harmony with this, Shils' model considered ‘pre-modern societies’ as those where ‘the mass of the population...has been far removed from the immediate impact of the central

value system’ so much so that there are ‘occasions of active rejection and antagonism to the central institutional system, to the elite which sits at its centre, and to the central value system which that elite puts forward for its own legitimation’ (1982, 102). In modern societies, on the other hand, the centre-periphery gap was much smaller since ‘a more unified economic system, political democracy, urbanisation and education have brought the different sections of the population into more frequent contact with each other and created even greater mutual awareness, the central value system has found a wider acceptance than in other periods of the history of society’ (Ibid. 103). Shils argued that the major problems of any society were ultimately linked to the difficulties that arise in the dynamics of this integration of the periphery to the centre—the intensity of which would ultimately depend on where a particular society stood on the modernisation path. Further one moves away from the centre ‘less likely it is the authority to be appreciated,’ since those who are at the periphery lack the very ‘qualities’ acquired through ‘relationship, study, or experience’ to do so (Shils 1982 [1972], 102).

It is in this deeply elitist sense Shils defined populism as the name for any ideology that politically mobilises the ‘uneducated and unintellectual’ periphery’s essential suspicion against central authority along with its disposition to reject the ‘central value system’ elites and institutions uphold (Ibid. 199). Much like Richard Hofstadter (1955), Gino Germani (1978), and other proponents of modernisation thesis in the post-war era, Shils ‘stigmatised’ populism as a fundamentally ‘abnormal’ phenomenon deviating from a ‘reified and essentialized normality,’ an irrational reaction ‘violating or transgressing a natural order of how politics is properly, rationally, and professionally done’ in modern democracies (Stavrakakis 2018, 8). As Nils Gilman denotes, this combination of elitism with unwavering anti-populism characterising Shils’ model was indeed ‘the most fundamental political sentiment subtending modernisation theory,’ resulting in a very thin understanding of democracy—which was desirable only to the extent that peripheral masses submitted to the elite authority or otherwise they did not falter to ‘consign these people to the dustbin of both history and politics’ (2003, 18).

Eminent sociologist Şerif Mardin was the intellectual “entrepreneur” who imported Shils’ model into Turkey in his 1973 article ‘Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?’ (Mardin 1973; Turkish trans. 1990). Just as with Ziya Gökalp, it is difficult to overstate the influence of Mardin over his contemporaries as well as the future generations of Turkish

intelligentsia. With over 1100 books, articles, and dissertations citing his work⁸, Mardin's model 'has dominated the most academic analysis of post-war Turkish politics' (Hale and Özbudun 2010, xviii): 'Intellectual traditions that have little in common in terms of ideological commitments and epistemological presuppositions agree that modern Turkey has a center, held together by state institutions, socioeconomic status groups and worldviews, facing opposition from a periphery that has been excluded from those institutions, sources of privilege and cultural codes' (Bakiner 2018, 1).

In a nutshell, Mardin's work identified a 'structural contrast'—first emerged during the 19th century Ottoman modernisation period and then reproduced throughout the Republican era—between the growing power of a modern bureaucracy at the centre of Turkish society and a persistent incapacity of this centre in permeating and integrating the 'periphery' (1973, 169-70). Despite establishing centralised state apparatuses, Ottoman reformations had failed to curb the rise of peripheral power holders such as notables [*âyan*], who continued to function as the 'hinge' between the peripheral peasants and central officials, limiting the latter's capacity to penetrate the first through institutions of military, education or taxation. From the Young Ottomans onwards, Mardin argued, generations of European-educated elite at the centre of Turkish society had gradually resigned themselves to accepting the power local notables held over the periphery, and got distanced further and further away from it in terms of values and symbols. This, in turn, had resulted in the periphery's clinging even tighter on to a distinct 'peripheral code' that the 'men of religion' and local notables had 'established over the system of values and symbols' (Ibid. 179-80).

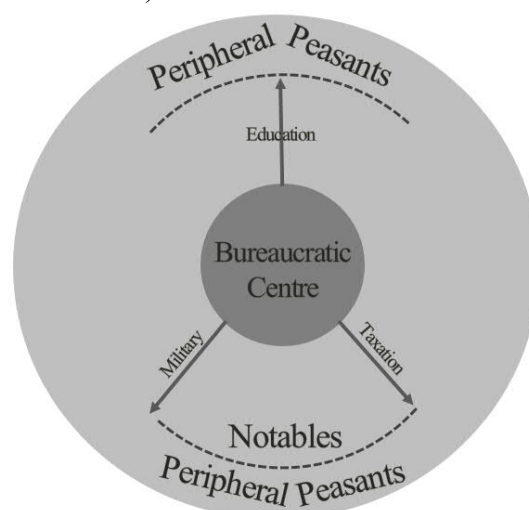


Figure 3: Mardin's Centre-Periphery Model (Ottoman Era)

⁸ Google Scholar search of his 1973 article yields 667 results and its 1990 Turkish translation 472 (search on April 21, 2018).

According to Mardin, the Kemalist formation of the Republic during the single-party era (1923-45), far from representing a rupture or revolution, was but a reproduction of this cleavage through the formation of a “new” centre. Continuing to see the periphery as ‘the locus of primordialist religious identities and ethnic separatism,’ elites and institutions of the Kemalist single-party regime did not attempt to integrate it to the centre but to eradicate the ‘peripheral code’ through an authoritarian imposition of their own ‘central value system’ (Mardin 1973, 177, 182, 184; Bakiner 2018, 3).

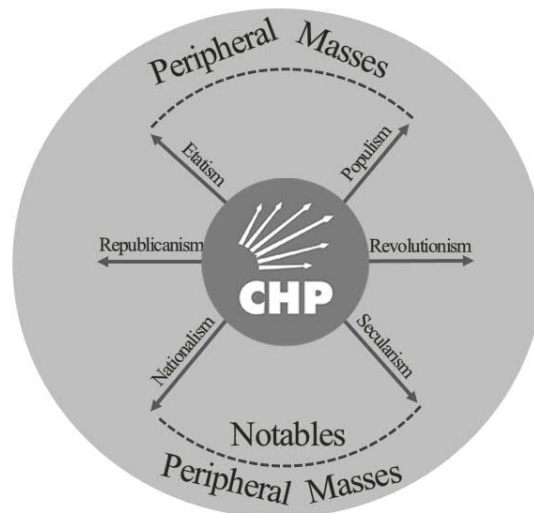


Figure 4: Mardin's Centre-Periphery Model (Single-Party Era)

Furthermore, Mardin argued that transition to the multi-party system in the post-war era only strengthened this cleavage, inscribing the centre-periphery divide deep into the party competition from the 1950 election onwards. Whereas the CHP stood fast for the preservation of Kemalist centre’s symbols, values and beliefs, the centre-right Democrat Party (DP) and its leader Adnan Menderes appealed to ‘rural masses and their patrons’ by identifying themselves with the ‘culture of the periphery’ and becoming ‘real populists’:

‘The new party promised to bring services to the peasants, take his daily problems as a legitimate concern of politics, de-bureaucratise Turkey, and liberalise religious practices...[T]he electoral platform of the opposition, especially as seen in Democrat Party political propaganda...established the lines of a debate between “real populists” and “bureaucrats.” This symbolic and cultural paraphernalia—the conspicuous patronising of mosques and religious rituals by [DP] members—identified the Democrat Party with the culture of the periphery...There were now good reasons to claim that the [CHP] represented the “bureaucratic” center, whereas

the Democrat Party represented the “democratic” periphery.’ (Mardin 1973, 184-86).

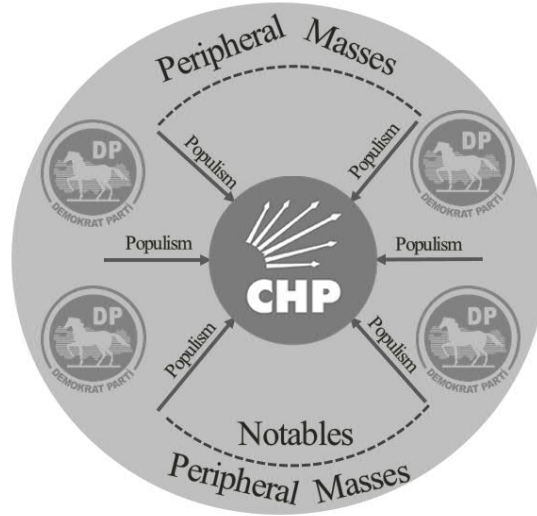


Figure 5: Mardin's Centre-Periphery Model (Multi-party Era)

5.3. Legacy of Mardin: Populism as the Birth-Defect of Turkish Democracy

Going far beyond the particular experience of 1950 electoral competition between the Kemalist CHP and the centre-right DP, centre-periphery model Mardin imported to Turkey eventually formed the mainstream of Turkish political literature in general and populism literature in particular. For decades to come, the party competition in each electoral cycle has been read through the centre-periphery cleavage, boiling the entire politics down to a bipolar competition between the agents of periphery and centre (Akarli and Ben-Dor 1975; Sayari 1978; Leder 1979; Heper and Landau 1991; Kasaba 1993; Sayari and Esmer 2002; Sunar 2004; Mehmet 2004; Kalaycıoğlu 2001, 2005, 2006; Çarkoğlu and Hinich 2006; Kahraman 2008; Keyman 2010; Öniş 2012; Koçal 2012).⁹ Ever since the appearance of Mardin’s model, Turkish scholars have identified the CHP (and its centre-left derivatives in decades to come) exclusively with the forces and tendencies of the centre, namely the state elite and their bureaucratic authoritarian *halkçılık*, whereas the DP of Menderes and his centre-right successors, have all been depicted as the adversaries of this tradition, representing the traditional and conservative forces of the periphery and *popülizm*.¹⁰

⁹ This is a (far from complete) selection of works by some of the most prominent scholars of Turkish politics that are built around Mardin’s model throughout the decades.

¹⁰ Following the 1960 coup, the DP was abolished and its leader Menderes was executed by the military government. Upon a return to civilian rule in 1961, ex-DP cadres founded the Justice Party (AP) under the leadership of Süleyman Demirel, who dominated the centre-right politics throughout the 1960s and 70s. Following the 1980 military coup, all political parties, including the CHP and the AP, were closed by the National Security Council. Once the military government announced a return to civilian rule and called elections, ex-CHP cadres

Following Mardin's initial depiction of party competition in 1950 as the one in between the "bureaucratic" centre and "populist" periphery, implicit or explicit prevalence of centre-periphery model is especially noticeable in the literature on Turkish populism. Contrasting the populism of the multi-party period with that of single-party era, Toprak argues that the centre-right parties such as the DP in 1950s, AP in 60s and 70s, and ANAP in 80s, all belong to the same tradition of 'political populism' (Toprak 1992). He maintains that, having emerged as a reaction against the 'intellectual populism' of CHP (i.e. *halkçılık*), these parties have become vessels for the masses to participate in 'political' affairs since the transition to multi-party system (62). Tekeli and Saylan similarly situate the DP tradition's populism in contrast to Kemalist *halkçılık*, arguing that, unlike in the single-party era, the DP and populist centre-right governments later on 'did not push for any reform which was not appreciated by the people' (1978, 91). Contrary to the 'elitist' motto of *halkçılık* 'despite the people for the people,' they assert that the DP-tradition has developed an inclusive approach to populist politics following the slogan 'from, with and for the people' (1978, 80, 89). In the same vein, Resat Kasaba traces the roots of the DP's electoral success back to the 'recentralisation of the late Ottoman and early Turkish states' that led to a 'common and generalised resentment' among a 'large section of Turkish society' (1993, 45). '[T]apping popular resentment against the single-party government' and 'translating this sentiment into outright antagonism against the [CHP],' he concludes that the DP became the 'main representatives of a genuinely populist movement' with a 'supra-class' appeal (Kasaba 1993, 52).

This tacitly accepted cleavage between centre and periphery is repeated and detailed most explicitly by İlçay Sunar in one of the most influential accounts of populism in Turkey (Sunar

founded three different parties in 1983-85: Populist Party (HP), Social Democratic Party (SODEP), and Democratic Left Party (DSP). While the first two merged under the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP) in 1985 which, in turn, gradually fused into the re-established CHP in 1992-95, the DSP continued alone under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit, partnering in and leading coalition governments during 1997-2002. The "centre-left derivatives" of CHP mentioned here comprises of these four parties (HP, SODEP, DSP, and SHP), which appeared and gradually withered away from the Turkish political scene in the span of roughly two decades 1980-2002. Ex-AP cadres at the centre-right, on the other hand, founded two parties of their own after the 1980 coup: The Motherland Party (ANAP) under the leadership of Turgut Özal, and the True Path Party (DYP) under Süleyman Demirel. While the former dominated the political scene in 1980s and maintained a majority in the governments until 1991, the latter ruled as majority and minority in the subsequent governments until 1999. Additionally, two other traditional party families exist in post-war Turkish politics, neither of which used to be accounted for in the literature based on centre-periphery model up until the emergence of AKP in 2000s: Ultra-nationalist far-right tradition of Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the Islamist National Outlook movement. The far-right MHP had been a fringe party for 30-years until its electoral breakthrough in 1999, when it became the junior partner of coalition government until 2002. Since then MHP has had a rather steady presence as the 2nd/3rd largest opposition party of the AKP era. National Outlook movement, on the other hand, have led to the foundation of a chain of Islamist parties since 1970, all but the most recent two of which were closed down by either military governments or constitutional court: National Order Party (MNP) 1970-71; National Salvation Party (MSP) 1972-81; Welfare Party (RP) 1983-98; Virtue Party (FP) 1998-2001; Felicity Party (SP) 2001-onwards; and finally the AKP.

2004).¹¹ He begins by identifying the key to DP's success in the party's 'inclusive populism' that was 'designed to appeal to the everyday demands and values of the *halk*' (2004, 125). Contrary to the 'exclusionary variant of populism' that was the 'official-Kemalist' *halkçılık*, Sunar argues that it did not attempt to force 'cultural change from above' but instead mobilised the people 'from below' against the 'bureaucratic elite' (124). In an earlier, extended version of his work that appeared in Turkish, Sunar most clearly spells out the Mardin-inspired centre-periphery basis of his reading of DP period as a 'transformation process' through which Kemalist *halkçılık* became *popülizm*. 'Political success of the DP', Sunar maintains, 'lays in a vertical contrast Turkish society inherited from Ottomans, which became even more pronounced thanks to the of the single-party era's policy of secularisation: a modern, secular political centre holding the monopoly of political power and a traditional, religious society carrying its economic burden. The DP's success resides in its ability to mobilise [the latter] under a popular alliance against the bureaucratic centre' (Sunar 1985, 2080-81).

The distinguishing feature of Sunar's account is the weight it gives to, what he calls, 'patronage relations' as an indispensable feature of Turkish populism, which he claims is the legacy of DP that has 'become the permanent features of centre-right politics, dominant in Turkey since 1950' (2004, 128). According to this, since its initial formation, the lasting 'alliance' between the centre-right parties and the periphery has been essentially a patron-client relation whereby 'goods and services are exchanged for loyalty, and support' (125-26). In this way, Sunar's approach practically shadows—without actually citing—the mainstream literature of the late 1970s that associated the notion of populism with the early stages of import-substitution industrialisation (ISI) policies, especially in Latin America, whereby 'steady growth allowed personal leaders to attract a large following by enacting mass incorporating, moderately redistributive policies' (Germani 1978; Weyland 1996, 4; Roberts 2007; Cardoso & Faletto 1979). In order to remain in power, similar to the classical populist regimes of Vargas in Brazil or Peron in Argentina, Menderes in Turkey was 'bound to a strategy of ever-growing economic expansion sustained by a state-assisted capitalist economy that was designed to uphold the party-anchored patronage coalition' (Sunar 2004, 126).

For Sunar, following Mardin, what is particularly interesting and exceptional in the case of Turkish populism is the role religion plays in it. Considering religion as the predominant and distinctive characteristic of the periphery—so much so that he calls it 'peripheral Islam'—Sunar

¹¹Two chapters used here were first published under the same titles. See: Sunar & Toprak 1983; Sunar 1990.

argues that Islam has been not only ‘instrumentalised’ by the centre-right parties for ‘electoral purposes’ but also ‘ideologized’ by ‘peripheral groups in their attempt to share in the benefits of modernisation through clientalist participation’ (163). Thus, Sunar’s account, built almost entirely on Mardin’s model, conceptualises populism in Turkey as an essentially peripheral, religiously conservative phenomenon antagonistically mobilised against the authoritarian, Kemalist, bureaucratic elite and their secular values at the centre, which manifests itself through the patronage politics of centre-right parties. Despite having started as a ‘celebrated democratic experiment,’ Sunar concludes, due to its ‘relentless pursuit of populist expansionary policies’ the DP has left a ‘clientalist-populist legacy of post-Kemalist politics’ which still ‘continues to haunt Turkish politics’ (128, 164). The centre-right parties have been trapped thereafter in ‘the particularism and parochialism of populist politics’ and thus ‘failed to effect a transition towards a more universalist, civic politics’ in the model of ‘industrially advanced, democratic countries of the West’ (130-31).

The obvious way in which Sunar describes populism as a lower form of politics holding Turkey back in its long journey towards the ideal of Westernisation and democratisation, gives way to a more manifest expression in several accounts later in 90s and 2000s. Heper and Keyman, for instance, outright classify first half-a-century of multi-party era [1946-97]—with the exception of a few years here and there—as a period of ‘parochialism’, ‘populism’ and ‘patronage’ of centre-right governments (1998). They argue that, despite their claim to be the ‘protectors of the masses against the state elite’ and ‘proponents of the “national will,”’ ‘political elite’ of this tradition have made ‘no effort to develop coherent socio-economic policies’ to establish a ‘viable democracy’ but pursued a politics consisting ‘no more than slipshod decisions essentially motivated by a desire to garner votes’ (261-63). In his account of the Turkish politics in the aftermath of 1980 coup d’état, Heper defines ‘populist democracy’ in contradistinction to both ‘rationalist democracy’ advocated by the ‘state elite’ and ‘popular democracy’ practiced in developed countries. He argues that the ‘political elite’ in Turkish centre-right tradition could neither pursue a path to serve ‘general interest’ like rationalist Kemalists did, nor could they stress ‘individual or group interests’ as their Western counterparts. Having stuck to the ambivalent notion of ‘national will’, populist democratic tradition in Turkey has ‘paid scant attention to the issue of representation’ and ‘contributed to the continuing salience of cultural cleavages’ (Heper 1990, 322).

Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, in turn, provides yet another standard modernist, thus deeply anti-populist account of Turkish politics, akin to those of late Ottoman intellectuals who likened the gap between their country and Europe to the one between a student and an accomplished scholar. For Kalaycıoğlu, the entire multi-party era has essentially been characterised by a particular ‘political culture’ that equates democracy with ‘populism practiced through clientalist networks’ reigns supreme (2001, 66-7; 2005, 178). In complete agreement with Mardin and Sunar, he maintains that despite having managed to ‘abolish the “happy few” who comprised the Center’ during the single-party era, main actors of Turkish democracy since 1950s have aimed no higher than to ‘extract serious benefits from the political Center’ to the periphery in order to get elected and re-elected, thus got stuck on the same point in the modernisation path (2001, 63-4). Classifying political parties in Turkey as ‘penultimate political institutions of populist patronage,’ Kalaycıoğlu condemns them for their pre-modern dependence on ‘nepotism, favouritism, regional-communal bonds, and other *gemeinschaftlich* links of agricultural and post-agricultural society’ (2001, 63). Since their electoral survival has been dependent heavily on the ‘solidarity groups of the Periphery’ that are formed around ‘primordial bonds’ such as ‘religious brotherhoods’ and enjoyed ‘clientalist connections, resources, and capabilities to mobilise the masses’, he maintains, centre-right governments from 50s onwards have remained stuck in a ‘vicious cycle,’ promoting the same impaired understanding of democracy that is ‘maintained at the expense of the rule of law’ (2001, 63; 2005, 177).

In a particularly modernist tour de force that brings to mind the idealised picture of the West drawn in the pages of *Halka Doğru* (op.cit. in chapter 4, p. 26), Kalaycıoğlu contrasts Turkish democracy to its obviously superior Western counterpart. Unlike the Western democracies where there is ‘a middle class on whose support democratic regime and its institutions can depend,’ he states, ‘democracy *alla Turca*’ is ‘supported by local notables (*eşraf*), peasantry and the urban poor’ and thus ‘can only function as a system of clientelistic networks bent on receiving the emoluments of the state budget through the ascendance to power of the populist patronage mechanisms (political parties)’ (2001, 65). Thus it is not surprising that once the pre-modern backwardness of Turkish political culture is established as such, the verdict is perfectly compatible with an elite theory of democracy that sees political participation of “the people” as a malaise in an of itself (Gilman 2003, 48): ‘Peasant culture and democracy produce a crude form of rule based on amoral majoritarianism, which fails to respect laws, and other rules of the democratic game of politics’ (Kalaycıoğlu 2001, 65).

Even Marxist accounts of populism in Turkey share a similar view and employ it as an exclusively pejorative term in their efforts to delineate the inferiority of Turkish political system vis-a-vis Western democracies. In his oft-cited piece ‘Populism in Turkey: Notes on 1962-1976 Period’, political economist Korkut Boratav, also known as the *doyen* of Marxist economics tradition in Turkey, defines populism as a political tool of hegemonic bloc, whose ultimate function is to reproduce capitalism by curbing radicalisation and class consciousness of the lower classes through incorporating them into the system via political and economic channels (Boratav 1989). Boratav considers it a direct outcome of the transition to multi-party regimes whereby to maintain their class dominance, capitalists are constrained to make a reluctant compromise with the lower classes: ‘General political framework of populism is a state in which the working classes, especially regarding those issues related to their own economic interests, *can effect* the political decision-making processes, but cannot organise in a way in which they could become an *alternative* to or *co-owner* of the political power’ (Ibid., 9).

Unlike the West European bourgeois democracies where working classes can organise and determine or influence the government, Turkish Marxists consider populism peculiar to the underdeveloped capitalist societies where it conceals the fundamental conflicts of class-based interests and usually appears in combination with state-sponsored ISI policies (Karahanoğulları 2012, 119). Populism, in this sense, materialises in a set of ‘distributive policies’ that are implemented to achieve a political ‘equilibrium’ between ‘the short-term interests of the vast masses of people’ and ‘the long-term interests of the sovereign bloc’—that is the ‘large landowners, and commercial and industrial capital’ (Boratav 1988, 99). Designed to distort and conceal the inherently class-based distinctions in capitalism, populism is employed most frequently by the centre-right parties (Keyder 1987, 202), which Marxist political economists consider essentially as political vessels of ‘parasitic sovereign classes who instrumentalize popular movements in order to gain a total control of political power’ (Eroğul 2014 [1970], 81).

Taking their queue mainly from the Latin American scholarship (Robberts 1996; Philip 1998; de la Torre 1999, 2000; Weyland 2003; Barr 2003; Filc 2011), more recent political economy focused accounts apply the concept of populism specifically in articulation with neoliberal governmentality, exploring the different ways in which the centre-right parties in the post-1980 era utilise populism in implementing neoliberal policies in various areas (Yıldırım 2009; Bozkurt 2013; Özden & Bekmen 2015; Akçay 2018; Boyraz 2018; Adaman et.al. 2019; Madra & Yılmaz 2019). Emphasising the role it plays in maintaining the dominant class

relations in an ‘environment shaped by increasing exploitation of labor, insecure working conditions and an attack on organised labor,’ these accounts regard populism essentially as a tool centre-right governments use to harvest the support of poor working classes while simultaneously consolidating the rule of ‘big bourgeoisie over the subordinate classes’ by ‘relating to the masses as the “people”’ (Bozkurt 2013, 377; see also Yıldırım 2009, 78). As Bozkurt puts in her investigation into the transformation of Turkish social security system under the AKP, the party employs ‘populism in the form of skyrocketing social assistance programs’ in order to ameliorate the negative effects of neoliberal policies over the lower classes (Bozkurt 2013, 391). While putting much of the state resources into the service of politically affiliated small and medium size enterprises that have quickly grown into large conglomerates thanks to their crony capitalistic relations with the party leadership, the AKP government has substituted the functions of shrinking welfare state with charity groups and financial instruments that have served as a ‘populist cushion,’ helping the party to blunt the force of economic liberalisation as well as to cultivate mass support even among the most impoverished groups (Akçay 2018, 10-14). Though they draw the attention towards often neglected class-based dynamics that motivate the AKP’s economic policies, these accounts still employ a Mardin-inspired understanding of populism as a deceptive tool the party employs principally to manipulate ‘peripheral’ masses to vote against their class interests (Boyras 2018, 441-42).

By this point it gets reasonably clear what is generally meant by populism when the concept is employed in the Turkish case. The fundamental conviction shared by all these accounts is that from the very initiation of multi-party regime in 1950, democracy in Turkish political culture has been practiced in the abnormal form of populism, which has deepened and cemented rather than overcome the centre-periphery cleavage. Insofar as this ‘virus’ has remained untreated, the entire history of Turkish democracy should be seen as one of populism:

[P]opulism continues to be the “birth defect” of Turkey’s democracy. Turkish populism survived three military interventions, numerous boom-and-bust cycles in the economy, and a large number of ideologically different government and parties. More importantly, Turkish populism has coexisted with different economic development programmes, including the state-sponsored rural development policies of the Democratic Party in the 1950s, and the import substitution of the

1960–1979 period. Most recently, populism has also survived the liberalisation reforms that started in 1980 and were maintained in the 1990s (Eder 2004, 52).¹²

This democracy-as-populism *abnormality* that is considered peculiar to Turkish political experience is further situated in contradistinction to a vaguely defined ideal of Western democratic *normality*, whereby the centre-periphery cleavage is considered, to a large extent, bridged thanks to a democratic political culture and sense of good governance disseminated and internalised throughout the entire society. Contrary to this supposedly ideal way in which Western democracies are established and maintained through a gradual transformation and integration of both the centre and the periphery into one another, democracy *alla Turca* is practiced predominantly through a violent penetration of the peripheral majority's primordial values and parochial interests into the political centre, wreaking havoc on what little democratic institutions and values were in place before them.

However, as detailed above, this entire centre-periphery model Mardin borrowed almost verbatim from Shils is a dead ringer for the elite-people cleavage the American scholar is more famously known for among the students of populism. Once *translated back* to that terminology, it becomes clear that populism, as it has been understood in mainstream Turkish literature, is also a dead ringer for Shils' deeply elitist account, most distinguishing feature of which is a deep contempt towards “the people”—only renamed as “periphery” this time. Populism is the political mobilisation of the ‘uneducated and unintellectual’ periphery (read *the people*), its values and interests by opportunistic demagogues against the centre (*the elite*) in order to obtain and/or maintain political power (Shils 1956, 199).

It is of particular importance here to underline the following point: the fact that the DP is identified as the archetypical example of populism in Turkish politics, exclusively through the lenses of modernisation paradigm thanks to the hegemonic status of the centre-periphery model, does not necessarily mean that it was not a populist party at all. That is to say, it is perfectly conceivable to identify the party as a populist one without simultaneously discrediting populism itself as an inferior, undemocratic way of conducting politics that consists of little more than opportunism, clientalism, and manipulation of the parochial interests and values of ignorant masses for the sake of political power. Taking the alternative post-foundationalist approach,

¹² Açıkel's account (2003) emerges as a case of *reductio ad absurdum* and offers a historical outlook of Turkish politics constituted entirely around sub-species of populism including, but unfortunately not limited to, ‘populist-leftism’, ‘populist-nationalism’, ‘Islamist-populism’, ‘nationalist-populism’, ‘paternalist economic populism’, ‘conservative-populism’, ‘urban populism’, ‘populist-right’, and ‘solidarist-populism.’

one could still argue that the DP did indeed construct a populist discourse around the nodal point of “the people” as the excluded majority, through which a multiplicity of otherwise differential identities and unfulfilled demands got articulated equivalentially in their common opposition against the establishment and the illegitimately powerful elite minority at its helm. Accordingly, following Bora and Canefe (2008), we can assert that the key to the DP’s rise to prominence and eventual electoral success laid at its ‘transformative capacity’ to articulate not just Islamic values and identities but also other multiple disgruntlements that were widespread among different groups in the society into a common ‘oppositional’ front:

‘the suffering of those small producers, croppers, farmers with little land and...labourers in rural areas under the burden of heavy taxation and semi-feudal order of land ownership; backlash of urban workers without social rights whose living conditions got even worse particularly with the Law of National Protection; complaints of civil servants and others with fixed income about rampant black-marketing and the rising cost of living; and the discontent of industrialists and businesspeople due to the Law of Protection and lack of state-sponsorship...’ (Bora and Canefe 2008, 641).

Under the trying socio-economic conditions of post-World War II years, the DP had the near-ideal circumstances to present itself as the sole representative of those various frustrated demands against the CHP and its relatively small clique of supporters consisting largely of civil and military bureaucrats, large landowners, local notables and selected businesspeople clientalistically tied to the single party-state. The fact that the government had blatantly manipulated the 1946 elections further strengthened the party’s discursive claim over being the ‘faithful voice of the people’ who had been muffled by the bureaucratic establishment and the political elite before (Neziroğlu & Yılmaz, 2014). The party took full advantage of these favourable conditions most distinctively during the campaign trail leading up to 1950 elections, constructing its entire campaign around the notion of ‘popular will.’ In Faroz Ahmad’s words, the DP ‘emphasised populism and popular sovereignty and demanded that political initiative emanate from below, from the people, and not from above, from the party’ (1993, 105). Highlighting the gap between the ruling elite and the people as the primary obstacle before the realisation of popular will, the party claimed to represent the people as a whole as opposed to the CHP elite which, in Menderes’ words, divided the people and valued them according to their levels of privilege: ‘We are not among those who deride the people by separating them into the first, second, and third class peoples’ (Menderes 1967, 75). In contrast to what they

identified as inherent elitism of the CHP government, the DP leadership situated the party in opposition to both the ‘political overlords who backtrack from their promise of popular sovereignty’ and their ‘elitist understanding of democracy’ which regards it to be the ‘elite’s duty to raise and educate’ the people (Ibid., 148-9).

Following its electoral victory with a stunning 80% parliamentary majority, however, the DP failed to fulfil its promise of repairing the economic and political damages single-party regime had caused. Despite initially prioritising small producers and farmers who were considered to be its most loyal supporters and achieving an impressive level of economic growth in its first few years, later on Menderes government allocated much of the vast foreign credit received as part of the US Marshall Plan to a small clique of large landowners, which not only exacerbated rural poverty but—along with post-war population increase and a few exceptionally poor harvests—also intensified the already-major wave of migration to urban areas from 1954 onwards (Keyder 1987, 132-3). As the popularity of the party and its policies deteriorated in the second half of the 1950s, the DP discourse steadily moved away from its early populism towards an authoritarian nationalism, becoming increasingly intolerant of dissenting voices in society and framing opposition as ‘desecration to the nation’s will’ (Bora and Canefe 2008, 647). Analogous to Kemalist nationalist articulation of Kurdish unrests to the ‘outside’ as an outcome of British incitements, at the height of Cold War, opposition originating from the so-called “periphery” against the DP government was attributed to communist incitements (Yeğen 2007, 129-31). As part of its discursive attempts to articulate its critics to the outside of the “nation”, the party formed the pro-government *Fatherland Front*, labelling those who refused to join as ‘subversives’ and broadcasting their names in the media (Ahmad 2003, 115). Having expanded the scope of its target far beyond the political and bureaucratic elite, the government added critical journalists, students and academics to its ever-growing list of the enemies of the nation. Thus befittingly, at the tail-end of its tenure, the DP crowned the completion of its transformation from a populist to a full-fledged authoritarian-nationalist party with the establishment of the ominously-named *Committee of Inquest into the Harmful Acts by the Opposition and the Press* (Türk 2014, 53-70).

This major discursive transformation the DP went through, along with the displacements, continuities, and collaborations it produced between various forces located at the so-called “center” and “periphery” remain unfortunately unaccounted for in much of the mainstream scholarship on Turkish politics, which instead habitually lumps the party’s entire lifespan under

the single blanket term of *populism* and presents it as the point of origin when the democracy in Turkey was born defective. Following Shils through Mardin, consequently, it regards populism as a perversion of what *actual*, *rational*, and *proper* democracy is supposed to be. In other words, having remained firmly stuck within the centre-periphery paradigm, even half-a-century after Shils, mainstream studies on Turkish politics consider populism as an essentially inferior way of conducting politics that lags far behind the supposed ideal of Western democracy. In parallel with the early ‘pathological’ accounts of populism developed in 50s and 60s (Hofstadter 1955; Viereck 1955; Shils 1956; Lipset 1960; Bell 1955, 1963) this scholarship classifies it as a deceitful, Machiavellian political tool that is detrimental to democratic principles and institutions. Populism, by its very nature, is deemed most suitable for the use of power-thirsty demagogues who master it with ease to mobilise the ignorant, peripheral masses by manipulating their primitive values and gratifying parochial interests in the service of a quest for political power.

Since what persistently characterises and determines the periphery, i.e. *the people*, in the particular case of Turkey—what Kalaycıoğlu calls ‘peasant culture’ or Mardin ‘peripheral code’—is conservative values and provincial interests, mainstream scholarship tends to locate instances of populism exclusively in the centre-right descendants of DP who have only perpetuated the party’s *original sin* by manipulating the people and tapping into their conservative values and short-term interests in exchange of political support. Hence, it is of little surprise that the single most popular and electorally successful case of left populism in Turkish political history, i.e. Bülent Ecevit’s ‘left of the centre’ outlook in the 1970s, is consistently overlooked in the mainstream accounts of Turkish populism (see esp. Aytaç & Ezgi 2019). Having already outlined his populist vision in three consecutive books titled *Left of the Centre* [Ortanın Solu] (Ecevit 2009 [1966]), *This Order Must Change* [Bu Düzen Değişmelidir] (2009 [1968]) and *Atatürk and Revolutionism* [Atatürk ve Devrimcilik] (2009 [1970]), Ecevit deliberately and painstakingly swayed the CHP away from its traditionally elitist and etatist Kemalism into adopting a left populist discourse that identified itself ‘entirely with “the people”’:

‘It is necessary for us to give up claiming that only intellectuals know what is best, and to accept that the people know perfectly well where their interests lie. If so far people have not voted for the reformist forces [i.e. the CHP] that has not been

because of their backwardness but because they saw that the reformists were alienated from them' (Ecevit quoted in Ahmad 1977, 313).

For Ecevit, then, left-populism offered the opportunity to break the bonds of loyalty the right-wing parties had constructed with the pious population and to rearticulate them into its own "people" (Erdoğan 2001; Esmer 2008). As Çolak explains, 'the primary goal of Ecevit's brand of populism' was to show that 'the pious people, too, could be progressives' given that they 'could not possibly remain indifferent to leftist policies that would improve' their lives (Çolak 2016, 12). Thus, he considered it a mistake on the CHP's part to focus exclusively on cultural reforms without addressing the everyday economic grievances of the ordinary people first, which had distanced the pious masses from the party.

Standing witness to the fallacy of the mainstream wisdom that the center-periphery cleavage is somehow reflected in the voting behaviour and ideological self-identification of the electorate in Turkey—i.e. those holding centrist values such as secularism identify themselves on the left and hence support the CHP, while the pious peripheral masses are strongly associated with the right and therefore support the DP and its descendants (Çarkoğlu 2012)—Ecevit's left populist discourse succeeded in appealing to and resonating with the majority of voters in Turkey, massively expanding the CHP's electoral basis and giving the party its highest-ever share of votes at 41% in 1977. This left populist era which demonstrated the radical fluidity between the so-called centre and periphery remains conspicuously missing from the mainstream scholarly accounts because it constitutes an *anomaly* for an otherwise seamless, uni-dimensional politico-historical narrative that is the centre-periphery.

5.4. From Theory to Practice: Use of "Populism" in the Early AKP Era

Let us continue with an even bolder claim about the mainstream literature on Turkish populism: Even during the AKP-era (2002-onwards) populism still continues to function within more or less the same parameters set by Shils, as an overwhelmingly dirty word—a pejorative reserved exclusively to discredit politics and politicians that are disapproved and/or despised. That is precisely the reason why numerous books and edited volumes published during the so-called "golden years" of AKP government (2002-2010) praising its manifold successes in the areas of democratisation and economic progress specifically refrain from using it in relation to the party, its leadership or policies in any ways (Heper & Toktaş 2003; Yavuz 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2006,

2009; Kieser 2006; Keyman & Öniş 2007; Ciddi 2008; Cizre 2008; Fuller 2008; Hale & Özbudun 2010).¹³ In rare cases where this “vile” word appears, it is almost always there to make the point that how well the AKP and its leadership have managed to resist this inherent disease of Turkish political culture (Heper & Toktaş 2003, 178-9; Cook 2009; Karagöl 2010); ‘eschew an unbounded populist path’ (Patton 2006, 515); or not to fall into yet another one of those ‘recurrent populist cycles’ (Keyman & Öniş 2007, 130, 237; Hale & Özbudun 2010, 101-103).

For the critics and opponents of the AKP during these “golden years”, on the other hand, populism was the key factor they contemptuously attributed the party’s electoral success to. In 2005, the AKP Minister of Culture and Tourism Erkan Mumcu unceremoniously resigned from his post and the party due to, what he claimed, ‘populist policies’ of the government, adopted solely to win elections (Sabah 2005). Opposition columnists argued that ‘populism’ offered an ‘easy way out’ for Erdoğan to disguise the ‘deceitful’ and ‘erroneous’ nature of the government policies, and instead enabled him to get ‘the people to applaud him’, ‘bring in votes’ and ‘provide the results he wanted’ in the elections (Mengi 2007). Secularist scholars, on the other hand, warned of an ‘Islamisation’ and ‘Arabisation’ of Turkey under the AKP, which aimed at ‘dismantling the Republic’s code of conduct in statecraft—in the name of populism’ through ‘populist and chauvinistic approaches to politics’ (Criss 2010, 47). In their arguments against the amendments that would grant pardon to university students who had lost their rights to study or exemption to those over 40 years-of-age from military service, opposition politicians dismissed those proposals as ‘populist measures’ by the AKP government to harvest votes in the face of approaching elections (TBMM 2005, 478-81; Yıldırımkaaya 2010; Habertürk 2010). The day after the AKP gained a landslide victory against his own party in July 2007 general elections, a deputy chairman of the CHP voiced his despair in the face of what he perceived as the triumph of ‘blatant populism’:

‘If you are in need and hungry, if you are not at all content with your life, if you criticise the government every day from dusk till dawn and you then vote for the very same government, there must be something which cannot be explained with logic. What is it? It is the government’s policy to harness the religious feelings of the people for political aims. If the people, despite all these hardships, still vote for

¹³ This is, naturally, an incomplete list but, nevertheless, given the prominence of both their authors and publishing houses, gives a representative picture of the mainstream scholarly take on AKP during this period.

this party, that probably means that they vote for them because of religion...If illogical reasons play such an important role in politics, this should make us think' (Öktem 2007).¹⁴

The glaringly obvious point to be made here is of course the fact that despite all their obvious differences, both pro- and against-government voices agreed upon a pejorative definition of populism as a form of politics to be avoided at all costs due to its dangerous, irresponsible and irrational qualities. Furthermore, remaining largely within the tradition set by their predecessors, the mainstream scholarly accounts of the Turkish politics during this period of so-called “golden years” of AKP government join this anti-populist crusade and do little more than reverberating its ideological premises.

As a matter of fact, the alleged non- or even anti-populism of the AKP, which was applauded and commended in the mainstream literature on Turkish politics at the time, was an angle the AKP and its leaders worked really hard to promote in their early efforts to distance the party away from its predecessors and competitors (AKP 2002a; Sarı 2011, 410-412).¹⁵ Literally the second sentence of its first ever electoral declaration in 2002 reads: ‘Promises the party makes to the people...are not populist ones given as part of the usual election propaganda but documents that present the way in which the AK Party owns up the problems of Turkey and list its future goals’ (AKP 2002b). In his statement of “Emergency Action Plan” two weeks after the party’s first electoral victory in 2002, Erdoğan ensured the public that his party was strong enough to ‘undertake what is to be done,’ precondition of which, he said, was ‘to eradicate populism’ (Hürriyet 2002a). The second electoral declaration in 2007 similarly boasted that having avoided to ‘fall into the populist trap’ in its first term, the AKP government offered ‘realist policies’ with a ‘long-term vision’ and produced ‘sustainable solutions’ (AKP 2007, 38). Non-populist character of the government policies was a point AKP spokespeople repeatedly underlined to garner support for them. Sweeping legal amendments and policy changes the party pushed for, like the so-called municipality reform to overhaul the local administration structure or the democratic opening process to negotiate a peaceful end of the

¹⁴ Published in *Radikal* and *Sabah* dailies on July 24, 2007 (both archives are inaccessible after closure or ownership change). Hence, see Öktem 2007.

¹⁵ In the run up to Siirt by-election where he finally got elected as member of parliament and subsequently became prime minister, Erdoğan had declared: ‘Populism is a customary feature of Turkish politics. During election campaigns, particularly by-elections such as this one, the state channels all its resources to the election district. As a candidate and as the leader of a political party, I do not condone nor want such a transfer’ (Milliyet 2003). Albeit being published as a political propaganda material, Sarı (2011) is an invaluable volume that contains more than 550 speeches Erdoğan gave during 2002-2010.

civil war with the Kurdish PKK, were defended as results of ‘not populist but administrative calculations’ stemming not from ‘populist concerns’ of ‘vote’ or ‘office’ but ‘concerns of Turkey’ (HaberTürk 2008; NTV 2009).

Invariably invoked in contradistinction to the espoused principles of the party like rationality and sincerity, populism in the AKP discourse overlaps with the way in which it has been defined in the literature. Like Mardin, Sunar, Kalaycıoğlu, and the rest, Erdoğan himself finds populism a reprehensible way of making politics that employs ‘empty promises’ to target parochial interests and ‘identity politics’ to capitalise on the people’s values and beliefs:

‘Nobody should expect us to get into a populist race with others, take part in a political competition over identities, or conduct DNA tests of the people. Those who run such tests are the ones who try to divide the country. The AKP have never resorted to populist rhetorics on any issue and will never do so in the future. Our vision refuses the notion of politics as a bidding game of promises. We compete not in terms of the price as populist rhetorics available at every other political stall do, but in terms of the quality of services we provide and of variety of products our politics as a package offers. Those who picked the easy way out in elections and, rather than bothering with a different politics, entered into a race of identity politics were made to pay a hefty price by our people. We have not and reject ever to bargain over ethnic, religious or cultural identities of our citizens’ (Milliyet 2008).

Conceived as this particular combination of ‘empty promises’ and ‘identity politics,’ populism became the worst of all political evils in the AKP discourse—the pursuit of an ‘exclusive and polarising’ politics on the basis of an ‘ideological, ethnic or religious identity’, which ‘antagonises the rest’ (Erdoğan 2004a). Contrary to such an understanding of politics based on an ‘us versus them mentality that has polarised Turkish society’, the AKP portrayed itself as a catch-all liberal party dedicated to the principle of pluralism, the ‘meeting point of different value systems, political styles, and individuals from across the political and socioeconomic spectrum’ (Akdoğan 2003, 86, 116; 2006, 54; 2010). In a speech he gave at the American Enterprise Institute in 2004, Erdoğan himself reiterated the exact same point in pretty much the same terms:

‘We are against the employment of discourses and organisational approaches that create *divisions of us and them* and make one specific fact— ideology, political

identity, ethnic element, or religious thought— the center of the polity, thereby antagonising all other choices. We don't accept that kind of an approach. This supposition is also the most effective measure against those who try to abuse people's spiritual and moral feelings, including religion as for secularism. We define this as an institutional attitude and method which ensures the state to remain impartial and equidistant to all religions and thoughts, a principle which aims to ensure peaceful social coexistence between different creeds, sects, and schools of thought' (Erdoğan 2006, 336).¹⁶

5.5. Conservative Democracy: An Anti-Populist Bridge to Close Centre-Periphery Gap

With its claims to put forth rationality, individual and human rights, tolerance and pluralism as the guiding lights for politics, such an “anti-populist” discourse was designed to safely position the AKP within the family of liberal democratic parties in Europe, distancing it particularly from the Islamist parties of National Outlook tradition from which the entire founding cadres of the party, including Erdoğan himself, were hailed (AKP 2002c).¹⁷

This is most salient in the AKP's ideological self identification as a ‘conservative democratic’ party, which often amounted to “anti-populism” as well (Özbudun 2006a; Şimşek 2013; Yavuz 2018). Adapted roughly from the European context by the official ideologue of the AKP Yalçın Akdoğan, ‘conservative democracy’ has been the core term the party discourse employed to differentiate the AKP both from its predecessors belonging to the Islamist National Outlook movement as well as from the centre-right parties (2003; 2005; 2006; 2010).¹⁸ While the Islamist parties, according to Erdoğan, resembled ‘political congregations’ tied to ‘strict ideological doctrines’ and thus ‘radicalised’ politics, the centre-right parties ‘did not have any ideology at all’ and were like ‘political corporations’ designed solely to distribute

¹⁶ Tellingly this speech (dated January 24, 2004) is published as an appendix in an academic book published by University of Utah (Yavuz 2006), which contained not just Erdoğan but also Akdoğan and Abdullah Gül along with contributions by several of the leading liberal scholars of Turkish politics including Ali Çarkoğlu, Ziya Öniş, Hakan Yavuz, William Hale, Ahmet Kuru, Sultan Tepe, İhsan Dağı, Şaban Kardaş and many more. Even a cursory reading reveals that this speech in Washington D.C. is very close to the one Erdoğan made at the opening of International Symposium on Conservatism and Democracy (Erdoğan 2004a) two-weeks prior in Istanbul.

¹⁷ See especially Article 4, where the party lists freedom of speech (4.4), belief (4.4. & 4.8), and political organisation (4.6), as well as separation of powers (4.7), free-market (4.10), and pluralist democracy (4.13) among its founding principles (AKP 2002c, pp. 19-22).

¹⁸ As one of those few names who have never left Erdoğan's closest circle since the AKP's foundation, Akdoğan served uninterruptedly as his chief policy advisor, while also taking side-tasks such as MP, deputy PM, as well as columnist in several pro-government newspapers.

income to their shareholders' (Erdoğan 2004a). As a self-identified 'conservative democrat', Erdoğan himself embraced the term as reflecting both the 'political philosophy' and 'ideological identity' of the party at the time, and promoted it as being uniquely capable to 'influence and change Turkish political culture and institutions for years to come' (Akdoğan 2003, 6-7; 2006, 49).

Conservative democracy as the ideological identity of the AKP was developed originally through discussions with a group of prominent Islamist writers such as Ali Bulaç and Ahmet Harputlu in the pages of journals like *Sözleşme* [The Charter] and *Bilgi ve Düşünce* [Knowledge and Thought] (Bulaç 2010). The necessity of having a radically different orientation in Islamist politics in tune with the rapidly changing domestic and international situation was the focus of their discussions. They argued that in the era of post-28th February Turkey and post-9/11 world, where the universal hegemony of liberal democracy and free-market economy crystallised in domestic politics as a deep suspicion towards anything Islamic and a common desire for the EU membership, a departure from the 'confrontational' discourse of traditional Islamist parties towards a more 'accommodational' one of 'new Islamism' was necessary (Çavdar, 2006). Akdoğan's formulation of 'conservative democracy' was in essence the name of such a neo-Islamist reshaping of the AKP's ideological identity so that it would 'combine international norms with local values and cultures' (2003, 113-18): 'Through a merger between conservative democracy and global values the AKP should produce a thesis for Turkey, which should be made of the human rights discourse of Brussels, spiritual values of Mecca, and national conscious of Turkistan' (Yavuz 2004).

Within the early party discourse, the AKP stated that in order to 'establish a healthy relationship between religion and politics', it was indispensable to take 'religious values of society in Turkey' into account as a 'social given' and a 'part of tradition' (Akdoğan 2003, 100). That is to say, through an emphasis on its conservative identity, the party displayed a tendency and capacity to appeal to what Sunar called 'peripheral Islam', opening up the political centre to accommodate, rather than preclude, its values and sensitivities (Sunar 2004, 163). But unlike its Islamist predecessors, the AKP discourse also contained elements that signalled a fair level of awareness about the likely problems of an uncontrollable rush from "peripheral Islam" would cause in the "secularist centre". In order to pre-emptively calm these ultimately elitist and secularist anxieties, the AKP was quick to assure any sceptical observer that the party would not fall into the same "populist trap" of "identity politics" as its predecessors did, and would

‘hinder uncontrolled reaction in favour of controlled alteration’ (Akdoğan 2006, 53). In a perfectly Young Turk-ish tour de force, the party articulated Islam as an essentially pluralistic, liberal doctrine that rejects ‘any privilege claim on the basis of clan, tribe, family, class or individual’ (Akdoğan 2003, 97). Accordingly, in contradistinction to previous Islamist parties conservative democratic identity of the AKP simply amounted to taking this ‘liberal, inclusive and critical nature’ of Islam into account in its politics (Harputlu 2002, 24-6; Metiner & Akdoğan 1997, 46-7):

‘While attaching importance to tradition, our conservative democratic vision does not follow a traditionalism that rejects the proceeds of *modernity*. While considering the social, group identities and civil society importance, the AKP does not push for a congregationist [*cemaatçi*] approach. While attaching importance to religion as a social value, the AKP does not favour a (style of) politics based on religion, the transformation of the state on an ideological basis, and organisation on the basis of religious symbols. Politics based on religion, using religion as an instrument, and pursuing an exclusionary policy in the name of religion will harm both social peace and political pluralism, as well as religion. There is a very serious difference between being a party which attaches importance to religion and to the pious people and accepts the social functions of religious values, and being a party which aims to transform the society by force with the aid of the state apparatus by transforming religion into an ideology’ (Erdoğan 2004a; Erdoğan 2006, 336).

It is interesting to note that ‘conservative democracy’ as it was defined and promoted as an ideological novelty within this discourse is calibrated almost perfectly for the gaze of those who have long seen the politics and society in Turkey through the lenses of the centre-periphery model. So much so that it is as if the whole notion was invented specifically for the consumption of that specific audience. In his speech at the first general congress of the AKP on 12 October 2003, for instance, Erdoğan described his party’s democratic conservatism as a ‘brand new political centre’ that takes its queue from the ‘societal centre,’ which clearly corresponded to periphery in Mardin’s model. Presenting his party as a global ‘model’ of a modern mass party based on conservatism, Erdoğan declared its mission: ‘to bring the values and demands of the societal centre to the centre of politics, thereby solving problems that stem from the gap between the state and society.’ Contrary to the ‘obsolete understanding of the centre’ that hindered the society’s ‘dynamism,’ Erdoğan defined his party as an ‘Anatolian movement formed by our

beloved people' who have 'accomplished what the elites could not' (AKP 2003). Almost two years later, he made the same point in even less ambiguous terms. Understood as the 'collection of those values, habits and preferences the people share and agree upon,' the societal centre was where the AKP as a 'conservative democratic party' stood at. That was particularly why his party was finally able to avoid falling into the same old 'trap of populism' and, instead, bridge the gap that had traditionally existed between the political centre and the rest of Turkish society:

'Having lost its connection with the societal centre long ago, politics in Turkey imprisoned itself in a political centre that took place within the limits of *status quo*. Even those parties that considered themselves as centre could not step beyond the limits of such a narrow political centre. The real achievement of the AKP is its novel understanding of politics that has done away with the disconnect between the societal and political centres, *rendering them identical* instead. Without being based on the societal centre and carrying its demands into politics, no political initiative can call itself the centre, nor can it be democratic. It is in this sense the society is the basis of our politics... For us, politics can not be a worthy endeavour unless it is part of a *civilizational perspective*. Politics is a worthy cause only insofar as it reproduces a civilisation so that its reputation soars on a global scale and becomes a model of civilizational practice for the humanity. Our mission is too important to be wasted through futile, daily bickering, as it is deep and rich enough to embrace the sensibilities of each and every person in this country. We are faithfully, lovingly, equally and without discrimination connected to all the colours and human richness that constitute this country. We will not fall into *populist traps*, and never give a pass to those attempts to corrupt the chemistry of our society. We will live the way we have always lived throughout history, attached to one another as close as the nail and flesh, sharing the beauties, riches and bright future of this country like brothers and sisters (Erdoğan 2005a quoted in Sarı 2011, 57-8).

This particular speech by Erdoğan is quoted in extenso because it does indeed provide a telling summary of the paradoxical way in which the discursive construction of AKP's political identity has materialised. Since its very foundation the party has defined itself in contradistinction to what it considered as "twin evils" of Turkish politics: "status quo parties" of the centre and "identitarian parties" of the periphery. Equalising populism, as it has been done in the mainstream literature, with "patronage" and "identity politics" based on the values

and interests of the periphery, the party has managed to have its cake and eat it too, so to speak. Insofar as populism is associated exclusively with the corrupt practices of the centre that prays on the parochial interests of the periphery and the identitarian politics of pro-Kurdish or Islamist parties that are considered as capitalising on their ethno-religious sensibilities, the AKP’s relentlessly antagonistic discourse that is constructed around the claim to champion the values and interests of “the people” against Kemalist status quo and its ultra-secularist “elite” at the political centre could pass as “non-populist”. Insofar as any political attempt to radically change the society in line with a vision for future is dismissed as totalitarian and utopian ‘social engineering’ (Akdoğan 2003, 115-17; AKP 2002a, 2002d; Erdoğan 2004a), the AKP’s civilizational discourse that has envisioned politics primarily as a transformative effort for the reconstruction of a civilisation could pass as “conservative.” A patently populist discourse combined with radical vision for future could pass as anti-populist conservatism insofar as it is adapted into the centre-periphery model that has been by far the most hegemonic way in which Turkish politics is ‘enframed’ (Mitchell 1990; Baykan 2014).

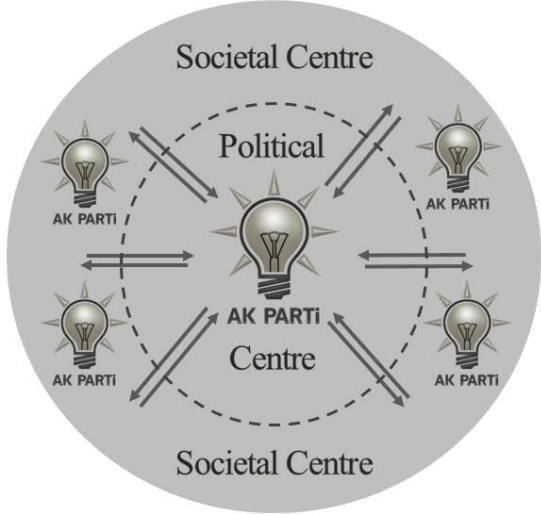


Figure 6: Centre-Periphery Model in the AKP Discourse

This speech is also significant due to its utilisation of a distinctly “civilizational” emphasis that had long been the determining feature of Islamist politics in Turkey. Formulated by the National Outlook Movement in 1970s and 80s as a “third way” alternative path of development to both capitalism and socialism during the Cold War era, civilizational rhetoric prioritised the moral and spiritual awakening of the society based on Islamic values and principles as these had been supposedly practiced for millennia within the Turko-Islamic civilisations like the Seljuk and Ottoman Empires. Holding fast to those authentic, time-tested and dependable set of morals and principles that created and advanced those great civilisations, Turkey could stand

independently against the attempts to assimilate it into Western or Soviet camps, and instead build civilizational alliances with other Islamic states and societies. The fact that this distinctly Islamist narrative was present within the “conservative democratic” discourse of the AKP as early as 2005 contradicts the mainstream claim that the Islamist transformation of the party became apparent much later, with Erdoğan’s so-called “masterhood” period beginning in 2011-12. Menderes Çınar, for instance, argues that the AKP ‘gave up on its conservative democratic identity step by step’, declaring the Islamist ‘civilizational discourse as the party’s new identity’ most clearly in the 3rd party congress in 2012 (Çınar 2018). But Erdoğan’s 2012 speech was no more “civilizational” than the ones he made several years before, constructing a similar, continuous narrative of history taking its roots from early Turko-Islamic civilisations a thousand years ago: ‘You cannot speak of a civilizational claim if the children of a nation, a civilisation that built extraordinary monuments on a boundless territory spanning as far as those magnificent barracks in the city of Sana in Yemen to the Bridge of Mostar fail to look after the monuments of Seljuks, Ottomans, and even Republican era that lay neglected by their side’ (Erdoğan May 8, 2006, quoted in Sari 2011, 329). As the proud inheritors of a ‘civilisation that promotes...spiritual values over materialism, conscious and morals over passion, sharing over self-seeking’, from its early years on the AKP consistently staked a claim over the achievements of Turko-Islamic civilisation at ‘every single stage of history’ (Erdoğan September 5, 2005, quoted in Sari 2011, 328-9). From those ‘heroic victories’ like the battle of Manzikert (1071), conquest of Constantinople (1453), and the Battle of Gallipoli (1915) to ‘great statesmen’ like Alp Arslan of Seljuks (1000s), Mehmed II (1400s) and Suleiman the Magnificent (1500s) of Ottomans, Mustafa Kemal of Republican era (1900s) as well as to those ‘remarkable names we have gifted to the arts and sciences’ including Al-Khwarizmi (800s), Al-Farabi (900s), Avicenna (1000s), Mevlana (1200s), Ali Qushji (1400s), Piri Reis (14-1500s), Sinan the Architect (1500s), Kâtip Çelebi (1600s), Nazim Hikmet and Cahit Arf (1900s), all were rearticulated as part of the same civilizational discourse that the party claimed ownership as ‘ours’ (Erdoğan February 8, 2010, quoted in Sari 2011, 329-30).

Expectedly, the AKP’s clear references to *Mardin-esque* terminology did not go unnoticed in the literature. As Ergun Özbudun, one of the leading proponents of centre-periphery model, puts in his remarkably favourable account of the party at the time, such a carefully formulated emphasis on conservative democracy was an asset that functioned ‘as a

means to unite the centre with the periphery’ (Özbudun 2006a, 549).¹⁹ Similarly, Davut Dursun considered the party as a tool for ‘periphery’s march towards the centre and its political participation’ (Dursun 2004). This was indeed precisely the way in which the AKP ideologue Akdoğan himself formulated the party’s conservative democratic identity for the gaze of intellectuals and scholars of Turkish politics: a democratic party fitting to the “Turkish exception”—one that is in touch with the periphery as well as with the centre, and would modernise the country by bridging the centre-periphery cleavage without falling into the trap of populism.

Akdoğan’s formula pledged allegiance to the centre-periphery model as the way to understand Turkish politics and tirelessly promoted the AKP as the most suitable candidate to overcome the constitutive gap this model identified (Akdoğan 2003; 2005; 2006; 2010). Following Mardin’s footsteps, Akdoğan drew the borders of “centre” around the ‘constitutive philosophy’ and ‘official ideology’ of Kemalism as it was preserved in the principles of Europeanisation, territorial integrity and secularism—all of which, he reiterated, remained in the monopoly of centre parties who considered themselves as ‘masters of the house’ (2006, 59-60). In a way parallel to Erdoğan’s definition of the ‘the parties that consider themselves centre,’ Akdoğan argued that this “centre” consisted of not only the usual suspect of the CHP but also the centre-right descendants of the DP as well, for they have all been ‘perceived as reliable and acting to ensure the continuity of the system’ (2006, 60). What made the Islamist parties of the National Outlook movement as well as the pro-Kurdish parties “peripheral,” on the other hand, was their radical opposition to that system as it was constituted on the principles of Europeanisation, territorial integrity and secularism.

It was true, Akdoğan concurs, that the ‘values and expectations of the majority of Turkish society’ were not taken into consideration at the political centre but this was mainly because ‘previous peripheral parties’ were unable to ‘translate their constituents’ demands into a language deemed suitable at the center’ (2006, 60). He defined the AKP in contradistinction to both the centre and peripheral parties, thereby promoting it as a truly novel force in Turkish politics. Situating itself in clear ‘opposition to ethnic, religious, and regional nationalism’ and ‘fully endorsing Turkey’s membership application to the European Union,’ the AKP

¹⁹ Only five years later the same ‘conservatism’ of the AKP would turn into a deficiency for Özbudun who, this time, would condemn Erdoğan of a crude majoritarianism that considers the “ballot box” as the only legitimate instrument of democratic accountability’ and criminalises oppositional minority for imposing ‘its will on the majority by unlawful means’ (Özbudun 2014, 157).

represented a break from its Islamist predecessors (i.e. peripheral parties) and, instead, became a party of the centre that is ‘firmly within accepted parameters’ of the regime (Ibid., 60-64). Nonetheless, ‘making conservatism the engine of change’ and bringing about a ‘cultural transformation that reconciles Islam with democracy’ at the same time, Akdoğan argued that the party had ‘broken new ground in the history of Turkish politics’ with respect to the old parties of the centre as well (Ibid., 53, 58). While previous centre-right parties simply *brought* peripheral demands to the centre and capitalised on them to attain and maintain political power, the AKP was the first platform that actually *represented* those demands. Having genuine, rather than superficial, knowledge about the periphery, the AKP was like a native speaker of its language, uniquely capable of ‘translating the periphery’s expectations and requests at the centre by couching them in the language of the center’ (60):

‘The AKP won the election by reconciling the demands of the center with those of the periphery and vice versa. In effect, the AKP occupies a novel political space in Turkey. The center’s loss of power and trust occurred simultaneously with the periphery’s final acceptance of the political process in order to affect lasting change. The AKP can be said to have successfully united the center and the periphery by employing an adept political language and adopting policies that take into account the values and expectations of the majority of Turkish society. It has successfully couched peripheral concerns in the language of the center’ (Akdoğan 2006, 60-61).

In other words, the AKP’s supposed novelty laid in its uniquely dual origins as a party of both the centre and the periphery that is—like a bilingual/bicultural person—equally fluent and at home in two distinct languages and cultures. Once the ever-present, constitutive problem of a society, its so-called “birth-defect,” is almost universally accepted in terms of a fundamental cleavage between two completely separate spheres with distinct languages and cultures, it is hardly surprising that the supposed political “remedy” takes the form of a promise to make them *whole* again. After all, this is, as we have demonstrated in chapter 3, the impossible horizon of the ‘political’ in Laclaudian terms, i.e. the promise of wholeness.

The interesting thing about the AKP, however, is the extraordinary distance it covers in its instrumentalization of the intellectual resources, terminology and nodal points of this hegemonic discourse of centre-periphery in shaping the party’s self-image as a political movement that is uniquely capable of bringing about said “unity” and, thereby, enlisting unprecedented support among the scholars of Turkish politics and society. Having successfully

tapped into the intellectual reservoir of mainstream scholarship via centre-periphery model, the AKP managed to construct the party discourse precisely in tune with the impossible liberal democratic ideal this model alluded to. Employing a term borrowed directly from the liberal scholarship based on ‘centre-periphery’ model, the party declared its ultimate goal to transform ‘Turkish political culture’ in a way in which the (liberal) ‘democratic political culture’ would pervade the entire society:

‘Strengthening of the democratic regime is the absolute precondition for social differences to coexist peacefully, for state-society harmony to realise, and for the eroded system to restore. In order to overcome those occasional periods of polarisation, political tension and social unrest, a democratic model implemented to all institutions and rules is similarly a must. State, institutional structures, laws and rules must democratise but, most important of all, the social segments need to internalise a democratic culture. Much of those problems we face today would cease to exist the moment Turkey internalises democracy by embracing and adapting it to all aspects of life. Thus, the first thing to be done in Turkey today is to fill the content of democracy as a concept and to disseminate it to all segments of the society’ (Akdoğan 2003, 82).

In this sense, deeply ambivalent and paradoxical way in which the party formulated conservative democracy is exemplary in its capacity to function as the *object petit a* [object of desire] for the gaze of those scholars who have seen in it the ultimate fantasy of generations of Turkish intellectuals fulfilled (Žižek 1997, 7; Daly 1999, 223). Thus, they could not help but laid their support behind the AKP as its deliverer. Echoing the scholarly consensus over the “exceptional” nature of Turkey as being simultaneously comprised of a set of polar opposites (modern/traditional, secular/religious, European/Muslim, centre/periphery and so on) conservative democracy of the AKP embodied the impossible ideal of reconciling these poles and finally making the Turkish society a unitary, undivided “whole”:

‘We had a dream that Turkey would become a democracy and everyone free, where no identity is excluded, no idea punished. The state would have no “other” or “internal enemy,” and never forget that it exists to serve the people. The rule of law, not the law of rulers, would prevail and render the human, not the state, untouchable. Aware of its limits, the state would not use its regulatory power to interfere the individuals’ preferences, worldviews and lifestyles. As a liberal, I have supported

this vision and thought that the AKP shared it. I have fallen in love with the possibility that in contrast to the authoritarian secularism, etatist Kemalism and military tutelage, such an alliance of conservative and liberal values could build a democratic and free country. Although we have occasionally proceeded in this direction during the last decade, the pattern in the past few years has taken us so far towards the opposite direction that we are even further behind where we once started. I have been mistaken. In a matter of few years, the people whom I considered to be political liberals have rapidly turned into authoritarians. As a liberal, I have always advocated for a limited state, protection and empowerment of the individual against it. I see it clearly now: what we thought as the thing that would “make it happen this time” was just a crude dream’ (Dağı 2014).²⁰

A genuine worry for the society's future is easily discernible here in the tone of Turkey's one of the leading liberal academics, who was incidentally—along with Akdoğan, Erdoğan, and the party's then minister of foreign affairs Abdullah Gül—one of the contributors of the edited volume discussed above endorsing the ‘conservative democracy’ of the AKP as the answer to Turkey's age-old question of democratisation (Dağı 2006). Here, on the other hand, is a deeply melancholic account of losing what one never had in the first place, evaporation of a liberal democratic fantasy in which the society would overcome all its antagonisms and become “one”. A Turkey where the disappearance of the Kemalist tutelary “centre”, i.e. the supposed source of the society's split nature, would inevitably lead to an all-inclusive liberal paradise with ‘no other or internal enemy.’ In this sense, Dağı's exceptionally candid account is a very revealing example of how deeply the ideological universe of generations of intellectuals in Turkey is shaped around a constitutive ‘lack’ missing from their symbolic order—a master-signifier on the loose that would, once found, give a final, but impossible, consistency to that order (Žižek 1997, 75-6; Glynos 2001, 210-212).

The carefully crafted ‘conservative democratic’ discourse of the AKP was a “novelty” insofar as it provided a *filler* precisely tailored to hold the ‘empty place’ lying at the hearth of Turkish politics as it was ideologically conceived through a series of social antagonisms

²⁰ This column originally appeared in *Zaman Daily* but since the paper was seized by the government in the aftermath of July 15th 2016 coup d'état attempt, its entire digital archive has been inaccessible. But this column is still available at <http://www.duzceyerelhaber.com/ihsan-DAGI/22929-Bir-ruyamiz-var-di-ne-ol-du-ona>. In perhaps one of the most representative cases depicting the tragic turn of events in Turkey's recent political spiral down, this particular column is one of the three pieces of “evidence” quoted in the court case against Prof. Dağı, who is being charged for terrorism and attempting to overthrow the state on July 15th. See: (Mağçıyan 2017).

between centre vs. periphery, state vs. society, modern vs. traditional, Kemalist vs. Islamist, secular vs. religious, Western vs. Eastern. Insofar as the concept of democracy in the mainstream political science scholarship in Turkey is trapped in a fanatically liberal utopian and post-political ideology that conceptualises politics ideally as a non-antagonistic matter, thus denying *the political*, its proponents were doomed to get disappointed sooner or later.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter offered a deconstruction of the mainstream scholarship on Turkish populism by way of tracing the roots of its pejorative understanding of the concept back to Mardin's centre-periphery model and Shils' militantly anti-populist account based on modernisation theory. First, it demonstrated that, much like the thin-centred ideology approach discussed above in sub-chapter 2.5, this scholarship envisions—and due to their fidelity to Mardin cannot avoid envisioning—Turkish politics as stuck in an inferior continuum between elitism and populism, only in the slightly different terms of centre (CHP, Kemalism, *halkçılık*) and periphery (DP, Islamism, *popülizm*). Like Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012; 2013; 2017), they position this continuum in contradistinction to a supposedly higher level of Western liberal democratic ideal where political antagonisms are somehow done with.

Secondly, this chapter also argued that thanks to the Mardin-*esque* way in which conservative democracy is formulated in the AKP's early discourse, the party successfully value-signalled that it not only shared the passionate anti-populism of the mainstream but even offered a solution to the foundational problem of Turkish politics as those scholars identified it. This enabled party to not only enlist unprecedented support within the ranks of mainstream scholarship but also do so while conducting politics in a characteristically populist way, which will be the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 6: AKP's Discursive Trajectory: From Populism to Erdoğanism

6.1. Introduction

Contrary to the mainstream political science literature in Turkey and the AKP's self-identification as an anti-populist conservative democratic party, this chapter first offers an alternative reading of the AKP's early discourse from a post-foundationalist approach, demonstrating that from its foundation the AKP has been a consistently populist force with a discourse structured around the nodal point of 'the people' which, in turn, is antagonistically positioned against the political elite and the corrupt status quo they uphold. This was a more or less steadily maintained discourse both during the brief period when the party was in opposition (2001-2002) and throughout at least its first term in the office (2002-2007).

The chapter further argues that the moment when the AKP government began to be called 'populist' in the mainstream scholarship and media was around the time the party took a significant turn away from populism to a more classical populist radical-right discourse, whereby nativism/nationalism and authoritarianism have become its 'ultimate core ideological features,' overshadowing populism (Mudde 2007, 22-23, 26). As discussed in detail in chapters 2 and 5, this misidentification is grounded in the anti-populist epistemological framework that has long informed the thinking of mainstream scholarship in US, Europe and, of course, Turkey. Insofar as populism is taken as a essentially anti-democratic way of conducting politics, it took the AKP to adopt a manifestly nativist/nationalist and authoritarian discourse of radical-right—especially during the course of 2013 Gezi protests and its aftermath—to finally “pass” as populist in the eyes of the mainstream. By moving beyond the habitual reification of populism with the politics of radical-right and taking a post-foundationalist approach in its stead, this chapter ends up overturning the most common narrative about the AKP's political trajectory, i.e. *conservative democrats-turned-populists*.

Examining the Erdoğanism phenomenon in the aftermath of Gezi through the lenses of post-foundationalist discourse theory, this chapter also makes a contribution on a theoretical level by demonstrating that, contrary to Laclau's conviction, a point of *pure populism* is actually realisable. At which point politics ceases to exist and gives way to a sort of 'bipolar hegemony', a zero-sum game between two homogenous camps that are separated by a single frontier and sustain themselves solely through their opposition to one another (Palonen 2009: 331). Polarisation and identification of the movement under a leader is an ever-present prospect of populism and, indeed, the political. But the Laclaudian theory's shortcoming is not that it

disregards this, for it has a name for it: pure populism. Its failure is to dismiss pure populism—possibly due to its underlying ‘emancipatory apriorism’ (Marchart 2007, 156-9)—as an impossibility, a ‘reductio ad absurdum’ point where politics could never reach in actuality (Laclau 2005: 45; 2007: 82).

6.2. Constructing The People: AKP’s Non-Populist Populism

Arguably the most enduring legacy of the 1980 military coup d’état was the establishment of a tutelary regime, whereby a small clique of ultra-secularist and nationalist elites located at the top of military, judiciary and bureaucracy were granted a de facto veto power over elected governments, determining the parameters of Turkish politics well into the 2000s (Esen & Gümüşçü 2016). Having perceived political Islam and Kurdish separatism as posing the utmost threat against the Turkish state, the guardians were quick to interfere in everyday politics using institutional channels such as the National Security Council and Constitutional Court, which were tasked to eliminate those threats through whatever means necessary, including disbanding “subversive” political parties and even toppling governments as they saw fit throughout the 1980s and 90s (Sommer 2017). As a young newcomer to the political scene in 2001, the AKP introduced a radically polarised, populist picture of Turkish politics that would take the most advantage of these circumstances by summarising it as a struggle between the people and the elite. Capitalising on his own victimised status as being persecuted by the political establishment in the past, Erdoğan drew a parallel between his personal story and that of the people:

‘My story is the story of this people. Either the people will reign supreme, or the pretentious and oppressive minority who are estranged from the reality of Anatolia and looking over it with disdain, will remain in power. The authority to decide on this belongs to the people. Enough is enough, sovereignty belongs to the people!’ (Erdoğan October 25, 2002 quoted in Yağcı 2009, 116).

In line with the general populist tendency of elevating the name of “the people” to the point of ultimate purity and righteousness (Canovan 2005, 65-73), the AKP’s discourse frequently referred to this entity in excessively respectful terms. The people were not only the supreme authority of power, they were also too virtuous, humble and patient to protest unless they really need to. In Paul Taggart’s terms, “the people” of AKP were only ‘reluctantly political’ (2000, 3). If their sufferings became unbearable and they lost their patience, people’s reaction would

be strong yet infallibly just. They would punish those who were responsible for their sufferings in almost a divine manner:

Our forethoughtful, supreme people who can make the best decision for themselves are not going to buy the government's excuses for running away from the elections. Our people will grade each accordingly. Their answer will slap them in the face and bury them into the ballot box (Hürriyet 2002b).

As a general principle, AKP's early discourse made no direct reference to Kemalist ideology in Turkey as a problem (Demirel 2004). This was mainly because they had wisely learned from the mistakes of their Islamist predecessors that 'such politics would escalate the authoritarian style of the secularist establishment' (Duran 2006, 283). The party leaders were extremely careful to keep their criticism focused solely on their political and tutelary opponents and drive a discursive wedge between the secular-republican elite and the Kemalism, making it clear that they had no disagreement with the latter. Opposing the then-PM Bülent Ecevit's criticism that the very existence of a party found by ex-Islamists indicated a regime problem, for instance, Erdoğan insisted that there was 'no regime problem in Turkey', but a problem of 'the backward and outdated politics of Ecevit and the ones like him' (Erdoğan 2002a). In Erdoğan's own words, 'those who think they have the monopoly over the principles of the regime' were abusing them 'in order to maintain their rotten status quo'. Contrary to what they claim, the secular-republican elite were 'neither secularists nor republicans in modern terms.'

What this meant was that the AKP was there to challenge the discursive hegemony of the secularist-republican elite over the founding principles of Turkey, not the status of those principles themselves. Unlike their predecessors, the AKP refused to play the game of politics under the discursive hegemony of the elite who alone could rearticulate the meaning of the principles such as secularism and republicanism as they wished and weaponize them against their opponents. At one point, Erdoğan got involved into a bit of semantics himself and skilfully blended it into the AKP's overall populist discourse, challenging the governing elite's discursive hegemony. In his reply to the standard Kemalist attack towards the AKP on the grounds that its founding cadres were Islamists and, thus, against the republic, Erdoğan claimed that, instead, he and his colleagues were the 'real republicans':

'We are on the roads of Anatolia, getting together with our businessmen, civil society leaders at special meetings, and with our people who stop our convoy and welcome us. Regardless of winter, snow, rain or storm, we toured the roads of

Anatolia and we will keep on. This means we are together with the people, those who are the *public of res publica*. In case you have forgotten, let me remind that it is because of this *public* whom you have forsaken, you are called the Prime Minister of the Republic and you do not deserve it anymore' (Erdoğan 2002b).

Having rejected the traditional secularist discourse that understood society as antagonistically divided between progressive Kemalists and reactionary Islamists, AKP introduced its own discourse as an alternative in the following way: The real antagonism in Turkey, the party argued, is the one between corrupted elite defending the status quo and the impoverished people demanding change. Against the traditional elite who have 'dedicated their lives to protect the *status quo*, profited from the country's stagnation, and turned a blind eye as decades were wasted so they could hold on to their offices and benefits' (Erdoğan 27 February 2007, quoted in Sarı 2011, 467-68), the AKP justified its emergence to the political arena as a result of an inexorable urge to get their hands dirty in the name of this neglected "people":

'Contrary to a majority of our people, there are still those who are afraid of democracy, picking inertia over dynamism, *status quo* over change, and considering their will as superior to the will of the people. Unlike those who resent popular sovereignty, we are honoured to have taken over the people's cause' (Hürriyet 2005).

As Turkey suffered tremendously under the status quo that used to threaten our people, it was a necessity to discard the old way of politics that took the people's will hostage. AKP was set to free the people's will... Those who wonder why they weaken when the AKP gets stronger should check the large gap between themselves and the people.' (Sarı op.cit.).

This was, indeed, the most consistent way in which the fundamental antagonism in the AKP discourse is spatially constructed in a down/up orientation. Through the figure of corrupt and power-thirsty elite, the party managed to formulate a clear understanding of the 'constitutive outside' as those tutelary elites 'up there' with political power (De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017, 314). However this is only part of the picture. What needs further investigation is the party's rearticulation of Westernisation, a signifier that used to be under the discursive monopoly of Kemalism, into its own equivalential chain and this is exactly where the *European Union* steps into the scene.

6.2.1. An Empty Dream of Europe

‘The EU is our obsession. Even though we all understand different things from the EU membership, this obsession is what unifies us’ (Yavuz 2009, 202).

Turkey’s relationship with Europe and her quest to become part of Europe and later the EU has been a long one. As detailed in above in Chapter 4, Westernisation has constituted the horizon of Turkish politics ever since the Reformation era in early 19th century in the Ottoman Empire. Mustafa Kemal defined his efforts as part of a long-term goal of ‘reaching the level of contemporary civilisations’ (Bozdoğan & Kasaba 2011). Right from the early days of the foundation of the Turkish republic, the primary aim was to see the country recognised as a respected European power (Lewis 2002; Ahmad 1993). And this goal has been persistently pursued by all the governments of Turkey throughout its history.

Formal institutional engagement of Turkey with Europe started all the way back in 1959. Yet, since then, every time Turkey seemed close enough to actually reach this eternal goal, something unexpected came up and the process was delayed. But the ideal of Europe, with the historical importance attached to the name, has nevertheless prevailed in Turkish political psyche as the land where all the problems and difficulties of life have been overcome (Müftüler-Baç 1997). Such an idealisation was accomplished not only through the official state indoctrination but also kept alive thanks to Turkish immigrants in Europe who increased frequency of their visits back to their Anatolian hometowns in the 1970s after several years of working and saving (Unat 2006). A significant portion of Turkish popular culture in this period was based on these experiences and kept the ideal alive while the immigrants were away. New luxurious dwellings were hastily built in major cities and holiday towns specifically for the purchase of those immigrants, standing as the permanent reminder of the same European dream (Tezcan 2000, 173-89).

It is this persistent vitality of the European ideal in the formation of modern Turkish politics that has made the consecutive governments keep knocking at the European door as ‘they all want to succeed where the rest has failed’ (Jenkins 2008). However, due to the almost endemic existence of military coups and economic crises in Turkey, the civilian governments remained rather occupied with the task of fighting for their survival. It was only with the emergence of AKP these two pressing elements—Kemalist ideal of Westernisation and the survival of civilian government—were combined under the signifier of the European Union in the party’s discourse. In an atmosphere of total economic collapse and political turmoil, and

based on the idealised status of Europe, membership offered the royal road to fulfil the constitutive ‘lack’ in “the people” and make them “whole” again, signifying economic prosperity, political stability, democracy, religious and cultural freedom and so on. In Erdoğan’s own speeches as well, this equalisation of Europe with the development and civilisation was a permanent theme:

In this globalising world, in order not to remain in the slums of development and civilisation, Turkey should join the EU. It is the place for Turkey to increase her political, economic and administrative standards. If Turkey wants to find comprehensive solutions to the administrative crisis caused by democratisation problems, there is no alternative to the EU (Hürriyet, 2002c).

What is also worth noticing here is that the EU membership was elevated to being the master formula to solve all problems, no matter how deeply rooted they are, and therefore considered as the absolute political priority in AKP’s discourse: ‘The first issue our country needs to deal with is, of course, the EU. Only then the problems of economy, education, social life, unemployment, and income distribution can be solved by a potent crew’ (Hürriyet, 2002d):

Let us not forget that an opposition against EU membership would harm the future of our children, for it is an indispensable process for all areas of development including democracy, economy, competitiveness and security (Erdoğan 2006a, 107).

In its 2002 Election Declaration, the party states that ‘Turkey’s membership to the EU is a natural outcome of our country’s modernisation process’. Only through the steps taken towards this goal the country could ‘maintain its existence on the international arena’ (AKP 2002b). So it is conceptualised as an indispensable precondition for not only the fulfilment of popular demands but also for their very survival. In other words, the “EU membership” in the AKP’s early discourse was a matter of life and death.

Read in tandem with the AKP’s strategy of discursively separating the official Kemalist ideology and its principles from the established elite and positioning the party on the side of “the people” against the elite, this rearticulation of the signifier “EU membership” completed the AKP’s populist discourse. Thereafter, the AKP’s stance can be understood in relatively clearer terms as exerting direct and ceaseless pressure over the elite and their unwillingness to take necessary steps for the fulfilment of the people’s privileged demand, namely the EU membership:

Even though the goals are so obvious in the framework of the Joint Membership Paper, current government fails even to follow them and make any progress in the area of structural reforms... But our people do not fail to notice that the government is clearly afraid of the progress simply because it would break down their age-long reign in every corner of the state. The day is approaching when our people will get rid of these parasites and start to rule again (AA 2002).

The EU is constantly asking for the government to deal with the issues of fundamental human rights and freedom. Have they done anything about the religious freedom? No need for further explanation. Our people see at least as much as we do and surely going to express their will in the elections (IHA 2002).

In addition to its function to stand for the “wholeness” of the people which provided significant advantage for the AKP to win 2002 election, during the party’s first term in the office the EU membership further served as a discursive tool to drive a wedge between the republican Turkey’s ultimate ideal of “reaching the level of contemporary civilisations” and the EU-sceptical establishment elite. Once the AKP government managed to take an unprecedented leap towards the membership by securing a date with the EU to start the official negotiations, this remarkable achievement was quickly utilised to identify the party as the ultimate embodiment of both the republican ideals and the “popular will” against the “illegitimate” guardians and establishment elite, who opposed the country’s EU membership to keep their power free from popular scrutiny:

‘The date of 17 December has emerged as a turning point and started to disturb certain circles seriously. When you look at their past, you shouldn’t help but see that they have espoused or inherited a tradition of government with a ‘national chief’ system and not with a republic. Those who, whenever they enjoyed power they did without popular will – only following unlawful coups, cannot stand up today and pose themselves as the guardians of the Republic’ (Firat 2006, quoted in Yağcı 2009, 134)²¹.

Having associated the EU membership with the Kemalist republican ideal of “reaching the level of contemporary civilisations”, the AKP government utilised it as a buffer zone, keeping the party safe from a direct confrontation with the regime guardians during its first term in the

²¹ The EU finally declared Turkey as an official candidate on December 17, 2004 and set the date October 3, 2005 as the beginning of negotiations.

office. After all, as ex-Islamists who spent decades among the ranks of the National Outlook, the AKP leadership had paid hefty prices for their unflinching anti-Western discourse, witnessing the obliteration of each and every one of their political initiatives by the tutelary elite. Thus, as Duran puts: ‘it is certain that the AKP, more than any other Turkish political party, regards international support as a fundamental factor in attaining political legitimacy’ (Duran 2006, 282). In terms of its stance towards the EU, the party did not simply diverge from its predecessors but went to the other extreme, which enabled the AKP to ensure its position in power without facing any serious push-back from the establishment. In fact, the reforms curbing the military’s role in politics as well as the judiciary’s sphere of influence could only be achieved with a justification as strong as the EU membership. This was most vivid in the statement of Hilmi Özkök, the then Chief of Staff of Turkish Armed Forces, commenting on the proposed amendments: ‘70% of the people want the EU membership. Nobody can resist this kind of majority. We are ready to compromise and undertake risks to harmonise with the EU values’ (Radikal 2003).

However, what the nature of Europeanisation process after the opening of negotiations requested from the AKP government was the exact opposite of its function in domestic politics: a direct confrontation with the guardians of the Kemalist regime. When the Council concluded that Turkey fulfilled the Copenhagen Criteria to start the negotiations on December 17th 2004, the next step was the implementation of previously passed legislations, including the recognition of Cyprus as a legitimate diplomatic partner and finding a peaceful/democratic solution to the Kurdish problem. However, within the traditional Turkish national security understanding, these were issues of extreme sensitivity—so-called “red lines” of the post-1980 regime (Aybet 2006). Therefore, realising those reforms the EU membership process required was near impossible without risking a direct confrontation with the tutelary elite. Yet this was exactly one of the main functions of the EU for the AKP government in the first place: preventing a direct confrontation with the guardians.

In addition to this, the AKP no longer held discursive hegemony over the signifier “EU membership,” which the party used to articulate as the key to the “wholeness” of “the people.” As the membership process got more concrete, like Tocci indicates (2005), the public started to have a more detailed, non-idealistic knowledge of the EU with all its imperfect sides and target of membership looked further and further: ‘More internal discussions in this regard have taken the romantic and ideational cloud off Turkey’s approach to the EU’ (Oğuzlu 2008, 4). Domestic debates led to widespread scepticism about the open-ended nature of accession talks;

calls to offer a privileged rather than full membership to Turkey; attempts at making the country's membership conditional to the EU's absorption capacity and so forth (Ibid., 12-13). Consequently, the membership signifier could no longer stand for democracy, economic prosperity, freedom, security and such at the same time. This is most vividly observed in the historic fall in the public's support for the membership from 73% in 2004 to 38% in 2010 (GMF 2010).

But the AKP initially tried to keep EU cause alive anyways, starting with a few, relatively less alarming requirements such as the re-opening of the Greek Orthodox Monastery in Istanbul. But even then, the reaction from the tutelary elite and establishment media was immense, for the Patriarchate is considered to be an important symbolic remnant of radical expansionist project of Greater Greece and, thus, a threat to the territorial integrity of Turkish nation-state (Grigoriadis 2009). So the AKP left the process at a more or less frozen state indefinitely as the EU membership lost its double function. AKP's "giving in" to the hard-liners' demands in 2006 with regard to the Cyprus and Kurdish problems can be explained, in this respect, as a result of this loss. The party simply could not risk pursuing the same track in the absence of the EU as a signifier of the 'lack.' For the sake of its survival, the AKP took an increasingly defensive stance and, albeit temporarily, yielded to the demands of the establishment.

6.2.2. A New Constitutive Other: The Deep State

An explicit confrontation with the guardians became inevitable during the course of presidential election in 2007 when the AKP government wanted to appoint one of its own for this symbolically and politically significant post.²² In fact, all the three "guardians" got involved into process to preclude such an outcome. On the eve of the election, outgoing President Ahmet Necdet Sezer warned the public about the negative outcomes of appointing an Islamist as the President (Milliyet 2007). Then right after the AKP Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül won the parliamentary voting, the Armed Forces published a memorandum that effectively threatened to stage a coup if he had been officially appointed (Radikal 2007). And finally the judiciary blocked the election process on the basis of a previously unknown requirement that a quorum

²² According to the legislation in force at the time, the President had the authority to veto legislations, appoint high level bureaucrats and judges. In fact, during his term, President Sezer had vetoed many legislative changes, and prevented the appointment of hundreds of AKP nominees to key bureaucratic positions. Thus it seems justifiable to claim that, as the pressure from *guardians* intensified in the absence of EU cause, the AKP felt obliged to gain this post simply in order to be able to survive. See: Baran 2008.

of two-thirds of the 550 members of parliament had to participate in the vote. Facing the double threat of hung parliament and coup d'état, the AKP government was left with no choice but to call for snap elections. Contrary to the expectations of guardians and the opposition, the AKP won the election by even a greater landslide, receiving 46.6% of popular vote, and Gül was formally elected President. Bewildered and humiliated by the electorate's indifference to their warnings, guardians and opposition remained silent.

From this point onwards the story of Turkish domestic politics started to revolve around a not-so-hidden duel between the AKP and the establishment. In darkest terms, both sides accused each other with treason, espionage and conspiracies (Balçı 2010).²³ The AKP, confident in its recently refreshed popular support, has taken an unambiguously supportive stance behind two extremely far-reaching legal cases, nicknamed Ergenekon and Sledgehammer, calling the process as the 'cleaning of the century' (AA, 2008). Investigations started in mid-2007 against a group of secular ultranationalists, including many high level serving and retired military staff, who were alleged of being members of the "deep state" (Söyler 2015) a 'vast terrorist organisation which has penetrated virtually every aspect of Turkish life and is committed to destabilising and eventually overthrowing the AKP government' (Jenkins 2009, 9; Ünver 2009). However, the cases quickly mushroomed beyond all expectations and proceeded for almost a decade. In dozens of raids, hundreds of suspects were detained and/or questioned, over three hundreds have been charged. Despite having uncovered some potentially important information on wrongdoing on the part of some of the accused, the process remained highly questionable in terms of its conduct and motives. The arrests included not just the military offices and underworld figures, but also journalists, business people, judges, politicians and academics many of whom appeared to have nothing in common except their political opposition to the AKP in particular and to Islamic conservatism in general (Çağaptay 2009; Jenkins 2011).²⁴ Concerns mounted as the suspects were held in detention for way over the legal limits, rendering the custody period a punitive one (Bianet

²³ Given the limits of this chapter, the *guardians'* strongest retaliation against these investigations, closure case for the AKP, is not explained in detail here. It would suffice to mention that a few months after the first raid of arrests were conducted, and upon the passing of AKP-pushed constitutional amendment for the legalization of head-scarf, Public Prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya applied to the Constitutional Court for the closure of the AKP, claiming that the party had become a 'focus for anti-secular activities'. Although the Court upheld the Prosecutor's accusation, it decided that the situation did not merit closure and, instead, the fined AKP €17 million and warned about its future conduct.

²⁴ Those doubts gained a wider acceptance in Turkish society after later waves of arrests included university rectors, prominent NGO leader Türkan Saylan and, most recently, two journalists Nedim Şener and Ahmet Şık. The arrests created rifts within AKP's own ranks, most notable being Minister of Culture Ertuğrul Günay's criticism that the legal process was increasingly resembling to the 1970's coup environment: Radikal. 2009.

2011). There have been also legal criticisms over the evidence collection methods of the investigations as they have been overwhelmingly based on illegal wiretaps (CNN Türk 2009).

Despite these issues—as well as the eventual dismissal of all cases for being part of an even “deeper state” conspiracy—the process itself has nonetheless fulfilled a crucial function in AKP’s discourse: constituting its *new, and even more ambiguous other*. In their analysis of right-wing politics in America, Berlet and Lyons call this feature as ‘anti-elite conspiracism’ which they define as a narrative that frames its opponents not simply as the elites who abuse their power from above but also are part of a vast insidious plot against the ordinary people (2000, 9-11). Arguably one of the earliest and clearest example of this narrative can be found in a statement by the AKP MP Avni Doğan: ‘It is all the doing of deep state that uprisings in the universities started and the PKK terrorism was handled leniently. In fact, [CHP leader] Kılıçdaroğlu himself has become the party’s leader as a result of a deep state operation’ (DHA 2011a). Far from being used by a few people here and there, signifiers with extremely criminalising and conspiratorial connotations such as “deep state” or “Ergenekon” have become core components of the party’s discourse, to be employed liberally to intimidate and silence critics over the years. When pressured over the leaked diplomatic cables that contained claims of his involvement in corruption, Erdoğan dismissed Wikileaks as ‘doing something similar to Ergenekon’ and blamed the opposition for embracing the documents (Yeni Şafak 2010). Earlier, Erdoğan had drawn even a clearer parallel between his critics who drew attention to his family’s extraordinary financial fortunes and the alleged “deep state” stating ‘the previous person who claimed that I had \$1 billion is now in prison under the Ergenekon investigation’ (Milliyet 2010). A similar pattern was discernible in the statements of other AKP members as well, regardless of the issue or actors in question. Against criticisms in the parliament and media concerning the issue that the names of Erdoğan and his colleagues were mentioned in a fraud case prosecuted in German courts, AKP’s response was almost the same, accusing their critics of hypocrisy as they ‘act as the lawyers of Ergenekon case’ (Cumhuriyet 2010).

What is particularly worth noticing here is the significant transformation of the ways in which the ‘constitutive other’ of “the people” is conceptualised within the AKP’s discourse in time. As indicated before, during its first years in power the AKP constructed a carefully fine-tuned populist discourse which used to articulate its “outside” as comprised of the tutelary elite whose relentless opposition to the party and its Europeanisation policies were not motivated by feelings of loyalty to Kemalist ideals or concern for the country but a desire to maintain their illegitimate power and corrupt practices. The party at the time was consistent in rearticulating

its opponents' efforts to declare the party's rule illegitimate on the grounds of its leaders' Islamist credentials, as a desperate manifestation of the traditional elite's reluctance to respect the will and sovereignty of the people. Under the shadow of these ever-expanding investigations, however, it became clear that an increasingly diverse array of individuals, institutions and groups that were in any way critical towards the AKP government and its policies were articulated to the "outside" of the borders of not just politics but law as well, giving it an *incriminating twist*. Although the populist vertical antagonism between the people and the elite was still central in the party's discursive articulation of these deep-state trials as a reclamation of popular sovereignty against the illegitimate elite, those who were criminalised as accessories to the alleged conspiracy and pushed to the outside of legitimate politics as *putschists* included not just the usual tutelary elite but, even more so, journalists, academics, civil society and political party activists (Kandiyoti & Emanet 2017, 871). This is to say, as vague as their boundaries are, terms like "deep state" still carry a minimum, incriminating content simply because of the tacit or explicit reference they make to the illegal, conspiratorial networks of a "state within the state" (Agamben 2005).²⁵ Demonstrating the government's willingness to rearticulate its political foes to the "outside" of legitimate politics, these trials marked an authoritarian transformation within the AKP discourse which, in time, has gotten only more visible: *criminalisation of dissent*. Following Bob Altemeyer (1981) we can identify such criminalisation as an indicator of authoritarianism gaining relative centrality within the AKP discourse, for it stands witness to the party's 'belief in a strictly ordered society in which the infringements of authority are to be punished severely' (Mudde 2007, 23). Early signs of this authoritarianism was there to see when the party declared that the 2011 general elections would be 'the most important one in Turkish history' as it will be a choice 'between the AKP and the deep state' (DHA 2011b). As we shall see below, the most immediate outcome of this discursive transformation has been the ever-deepening polarisation of Turkish politics between two mutually exclusive societies.

²⁵ Following Giorgio Agamben (2005), it is possible to define "deep state" as an entity that includes the apparatchiks of governmentality but operates on the basis of exception, of *law-founding violence*. It performs solely reactive and *repressive* functions, uses its foundational status within the state agencies as a means to claim an *exceptional status*.

For a detailed description and analysis of "deep state" in Turkish context see: Arcayürek 2007.

6.3. Spectre of *Gezi* and The Decisive Turn to Radical Right

On his way to the local bakery to fetch a loaf of bread in Istanbul, 14 years old Berkin Elvan was shot in the head with a gas bomb canister by Turkish police during the anti-government *Gezi Park Protests* in June 2013 (Özkırmırlı 2014). Having dropped to just 16 kilos by the end of a protracted coma for 9 months, Berkin's fragile body lost the battle on March 11, 2014. Mass rallies joined by more than two million protestors erupted in 53 cities around the country. Hundreds of thousands of people attended the funeral march in Istanbul on the following day amidst furious chants that held AKP government responsible for his murder and called Erdoğan to account for it (Kızılkoyun 2014). This fury was crystallised in his mother's cry: 'It wasn't God but Erdoğan who took my son' (Deutsche Welle 2014). The deep feeling of anger Elvan's mother expressed was not entirely uncalled for, as his son's was the eight life police forces claimed since the *Gezi Protests* had begun on May 30, 2013 (Amnesty 2013).

In response, Erdoğan made the thousands before him boo the mourning family in a rally a few days after, calling the 14 years old a terrorist and blaming the family for what happened to their son (Daloğlu 2014a). Even further, he made a chilling contrast between Elvan and Burakcan Karamanoğlu, 22 years old man who was shot dead on the night of Berkin's funeral under unclear circumstances (Sezer 2014). Moments after declaring 14 years old terrorist, Erdoğan called Burakcan 'our son' who was 'martyred' by terrorists from the funeral. Another MP from the party further claimed that Karamanoğlu was murdered by the 'illegal soldiers' under the order of the CHP leader (HDN 2014a).

In line with its authoritarianism, from day one the government articulated the *Gezi Protests* as acts of criminal violence committed by 'looters' and 'terrorists' (Resneck 2013). Police violence was praised as heroic and its victims desecrated. Besides his daring admission that he personally gave police forces the order to suppress the demonstrations by whatever means necessary, Erdoğan also threatened to unleash his own 'army of devotees' to suppress the protestors gathered in Taksim square (Letsch 2013; HDN 2013).²⁶ This was combined with a nativist/nationalist emphasis that labelled protestors as the fifth column of 'foreign dark forces' who put in motion a conspiracy to weaken the Turkish nation and overturn the government (Kayaoğlu 2013). Many observers of Turkish politics also noted that since the outbreak of *Gezi Protests*, such nativism/nationalism has determined the overall discourse of

²⁶ In fact, around the same time with this thinly veiled threat, there have been several instances where the *Gezi* protestors were attacked and sometimes killed by unidentified groups of armed men, "fighting" side by side with the police officers (Uras 2014).

the party, labelling not just Gezi protests but all instances of opposition as part of an overreaching foreign conspiracy against the national will (Nefes 2017). University students opposing a motorway going through their campus, massive marches following Berkin Elvan's death, corruption investigations and all forms of dissent were attributed to *foreign* incitements orchestrated by, among others, Americans, Jews, Israel, Germans, neocons, CNN, Financial Times, and international banks (Dombey 2014). In various speeches, Erdoğan urged his supporters to be on the lookout for various malicious lobbies working to corrupt and weaken the nation: the "interest-rate lobby" of financiers who wanted to impair national economy; "robot lobby" of social media critics; "porn lobby" criticising internet censorship; "war lobby" and "media lobby." (HDN 2014b; Tremblay 2014)

Once the criminal investigations implicating Erdoğan, his family and government in the biggest corruption scandal in Turkish history was unveiled a few months after Gezi, this nativist/nationalist and authoritarian discourse took a decisively anti-Semitic turn as well (Baydar 2013; Daloğlu 2014b). In a piece insidiously titled 'The Snake' (*Yılan*) in *Takvim* daily, one pro-government columnist stated that all opposition, secularist CHP, pro-Kurdish HDP and *Gülenists* worked in the service of a vast Jewish network of financiers who 'own 485 of 500 biggest global companies and work for the British Financial Empire behind the veil' (Diler 2014). On numerous occasions, prominent figures from the AKP labelled the party's opponents not just as terrorists or looters but 'Jews' as well, who took part in the same conspiracy with Gezi protestors to overthrow the government by supporting the investigations (HDN 2014c; Jones 2014). Zafer Çağlayan, former Economy Minister who had been forced to resign after being implicated in the scandal, stated that he would 'understand if a Jew' were behind the investigations but not a Muslim: 'But if the one who does this [against us] is passing himself off as a Muslim, shame on him' (Yaakov 2014).

This conspiratorial and anti-Semitic articulation of the political opposition to the "outside" of the Turkish nation was compatible with Erdoğan's tried-and-tested rhetorical tool of sectarianism, which he occasionally utilised to attribute the CHP grassroots support to their *Alevi* identity, an offshoot of Shiite Islam with around 15 million members in Turkey (Bila 2013; Karaveli 2013; Çelik et.al. 2017). Although many in Turkey had gotten used to Erdoğan's sarcastic references to the CHP leader's *Alevi* faith (Karakaya-Stump 2018), his sectarianism came to fore most prominently on the eve of *Gezi* Protests when he decried the deaths of '52 Sunni citizens' (Paul & Seyrek 2014) and named the planned bridge over Bosphorus after Sultan Selim I, also known as the 'executioner of Alevi's' (Meriç 2013). In November 2013, pro-

government media published a leaked police report about *Gezi* Protests which identified 78 percent of the protestors as *Alevi*s, even though such information is neither in the ID cards nor recorded in census offices (Cengiz 2013b). Understandably, many in opposition saw it as proof that the AKP government, in line with the Turkish state's infamous security reflex of profiling "subversives," has illegally kept records of the *Alevi*s (Cengiz 2013a). The fact that all but one of the victims of police violence during *Gezi* protests, including Berkin, happen to be *Alevi*s only strengthened these suspicions.

It was in this sense that the *Gezi* protests constituted a culmination point for the AKP government to establish such a discursive equivalence between otherwise differential signifiers, offering a ground where the grassroots opposition temporarily gained a more or less tangible embodiment with discernible features. Although millions of people from all ages, ideologies, genders, ethnicities, religions, and professions participated the protests in 81 of 82 cities in Turkey, a generic profile for "Gezi protestor" (hereafter *Gezi-ist*) nevertheless emerged. Besides the obvious *Gezi-ist=Alevi* equation promoted by the government, in big metropolises such as Istanbul and Ankara, the protestors were profiled mostly as liberal, young, educated citizens who felt that their identities and freedoms were increasingly ostracised by the AKP government in favour of a set of deeply conservative values. Various field studies conducted during the protests strengthened this conviction (e.g. Bilgiç & Kafkaslı 2013; Konda 2014). From alcohol consumption to abortion and co-ed student houses, in a short period of time leading up to the *Gezi* protests, the AKP spokespeople made it clear that the government intended to eliminate such practices in order to protect the 'moral fabric of Turkish nation' (Gürsel 2013a). After several years, these policies still remain un-implicated but their tangible political function laid in the fact that they were threatening enough to provoke many to publicly protest, thereby enabling a peculiar sort of protestor profile to emerge.

Those who participated in the *Gezi* protests were frequently seen in mixed groups of young women and men, and often in solidarity with the LGBT groups, making a collective claim over parks and public squares (Gambetti 2014). During the carnival-esque period of *Gezi* protests, there was even a massive Pride march, a first in the country's otherwise shameful history of tolerance (Pearce & Cooper 2014). Due to the government's rhetorical offensive against those who consume alcohol, drinking was turned into an act of dissention. The pro-government media made sure that such news showing young groups of *Gezi-ists* from all genders drinking in occupied squares and parks were distributed nationwide (Takvim 2013a). This meant that, effectively, those rightful protests against the government's threat to impose

conservative moral codes on the whole society inadvertently helped delineating a palpable figure of the *Gezi-ist*. *Gezi-ist* as someone who drinks; someone who is tolerant towards the sexual minorities; someone who considers pre-marital cohabitation acceptable.

The AKP and the pro-government media did not refrain from using fabricated evidence in their coordinated campaign to reify an association between the figure of *Gezi-ist* and moral degradation (Mercan & Özşeker 2015, 104). While Erdoğan himself accused the *Gezi-ists* who took shelter from the police in Istanbul's Dolmabahçe Mosque of drinking alcohol in (and thereby desecrating the sanctity of) the mosque, his supporters in media others went much further, claiming that they could have even 'engaged in group sex' there (Tuna 2013).²⁷ Another infamous case surfaced in the media was the claim that a group of *Gezi-ists* had attacked a headscarved woman and her baby in public. In her astonishing police statement, the woman in question alleged that a group of 80-100 half naked men wearing leather gloves assaulted her in bright day light among thousands of other people, urinating on her and throwing her baby off the stroller. Although none of the hundreds of witnesses backed up these claims and the footage from security cameras showed no such event, Erdoğan and pro-government media pundits kept blaming *Gezi-ists* for attacking 'headscarved daughters and sisters of ours' (Oruçoğlu 2015).

With its alleged role behind the corruption investigation, the figure of *Gülen-ist*, member/sympathiser of the international religious movement led by US-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen, became the latest addition to this ever-extending equivalential chain of enemies (Gürhanlı 2014). As the graft probes convincingly showed, on the eve of March 2014 elections the threat *Gülen-ist* posed was much more imminent and, accordingly, it was formally designated as posing a 'major threat against national security' by the National Security Council (Taş 2018). In the official government narrative of the Gezi, it was now the *Gülen-ists* who 'played a central role in the 2013 Gezi Incidents which began as a protest relating to city planning but later became an attempt to overthrow the government. It was later uncovered that [Gülenist] elements within the police force ordered police officers to use violence against protesters which provoked the incidents' (DCCP 2016, 8). Following the suit, pro-government columnists elevated this shadowy figure to the role of a 'foreign' puppet master who not only 'hired' *Gezi-ists*, opposition parties and media, but also 'blackmailed' others into participating in its sinister plans to impair the government (Kıran 2018). It was on the grounds of this hierarchical superiority that the AKP government coined the term "parallel state" as a

²⁷ The fact that these allegations were unequivocally falsified by the Imam of the said mosque had no effect on the claimants. On the contrary, the Imam was reprimanded and appointed to a rural mosuq (T24 2014).

pseudonym for Gülen’s followers after the graft probe, a name loaded enough to associate them with the Turkish “deep state” yet, simultaneously, vague enough to incorporate any and all opposition under one all-encompassing signifier.

This all-encompassing figure of the “enemy” masterminded by sinister foreign lobbies is contrasted against an equally vague figure of “the nation” [*millet*] whose members are considered as bounded to each other primarily through their unconditional support, loyalty and love for the AKP government and its leader. Famously dubbed by Erdoğan and pro-government circles as the 50% —a rather optimistic reference to the AKP’s share of votes— “the nation” is portrayed not simply as an electoral majority but a virtuous, homogenous body with a common set of values, interests and expectations that finds its political incarnation in the government itself. Often spoken of in outlandishly respectful terms such as supreme [*yüce*] or mighty [*aziz*], “the nation” is turned into a divine authority with a peculiar habit of expressing its will exclusively through elections or on orders from Erdoğan himself, thereby justifying the deeds of its representatives prospectively and passing judgments on them retrospectively.

This otherwise celestial entity was also given a material, albeit ephemeral, existence at the “Respect to National Will” (*Milli İradeye Saygı*) rallies organised by the AKP a few weeks after the Gezi Protests broke out. Hundreds of thousands of AKP supporters chanted as Erdoğan urged them to exclaim so strong that the enemies of *the nation* would ‘shake in fear’ (TRT 2013). Accusing the international media of reporting a deliberately distorted image of Turkey during the Gezi protests, he drew perhaps the clearest horizontal discursive line that separated his supporters (the nation) from his opponents (non-native outgroups) on the basis of their supposed national identity:

‘this *nation* is not the one you presented to the world. This *nation* is genuine, not those who throw Molotov cocktails to the police, loot and vandalise. We are one with this *nation* and there is no power strong enough to break our bond’ (Ibid.).

As in many other instances, Erdoğan pledged the crowds before him to ‘protect the democracy and *nation*’s will’ and bury those who do not respect them to the ballot box in the coming elections in March 2014. The AKP government made it crystal clear that it considered March 2014 not as an ordinary election but an all-out war, akin to the Turkish War of Independence (Gardner 2014). As mentioned above, the party’s peculiar brand of populist radical-right discourse emerges as a contaminated one, constructed through the articulation of a wide-array of elements including nativist, authoritarian, conservative, conspiratorial, sectarian, and anti-

Semitic ones. Thus the examination of the government's post-Gezi discourse indicates that it did not construct the fundamental antagonism primarily along the vertical axis of the people and the elite but the horizontal one between the nation and its non-native outgroups. This all-encompassing figure of the "enemy", in turn, appears to have been constructed around the ominous signifiers of *Gezi-ists* and *Gülen-ists*, which have become the central link in a long chain of equivalential terms along with looter, Alevi, coup-ist, alcoholic, pervert, atheist, Jewish, communist and terrorist.

The AKP commercial titled 'The Nation Indomitable, Turkey Invincible' [*Millet Eğilmez Türkiye Yenilmez*] that was broadcasted as part of the party's propaganda leading up to March 2014 local elections is a telling example of the party's turn towards a radical right discourse of nativism/nationalism.²⁸ 3-minutes long video opens up with a massive Turkish flag rippling in the wind and an archetypically villainous man in full-black clothes, leather gloves and sunglasses approaching it. Shot in close-ups from various angles, the man is depicted unmistakably as a sinister "agent" of shadowy forces with evil intentions. Before too long, this uneasy feeling is justified when the man breaks the pulley wheel inside the post and the Turkish flag begins to come down. At this precise moment, Erdoğan's voice is heard as he begins to recite the following lines from the national anthem of Turkey:

My friend! Leave not my *homeland* to the hands of villainous men. Render your chest as armour and your body as bulwark, halt this disgraceful assault. For soon shall come the joyous days of *divine promise*; Who knows? Perhaps tomorrow? Perhaps even sooner!

As if they are woken up by this holy call from the skies, people from different ages, neighbourhoods, social statuses and professions—some dressed in trendy Western-style clothing, others more "traditional" and conservative ones with many women in headscarves emphasised via close-ups—notice that the flag is falling as its shadow falls upon the city and at once begin running towards the flag post. All the while Erdoğan's voice, mixed with voices of Islamic call to prayer and cross-cuts of old men praying, keeps reciting the anthem:

²⁸ Once the electoral court ruled that it broke the campaign rules by using Turkish national flag for party-politics, this video was later modified so that the star and crescent on the flag were replaced with the slogan "The Nation Indomitable, Turkey Invincible." However, the original version is still available online here: <https://youtu.be/80J0FCe69to>

Oh glorious God, no *heathen* should ever touch the bosom of my sacred temples. These calls to prayers and their testimonies are the foundations of my *religion*, and may their noble sound prevail thunderously across my eternal *homeland*. View not the *soil* you tread on as mere earth - recognise it! And think about the shroud-less thousands who lie so nobly beneath you. You are the glorious son of a *martyr* - take shame, grieve not your ancestors. Unhand not, even when you're promised worlds, this heavenly *homeland*.

United through this holy duty, tens of thousands of citizens gather around the flag post in the form of a literal human-mountain reaching high enough for a young man to climb over them, grab the rope and pull the Turkish flag up back to its original, glorious status. This victorious scene is accompanied by Erdoğan reciting the final lines from the anthem:

O ripple and wave like the bright dawning sky, oh thou glorious crescent, so that our every last drop of blood may finally be blessed and worthy. Neither you nor my *race* shall ever be extinguished, for freedom is the absolute right of my ever-free flag; for independence is the absolute right of my *God-worshipping nation*!

As this ‘God-worshipping nation’ celebrate, the screen turns red as the Turkish flag—which, in the official state narrative, symbolises the blood spilled in the service of the nation’s freedom—and the AKP’s election slogan “The Nation Indomitable, Turkey Invincible” appears alongside with Erdoğan’s picture. The video ends with the AKP logo.

There is little room for ambiguity about the subject position on offer here: It is a national identity. As defined above in Chapter 3, nationalism as a discourse is structured around the ‘core concept’ of “the nation” which, as its nodal point, grants meanings to secondary signifiers such as state, land, people or culture (Freeden 1998, 754-5). At its most exclusive, it asserts that the ‘states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group’ and that the ‘non-native elements’ including persons and ideas are ‘fundamentally threatening’ to the homogenous nation-state (Mudde 2007, 19). Most characteristically, such nativist/nationalist discourses divide population in an exclusive manner, separating them through an in/out relationship (De Cleen et.al. 2019), with the “in” comprised of the native members of a nation who are conceived as sharing a common space, time, and other features such as language, customs, religion and so on (Freeden 1998, 752).

With a special emphasis on the signifiers of *homeland* (Turkey) and *religion* (Islam) as these are represented through a secondary chain of “sacred” signifiers like the flag, mosque, martyrs, blood, race and soil, members of the Turkish nation are interpellated in the AKP discourse as those who identify with those relics so thoroughly that they are willing to fight and sacrifice themselves for them. It is indeed through their common readiness to act upon Erdoğan’s call-to-arms in the face of a ‘threat’ against those relics that “the nation” materialises—instigated by the sinister act of the villain who, as an obvious “non-member” of Turkish nation, fulfils the role of ‘constitutive outside’ almost too perfectly. As this video was released for the 2014 local elections when the country went to polls for the first time after the Gezi protests and corruption probes, its meaning was unmistakable. Rather than a mere democratic procedure, elections were presented as a war of independence to be fought by the members of the nation, i.e. the AKP and its supporters, against the evil forces of a foreign enemy who want to deprive the Turkish nation of their sovereignty, i.e. opposition parties and their supporters. Erdoğan reiterated this nativist/nationalist rearticulation of Gezi events and corruption probes as attacks against the nation, calling his electorate to ‘join the new war of independence’ and ‘react against those attacks targeting our state, our nation, and national security’ (IHA 2014; Erdoğan 2014).

It is therefore of little surprise that, during the course of post-Gezi era, the AKP government began to emphasise the ‘native and national’ [*yerli ve milli*] character of its policies, supporters and values more and more, promoting it as the absolute benchmark against which the worth of any policy and actor shall be measured (Aslan 2017; Kasaba 2018; Insel 2019). Aside from transforming it into a catchphrase to promote dubious industrial and business ventures for the innovation of *native* alternatives to *foreign* products and services—including military jets, rockets and drones, microchips, flying cars, an instant messenger app, cyber security software, and a credit-rating agency (Oruç 2019)—Erdoğan stressed at the ‘native and national’ credentials of his party in contrast to supposedly ‘imported’ [*devşirme*], therefore non-national, origins of the opposition (BBC 2015). Curiously enough, this ‘native and national’ emphasis has been gradually adapted by the opposition (sans the HDP) as well, who have often tried to defend their “native” credentials in the same terminology (Baylan 2015; Yeniçağ 2018; Açar 2019).

In this sense we can identify a discernible pattern in the governing AKP’s discourse from the early years of “deep state” investigations onwards, whereby any opposition to the party’s rule has been more and more indiscriminately articulated to the “outside” and the legitimate

sphere of democratic politics. The discursive transformation the party went through during its second term in the office (2007-2011) becomes most palpable in the ominous figure of Ergenekon-ist (*Ergenekoncu*), which emerges as a discursive tool for the AKP government to construct an equivalential chain between the tutelary elite and the party’s political opponents on the basis of their shared antagonism towards the party. Blurring the boundaries of the tutelary elite (constitutive outside of the party’s populist discourse) in such an expansive way that it can now accommodate virtually any dissenting voice that is labelled as such by the government, the signifier Ergenekon-ist illustrates a turning point in the AKP’s discursive trajectory whereby its populism gets articulated with authoritarianism. While the AKP government’s relentless attempts to criminalise and severely punish any and all forms of dissent and political opposition (first, through Ergenekon-ist, then Gezi-ist (*Gezici*) and Gülen-ist (*Fetullahçı/Fetöcü*) from 2013 onwards) stand witness to its rampant authoritarianism for at least since the outset of deep state trials in 2008, its increasing predisposition to articulate the political antagonisms around the nodal point of the nation as the “legitimate natives” and its “illegitimate non-native” enemies is a strong sign of the party’s proliferating nativism/nationalism in the aftermath of the Gezi Events and corruption investigations in 2013.

Formal Criterion	Early AKP Discourse (2001-2011)	Later AKP Discourse (2011-2014)
Nodal Point and claim to represent	The people-as-underdog	Turkish nation
Subject position offered	Member of the people	Member of the nation
Constitutive Outside	The tutelary elite & establishment (Ergenekon-ists)	Non-natives (Gezi-ists, Gülen-ists...) & other outsiders (conspiring external enemies)
Orientation of relationship between nodal point and constitutive outside(s)	Vertical: Down/Up (on the basis of power, hierarchy, and recognition)	Horizontal: In/Out (on the basis of national identity)

Table 4 - Discourse Theoretical Conception of Early and Late AKP Discourses

Thus, following Mudde (2007), De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017), and De Cleen et.al. (2019) we can identify the party’s later discourse as a populist radical-right one whereby its nativist/nationalist and authoritarian features have constituted its ‘ultimate core,’ and overdetermined its earlier populism. Dissenters and political opponents are taken less and less as a minority group of illegitimately powerful elite but domestic enemies of Turkish nation conspiring with its external enemies, who shall be severely punished for their refusal to

recognise the supreme will of *the nation* and criminal attempts to topple its true embodiment that is the AKP government. As a populist radical right-wing discourse, it imposes an impossibly polarised depiction of reality in which the political division between the AKP government and its opponents crosscuts nearly all dimensions of human existence. And this is precisely the point where it becomes perfectly logical for the AKP cadres and supporters to be genuinely saddened by the death of Burakcan Karamanoğlu whereas showing no sign of compassion towards that of Berkin Elvan. In and of itself, the death of a 14 years old child does not have any pre-established meaning until its “side” is clarified through discursive articulation. Once he has reached the zenith of his discursive hegemony over his supporters, it has become Erdoğan and him alone who could wield such “deity-like” power to decide that.

6.4. Populism on the Loose: Erdoğanists and Anti-Erdoğanists

Let us start this final part with the tragic tale of a Turkish couple: Ali and Gülcan Dinç had been married for almost three years when in early 2016 the husband took his wife to criminal court for allegedly insulting the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Mr Dinç claimed his wife would ‘swear and curse whenever Erdoğan appeared on television’ and was unyielding in the face of his warnings that ‘our president is a good man and has done well for our country’ (Tremblay 2016). On one such night, Mr Dinç explains, he warned that he would record her statements and when his wife dared him to do so, he finally did it and used the recording as evidence at court. He told reporters: ‘I am sad to end my marriage but I would do the same even if it were my father who was offending Erdoğan.’

This incident may look mundane to seasoned observers of Turkish politics. After all it is just one of about two thousand cases opened against individuals who are accused of insulting Erdoğan in just two years, including high-school students, housewives, academics and journalists (O’Grady 2016). The tale of Dinç couple, nevertheless, is of special interest because it uniquely encapsulates just how deeply a polarising figure Erdoğan has become in Turkey today, penetrating all the way down to the nuclear family and shattering even the most intimate relationships. It seems to suggest that there is no bond strong enough in the country to overcome the love or hatred one feels towards him. Dinç couple felt compelled to keep fighting over their irreconcilable feelings for the President, for it has become who they are: an *Erdoğanist* and an *anti-Erdoğanist*.

A 2016 survey by the German Marshall Fund entitled “Dimensions of Polarisation in Turkey” demonstrates that far from being an odd couple, the Dinçs in fact constitute the norm (Nasi 2016). In the course of 14 years of uninterrupted single-party rule of Erdoğan’s AKP, politics has turned into an ‘apocalyptic existential struggle’: 83 per cent of the people do not want their daughter to marry someone voting for the “other” party; 79 per cent reject the idea of doing business with them; 76 per cent would not have each other as neighbours; and 74 per cent would not even allow their children playing with those of others. Families, friends, colleagues and all appear to be insignificant in the face of political polarisation. How is this even possible?

This section aims to answer this with a single term: *pure populism* (Laclau 2005: 45-46). In chapter 3 above, we have already established a clear definition of populism on the basis of a post-foundationalist discourse theoretical approach, which understands it as a ‘a dichotomic discourse in which “the people” are juxtaposed to “the elite” primarily along the lines of a down/up antagonism in which “the people” is discursively constructed as a large powerless group through opposition to “the elite” conceived as a small and illegitimately powerful group (Laclau 2005a, 2005b; Stavrakakis et.al. 2018; De Cleen et.al. 2018, 2019). As discussed, this is a definition shared by many unorthodox scholars of radical democracy and populism who welcome Laclau’s favourable take in an otherwise ‘post-democratic’ zeitgeist where the common goal seems to be ruling without the people (Crouch 2004; Rancière 2005).

But even some of these “sympathetic” figures voice criticism over Laclau’s assertion that populism, insofar as it postulates a ‘radical alternative’ to the status quo through the construction of the excluded “people”, is synonymous with politics per se (Laclau 2005: 47; 2007: 225). Benjamin Arditi, for instance, draws attention to non-radical instances of populism where the exclusionary logic is reproduced rather than contested and to the ‘dark possibilities’ that come along with it, such as a cult of personality and criminalisation of opposition (2007: 58, 82). He even hints at a dangerous undercurrent in Laclaudian theory that leaves the door open for an indispensable presence of the leader as the culmination of the “people” (Arditi 2010). Similarly, Nadia Urbinati points out that the *sine qua non* of populism, unification of many under the single banner of the “people” and against an “other”, tends to go towards ‘Caesarism’ and ‘polarisation’ (2007: 147). Like Arditi, she remains unconvinced by Laclau’s attempts at downplaying the personalisation as a convenient but not indispensable tool populism occasionally employs in order to make constitutive antagonisms more pronounced (Ibid. 148-9). This chapter ends up not just concurring with these sympathetic critics but

provides a discourse-theoretical analysis of a case where this supposedly “impossible” extreme of pure populism is observed.

Just to recall, according to Laclau, manifestations of *the political* are always resultant of a combination of logics of difference and equivalence in varying degrees and, thus, are located ‘at the diverse points of a continuum’ between the two impossible extremes of ‘pure institutionalism’ and ‘pure populism’ (Laclau 2005, 45). These discourses are the unapproachable limits of *the political* where it would be, hypothetically, determined solely by either a logic of difference or equivalence. But insofar as neither of those political logics is ‘entirely able to eliminate the other,’ both pure institutionalism and pure populism are doomed to remain forever unattainable (2007, 120).

Indeed, much of the radical democracy literature on the ‘post-political’ (Rancière 1999; Crouch 2004; Mouffe 1993, 2000; Catney & Doyle 2011; Schlembach et.al. 2012; Wilson & Swyngedouw 2014) have emerged as a response to the fact that Western democracies have been steadily approaching closer and closer to pure institutionalism since the end of Cold War. Under the hegemony of the so-called “TINA doctrine” [there-is-no-alternative], the political is increasingly distanced from being a space of contestations and confined to ‘technocratic mechanisms and consensual procedures that operate within an unquestioned framework of representative democracy, free market economics, and cosmopolitan liberalism’ (Wilson & Swyngedouw 2014, 6). In the oft-quoted words of Frederic Jameson, in the post-political era it has become easier ‘to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism’ (2003, 73).

But how about the other end where politics becomes too populist and also ceases to exist? Is *pure populism* really an unreachable limit case as Laclau theorises? This section makes use of the Laclaudian framework and tools to illustrate that the polarisation in contemporary Turkish politics has reached to such an extreme that it fulfils the conditions enlisted for a limit case of pure populism. Differential particularities in contemporary Turkish politics are all practically eliminated under two antagonistically constructed identities and the line dividing them: *Erdoğanists* and *anti-Erdoğanists*.

From the time of its foundation in 2001, Erdoğan’s AKP has won every single elections with an ever increasing landslide, consolidating its support base to roughly 50% of the electorate in the last few years. But especially since his ascension to the presidency in August 2014, Erdoğan has not been leading a party but a movement, what is called *dava* [the cause]

(Alaranta 2015, 98). Erdoğanists in Turkey pledge their oath of allegiance to the leader not the party, whom they regard as the ‘steel core of the cause’ (Eseyan 2016) and the ‘voice and breath of the nation’ (Fraser 2016). It is interesting to note that in the case of AKP this oath of allegiance is a literal one. In May 2016 party congress when Ahmet Davutoğlu was replaced by Binali Yıldırım as the party chairman, thousands of AKP members rose from their seats and stood still in complete silence while a message from ‘the great master’ was being read out by the Chairman of the Council, followed by a collective oath that declared AKP a party ‘eternally of Erdoğan’: ‘Mr. President, we promise that your passion will be our passion, your cause will be our cause, your path will be our path’ (Yeğinsu 2016). The party, for all intents and purposes, functions as an institutional tool for Erdoğan to keep appearances in a regime where there is still a parliament as a legislative body but the executive power lays solely in the hands of the Presidency.

Arguably this has been the case for long but become most apparent once Erdoğan left his post as the AKP leader for the presidency while maintaining his monopoly over the party. In a move that has *de facto* suspended the constitution, Erdoğan kept picking and appointing the party leader, council members and government ministers, as well as leading the cabinet himself. In 2016, the President even forced PM Davutoğlu to resign from his post for failing to keep a ‘low profile’ and, instead, acting as if he really held any power (Akyol 2016c). He was promptly replaced with Binali Yıldırım, a long-time Erdoğanist with a low-enough profile to push through the constitutional changes that would ultimately terminate his own office and transform Turkey into an executive presidential regime – or as Yıldırım himself put it: ‘to legalise the *de facto* situation’ (Mert 2016).

But far from being limited to the AKP cadres, Erdoğanists constitute a significant portion of Turkish society who are loud and proud in their devotion to the leader. AKP supporters make up approximately the half of Turkey’s electorate, among whom Erdoğan enjoys an extremely high rate of approval (Erdoğan 2016, 2). Millions of users gather daily in various social media groups such as the “Lovers of Erdoğan” [*Erdoğan Sevdalıları*] to celebrate their shared adoration for ‘the eternal owner of our hearth’ in the form of photos, songs and poems. Usually venerated as the “chief” [*reis*] or the “master” [*usta*], Erdoğan’s image, along with his quotes, make up the entire content on those incredibly popular pages. One of their most popular mottos on Twitter reads, ‘Whatever the Chief says, that’s it!’²⁹ Another group of

²⁹ A basic Facebook search for various derivatives of “Lovers of Erdoğan” in Turkish [*Erdoğan Sevdalıları*; *Erdoğan Aşıkları*; *Erdoğan Gönüllüleri*] results in more than thousand groups with a total of over a million

devoted Erdoğanists often appear in rallies wearing their signature dress of burial clothes that symbolise their readiness to sacrifice their lives for the “chief” (Çağaptay 2015).³⁰

It is tempting to discuss Erdoğanism phenomenon, specifically the astonishing devotion it has aroused in the AKP supporters and the peculiar relationship it has formed among them, in connection with the above-mentioned Freudian notion of a group in which the only common tie is the love for the leader. Having elevated him into the place of their ego ideal, members of such a group reach a point of complete ‘identification’ with one another, resulting in total consumption of their particular egos under that of the leader (Laclau 2007, 52-60; Freud 2001, 105-116). What ensues is a characteristically libidinal bond formed between the group members and the leader as their shared object-choice of love, in which the latter is idealised to the point of sublime and thus becomes immune to criticism (Žižek 2008, 192).

Statements by Erdoğanists from all ranks and creeds seem like a testimony to the functioning of such a libidinal bond. Interviewed during a presidential rally, a housewife in her 60s declared that, like her co-Erdoğanists wrapped in burial clothes, she would ‘die gladly’ if Erdoğan asked her to, for he was ‘the joy of [her] life.’ Her friend alongside also stated that her ‘greatest desire in this world’ was to make her toddler meet the President, for he was ‘in love with Erdoğan just like his mother’ (Çetin 2014). In a similar tone, Nuran Yıldız, the local head of AKP’s Women’s Branch, encouraged women to become members of the party, which she promoted as ‘a spousal link to Erdoğan himself’ (Sol Haber 2013). It is important to note that this is in no way a phenomenon limited to female Erdoğanists. Fethah Tamince, a billionaire businessman, went on record as early as in 2004 stating: ‘I have fallen in love the moment I met Erdoğan and since then I see him in my dreams 3-4 days a week’ (Süsoy 2004). Ethem Sancak, a leading media tycoon, followed the suit more recently: ‘The more I saw him, the more I fell in love. As I got to know Erdoğan, I realised that such a kind of divine love between two men is possible. I say to Erdoğan: May my mom, dad, wife and children be sacrificed for you’ (Tremblay 2015).

This common emphasis on self-sacrifice is of special interest because the use of religious, particularly Islamic practices, terminology and vocabulary in reference to Erdoğan as a holy figure is another, even more prevalent way in which Erdoğanists express their veneration

members and about 200 Pages with millions of likes. See the one from which the examples in this paragraph are taken with over 2 million likes: <https://www.facebook.com/LiderRecepTayyipErdogan/>.

³⁰ Recently even the American public got a sight of Erdoğanists when propaganda trucks lighting up with the praises like “We love Erdoğan” appeared on the streets of Washington D.C. during the President’s visit (Polat 2016).

for the leader. For instance, a glass Erdoğan drank water from while making a speech was carefully preserved by the head of AKP's Youth Branch in Istanbul and exhibited like a sacred token (Gürsel 2016). The three provinces Erdoğan was respectively born in, served as a mayor and got elected MP from were labelled as 'holy cities' by the then Minister of EU Affairs, because those cities supposedly 'paved the way for the emergence of the greatest leader Turkey has ever seen' (Hakan 2013). A leader so rare and special, according to another AKP deputy, that 'we shall pray a special prayer twice a day to thank Allah for granting [him] to us' (Taşkın 2011). A leading columnist of pro-government daily *Takvim* took a step further and counted Erdoğan as belonging to a holy species of leaders that are 'sent down from Heaven once every century' with a mission to 'put things in order and complete whatever is missing' (Akarca 2013).

It is not easy to dismiss these acts and remarks as hypocritical displays of devotion either, because they often go beyond a rhetorical sanctification of the leader and become outright heresy according to the Islamic norms which, presumably, both Erdoğan and his disciples strictly adhere to. In 2008, a religious book containing a poem with the lines 'Erdoğan is the guardian of the way to Allah, to upset Erdoğan is to upset Allah' were distributed in thousands with the consent of local authorities (Çetin 2008). His name was listed among Mohammad's children in a so-called identity paper fashioned for the Prophet by local AKP cadres during election campaign (Karadaş 2012). Government's approval of building a new hospital was praised as 'Erdoğan's *Sunnah*' – an Islamic term used exclusively for the deeds of Prophet himself (Gezen & Küçükkuuru 2013). In fact, Erdoğanists sometimes do not even bother beating around the bushes and express it directly that Erdoğan is like a 'second prophet' to them (Kılınç 2010). So much so that they believe 'even touching him is a form of worship' (Üzer 2011). Ultimately, this belief in him as the 'messenger of Allah' (T24 2015), 'leader of all believers' (Önal 2014) and 'caliph of the Earth' (Bayar 2014) turns literally into deification at times, as in the case of yet another AKP deputy who went all-in with his statement that Erdoğan could rule the world because he 'embodies all the qualities of Allah in himself' (Akyol 2016d).

6.4.1. Enemies Within

Considering this intense devotion to Erdoğan that often reaches to the level of worship, it is plausible to propose that Erdoğanists are not a group of ordinary political supporters but of disciples following a sublime leader who is beyond criticism in their eyes. He is nothing less

than the perfect embodiment of the cause, the party and the nation for them. Any act that breaks their unity poses an existential risk to the identity of every individual member and that of group as a whole, since the latter functions on the premise that its members are one and the same in an entirely homogenous union. Therefore anything less than a complete submission to the leader on the part of a member, regardless of their office, equals automatically to treason and, in order to ensure a successful preservation of group homogeneity, is responded by excommunication. A column in the pro-Erdoğan daily *Star* aptly summarises the way in which this principle functions and therefore deserves to be quoted *in extenso*:

‘[Recent change of leadership in the AKP] signifies a change of mentality regarding how to situate oneself in relation to the leader and how to administer the movement accordingly, [which] entitles not just fidelity but also loyalty and dependence [to the leader]...The cause and the leader are one and the same thing, which can never be separated. One cannot have a sense of the cause without a bond of loyalty to the leader...Erdoğan is not just the founding leader of a political party but someone who has materialised the cause in himself and thus become the embodiment of hope for the nation and ummah...None of us is indispensable whereas Erdoğan is our indispensable leader...It is surely a mistake that anyone, regardless of their office, could dare to equalise oneself with the leader or speak of him as if he is their equal. That is what we believe in and live by’ (Metiner 2016).

A once-leading member of Erdoğan’s inner circle explains how this principle works among Erdoğanists, speaking of a ‘system of intimidation and bullying’ to obtain complete submission: ‘99% allegiance would not suffice to save you from being turned into nothing in [Erdoğan’s] eyes...After even the tiniest of criticisms there comes a machine gun of slanders, blackmails, threats and insults’ (Bekdil 2016; Ongun 2016). Naturally, the list of loyalists-turned-traitors is getting longer each day.

Let us just take the examples of Bülent Arınç and the ex-president Abdullah Gül. Arınç was a long-time deputy PM, parliament speaker for the party, and one of the most prominent members of “the cause” overall. Along with Gül and Erdoğan, he makes up the so-called “founding trio” who established the AKP in 2001. Yet his credentials could not stop the wrath of Erdoğanists once he voiced reservations over the president’s interference into government issues and diverged from the official line sanctioned by the leader on issues like the Kurdish problem and freedom of expression. On pro-Erdoğan dailies he was labelled as a ‘traitor’ who was ‘speaking in the language of the terrorists’ to topple the president (Akyol 2016b). Erdoğan

refused to utter Arınç's name thereafter, calling him instead the 'dishonest one' (Küçükşahin 2016). The same goes for Gül as well. His plans for switching offices with Erdoğan in a Putin/Medvedev style move collapsed when he showed signs of disapproval towards Erdoğan's policy of brutal suppression of Gezi protests and called attention to the risks of increasing polarisation (Çandar 2015a; Gardner 2016). He too was called a traitor, acting 'greedy' like 'Brutus' and protecting enemies of the cause (Yılmaz 2015). Since then both have practically disappeared from the political arena.

Other AKP heavyweights accompanied them into political limbo. The party's founding deputy and ex-minister of education Hüseyin Çelik was labelled a 'cryptic terrorist' for criticising Erdoğan's polarising politics and promptly demoted from the government ranks (Yılmaz 2016). Ali Babacan, known as the AKP's "economy tsar" responsible for the country's financial recovery in 2000s, was accused of 'high treason' for defending the independence of the Central Bank and not sharing Erdoğan's conspiratorial views about a global 'interest rate lobby' undermining Turkey's economy (Yackley 2015). Sadullah Ergin, ex-minister of justice who spearheaded the legal reforms in harmony with the EU *acquis*, lost his seat after refusing to prepare laws that would bring judiciary under complete control of the executive and was declared a member of terrorist organisation (Çandar 2015a; Ramoğlu 2016). And finally, the most recent casualty in this war between Erdoğanists and their "enemies within" turned out to be Ahmet Davutoğlu, who stood by Erdoğan's side since the beginning, first as his chief foreign policy advisor, then foreign minister, and lastly PM. Even he could not avoid being excommunicated as a 'traitor' who 'collaborated with the West' and 'its Trojan horses inside' once he diverged from the leader's will, i.e. attempted delaying the transition towards executive presidency and rebuilding bridges with domestic opposition and the EU (Akyol 2016c).

6.4.2. Poverty of Anti-Erdoğanism

Even a bigger source of worry for the future of Turkish politics in general is the fact that the opposition actors inadvertently contribute to the reproduction of this exceptional bond fortified around the messianic image of Erdoğan. Just like his disciples, they place Erdoğan to the epicentre of their own discourses, albeit in the exact opposite way, and effectively reinforce his position as the sole frontier dividing the political realm into two camps that are mirror images of each other: Erdoğanists and anti-Erdoğanists.

Gezi uprisings quickly amassed millions of protestors all around the country chanting a single slogan: Down with *Erdoğan*. It immediately became clear that the issue was not just the trees in a park but what they symbolised: *Erdoğan*'s evermore authoritarian rule (Özkırmı 2014). Regardless of the versatile profile of the groups that made up the Gezi protestors in terms of ethnicity, religion, ideology or party affiliation, they all had one thing in common; the same staunch opposition to *Erdoğan*.³¹ This was largely thanks to his strategy of criminalising the protestors as 'terrorists' and staking a personal claim on the police brutality they faced, which succeeded in putting him into the heart of a rigid antagonism. In fact, Erdoğan quickly turned the whole picture into a battle for the survival of the nation by organising a series of counter rallies titled "Respect for the National Will" where tens of thousands of Erdoğanists chanted 'We are the soldiers of Tayyip' and asked their leader to give them the order to 'crash' the protestors (Gürsel 2013b). Consolidating his constituency, Erdoğan emerged victorious from all four subsequent elections.

A crude anti-Erdoğanism forms the backbone of other, more organised opposition actors as well. In a bid to mobilise their grass-root supporters and gain further popularity, they actively promote it as *raison d'être* of their existence and end up reinforcing the Erdoğanists' pure populism. In a typically anti-Erdoğanist speech he gave at the parliament, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, leader of Turkey's main opposition party (CHP), aptly summarised his party's mission: 'Erdoğan dreams of being an executive president but he cannot reach his goal before he crushes our bodies, spills our blood and annihilates us completely' (Demirtaş 2016; Milliyet 2016). Until 2015, electoral support for the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), latest successor of pro-Kurdish parties in Turkey's recent history, used to fluctuate around 6%, which the party received overwhelmingly from the Kurdish-populated southeast for advocating their ethno-cultural demands for decentralisation (Casier et.al. 2011). Despite the leadership's efforts to emphasise the party's leftist stance with a distinct focus on egalitarian issues and a record number of female and minority candidates, for long the HDP failed to break off the ethnic label and its popularity remained limited to pro-Kurdish groups (Celep 2014). This changed almost overnight following HDP leader Selahattin Demirtaş's historically brief speech in the parliament, which unmistakably pronounced anti-Erdoğanism as his party's *raison d'être* and enabled it to appeal to a completely different cluster of non-Kurdish voters who saw in HDP the unique opportunity to stop Erdoğan: 'I will express my message in just one sentence: Mr.

³¹ A survey conducted among 3000 protestors finds that 92% of Gezi protestors listed "Erdoğan's authoritarianism" as the primary reason for participation and disagreed with the statement 'I'm an AKP voter' (Bilgiç & Kafkaslı 2013: 7-8).

Erdoğan, you will never be able to be the head of the nation as long as the HDP exists and as long as the HDP people are on this soil. We will not make you the president. We will not make you the president. We will not make you the president’ (De Bellaigue 2015). Minutes after *#SeniBaşkanYaptırmayacağız* [#WeWillNotMakeYouThePresident] hit the worldwide trending topics list on Twitter and in June 2015 elections HDP more than doubled its votes with 13%, becoming the third biggest parliamentary group.

Such an unprecedented surge in the support for HDP and its comparatively less radical agenda of decentralisation meant a significant loss of popularity for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), an illegal armed organisation fighting Turkish state for an independent Kurdish state since 1980s (Yavuz & Özcan 2015). In a move quite uncharacteristic for the organisation, PKK leader Cemil Bayık attempted to compensate this loss by engaging in a bit of anti-Erdoğanism of his own, stating: ‘This is a war of life and death for both parties. If Erdoğan eliminates us, he will win and be able to defeat everyone on the side of democracy. We are the biggest obstacle in the way of his dreams. We want to topple Erdoğan and the AKP, otherwise Turkey will never become a democratic country’ (Loyd 2016).

So, if there is one thing anti-Erdoğanists have in common with Erdoğanists, it is their understanding of politics as an existential war. The fact that they are in equal degrees obsessed with Erdoğan only fuels their adversaries’ “purely populist” discourse that promotes a vision of the world ultimately divided between the leader-as-people-embodied and his negative reverse evil-incarnated. In the eyes of his disciples, it gives credit to Erdoğan’s grandiose views about a global network of conspirators working together to topple him personally. His list of “enemies” of himself, and therefore the nation, includes, but is not limited to, the opposition parties, Gezi-ists, Gülenists, Kurdish terrorists, finance speculators, Alevites, BBC, New York Times, Jewish lobby, Germany, Italy, Armenian lobby, and homosexuals (Idiz 2013; HDN 2015). Any and all sort of criticism and dissent against Erdoğan himself is instantly articulated to this ever-expanding “outside” of the Turkish nation. As one of Erdoğan’s top advisors put in his daily column:

‘Turkey stands on a delicate equilibrium where Erdoğan is the golden point of balance. Those coalition of crooks...are ready to turn Turkey into a colony if only they could reach their dream of seeing Erdoğan gone. Their goal is crystal clear: Topple the strong leadership to feed off the treasures, lives and blood of Turkey. Just like in the old times’ (Bulut 2016).

This is particularly why any international reaction against Turkey's dramatic slippage down to authoritarianism in recent years, no matter how well-intended, morally upright or friendly-toned it is, fails to strike a chord among the Erdoğanists. Insofar as they inevitably pose a challenge to Erdoğan's infallibility, critics are doomed to get articulated to the outside, dismissed a priori as "foreign enemies" of the nation and equivalentially chained to the "enemies within" (Cornell 2014; Armstrong 2015). Far from easing the polarisation, they paradoxically deepen it by helping Erdoğan to consolidate his constituencies even further and, consequently, weakening what little chance the opposition may have in dislocating some of them.

The poverty Turkish opposition suffers within the limits of anti-Erdoğanism is perhaps best described by the CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu. In a tone that reflects real despair, he stated:

'Erdoğan is a true narcissist who listens to no one but himself, abides by no rules but his own. We discuss among ourselves whether or not we should take such a person seriously and combat him but, alas, we have to... We have many projects but presenting them has no appeal right now [when] Turkey is *de facto* an AKP state. From mayors to teachers, academics to doctors, all consider themselves as servants to its rule. We are asked to correct *this* picture [while] playing the game of pseudo-democracy, which is imposed on everyone and opposing it equals to treason' (Özgüven 2016).

This extremely polarised picture stands witness to our assertion that the contemporary politics in Turkey under Erdoğanism seems to be rather analogous to the Dinç marriage. It is a tale of two parties who are on the brink of a violent break-up but nonetheless condemned to a perpetual dialogue of the deaf to maintain who they are. It is stuck in a vicious circle, what Emilia Palonen calls a 'bipolar hegemony,' where two homogenous camps occupy the entire political space and sustain their identities solely 'through their opposition to one another' (Palonen 2009: 331). Any new cleavages or demands are instantly articulated into this existing system of pro- vs. anti-Erdoğanism, leaving no space for a third position – not in party politics, business life, neighbourhoods or even families. The fact that there seems to be no way out of this deadlock at the moment but a divorce, a complete division of Turkish society into two distinct people(s), is a strong warning for not equating populism with politics tout court as Laclau does.

Formal Criterion	Early AKP Discourse (2001-2011)	Later AKP Discourse (2012-2014)	Erdoğanism (2014-present)
Nodal Point and claim to represent	The people-as-underdog	Turkish nation	Turkish nation
Subject position offered	Member of the people	Member of the nation	Erdoğanist
Constitutive Outside	The tutelary elite & establishment (e.g. Ergenekon-ists)	Non-natives (Gezi-ists, Gülen-ists and so on) & other outsiders (conspiring external enemies)	Anti-Erdoğanists
Orientation of relationship between nodal point and constitutive outside(s)	Vertical: Down/Up (on the basis of power, hierarchy, and recognition)	Horizontal: In/Out (on the basis of national identity)	Horizontal: In/Out (on the basis of personal loyalty)

Table 5 - Discourse Theoretical Conception of Early & Late AKP and Erdoğanist Discourses

As summarised in Table 5 above, Erdoğanism represents the zenith of the AKP’s populist radical right discourse that has been characterising the party’s rule more and more prominently since the dawn of its third term in the office. Whereas the party’s early discourse was a primarily populist one constructed around a vertical antagonism between the people-as-underdog and the illegitimately powerful elite at the helm of military, bureaucracy and judiciary, this was gradually overtaken by a horizontal antagonism constructed between the native members of the nation and its non-native outgroups, particularly in the course of Gezi protests, graft probes and the subsequent elections in 2014. Erdoğanism, on the other hand, signifies a further discursive transformation that is most distinctively characterised by the name of the leader gaining relative centrality in determining who belongs to “the nation” and its non-native outgroups, and why (De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017, 314). An unconditional and complete loyalty to the leader towers above all other forms of political identification as the unique criterion that determines one’s “side” (in/out) on the horizontal axis, which results in the transformation of what used to be the AKP discourse into the Erdoğanist one. Constructed on an affective relationship between Erdoğan and the nation, such a personalisation of national sovereignty is quickly spilled over the institutional limits of the party, turning it into a dispensable vessel during the course. Whereas Erdoğan is turned into the embodiment of the national will in the August 2014 Presidential election when he became the first president to be selected by national elections, the complete reorganisation of the state in the form of a hyper-presidential system in 2017 has transformed the country’s institutional framework into a ‘formally personalist one’ (Sözen

2018, 292-93). Under this new ‘Turkish-style presidential system’ based on the ‘harmony’ rather than separation of powers (Hürriyet 2016), Erdoğan has enjoyed complete authority over the executive branch and significantly increased his power over the judiciary too, effectively identifying himself with the Turkish state tout court (Esen & Gümüüşcü 2017, 306-307).

Our account that traces the discursive trajectory of the AKP from its early populism all the way to Erdoğanism reminds us that, far from being a theoretical limit concept, what Laclau calls as *pure populism* is an actual, albeit extreme and unfortunately named, possibility, which can be realised when a logic of equivalence rages unabated. Therefore this chapter maintains that it is plausible to side with Laclau’s “sympathetic” critics who more or less share his ontological categorisation of populism as a political discourse without endorsing its ultimate conclusion. As Erdoğanism case demonstrates, their warnings of an ever-present risk of extreme polarisation and personalisation in populism are far from being ungrounded. Though, considering the expansive trajectory the AKP has gone through whereby its early, quintessentially populist discourse first had to give way to a predominantly nativist/nationalist one for it to be subsequently transformed into Erdoğanism, in order not to render the concept analytically useless it would be probably wise not to call the resultant political picture as primarily populist. Instead, following the insights of both Mudde and De Cleen et.al., we shall emphasise *radical right* as the ‘primary term in the concept’ (Mudde 2007, 27) that corresponds to discourses articulated around a nativist/nationalist core, which in turn overdetermines their populism by turning the vertical down/up antagonism into derivatives of positions on the horizontal in/out axis.

6.5. Conclusions

This chapter offered a post-foundationalist analysis of the AKP discourse using the discourse-theoretical methodology offered by Laclaudian scholars of populism. Examining the AKP discourse throughout its political lifespan, contrary to mainstream, this chapter identified the party as a characteristically populist one from its founding in 2001. Focusing on the changing political architectonics as the party went through the critical junctures, the chapter drew attention to a discursive evolution, in the course of which the AKP has turned from a primarily populist party into a populist radical right one, eventually reaching to the “limits” of the political in the form of *Erdoğanism*. This is observed most distinctively through the steady advance of nativist/nationalist and authoritarian emphases of the AKP discourse at the expense of its earlier

populism. This is characterised in the gradual disappearance of the Kemalist establishment and elite as the constitutive outside of “the people”, giving way to an increasing more conspiratorial and criminal category of the enemies of “the nation.” At its zenith, this “nation” gets transformed into *Erdoğānists* who are constructed as totally identifying with the name of the leader. Although it is commonplace to observe that polarisation is an ‘instrumental electoral strategy’ Erdoğan employs to ‘consolidate his constituency’ (Keyman 2014, 29) little attention is paid in the literature to the extreme ways in which this strategy consumes the particular identities of his followers. It is equally interesting to note that such an extremely polarising discourse also simultaneously pushes the opposition to a dark corner where adopting an equally relentless anti-Erdoğanist stance emerges as the only way of survival, even though this amounts to being labelled “enemies of the nation” and paradoxically reproduces the Erdoğanist discourse. This discourse-theoretically informed analysis of the case of Erdoğanism also allowed us to confront the latent emancipatory apriorism of Laclaudian theory of populism, which tends to instil populism a democratic-egalitarian essence and disregard those unsavory instances where it paves the way for the establishment of authoritarian, anti-democratic regimes. Contrary to Laclaudian tendency to downplay populism’s predisposition towards personification, our examination of the AKP’s discursive trajectory demonstrated it in action, and stood witness to the fact that rather than being a mere limit concept, Laclaudian notion of “pure populism” is an actually realisable political arrangement that is detected most clearly when the AKP’s early populism reached at its nativist and authoritarian zenith in the form of *Erdoğanism*.

Chapter 7: Conclusions: Limits and Trajectories of Populism

7.1. Findings

For a student of populism like the author of this dissertation, it was truly a curious phenomenon to observe *populism* becoming the buzzword of Turkish politics precisely during this period when the AKP government has taken an unmistakable turn towards radical-right, with authoritarianism and nativism/nationalism coming to fore much more pronouncedly as the ultimate core features of the party's discourse. How could Erdoğan and his government have turned from beloved *Muslim democrats* to *wretched populists* almost overnight? This dissertation has been my humble answer to this question.

It is a common joke among the seasoned observers of Turkish politics that in order to be able to analyse it one has to take a break from Turkey. A constant flood of major developments and crises, each of which would possibly topple a government in Nordic countries, tends to create an overbearing sense of exhaustion due to over-politicisation on a daily basis. Not having the luxury to ignore it to maintain one's sanity—as many ordinary citizens of Turkey tend to do—I have instead been subjecting myself to a rather disorienting task of finding some semblance of consistency, an underlying logic within what seems to be a thoroughly chaotic and contradictory series of political developments in Turkey since the AKP came to power in 2002.

On the one hand, the AKP government had brought dynamism by rapidly pushing through a series of reforms, which allowed Turkey to become an official EU candidate in 2004. This was coupled with the economic overturn the party oversaw during its first term, rapidly recovering Turkey from the depths of crisis to a competitive and growing member of global economy (Öniş 2015). Having emerged victorious from its battles against the tutelary regime, the party also contributed significantly to the overall civilianisation of Turkish politics during the same period (Kalaycıoğlu 2015). Finally, the party undertook the herculean tasks of lifting the infamous headscarf ban and bringing about a peaceful solution to the country's Kurdish problem. Though the first was achieved while the latter eventually failed, the two together had the aggregate democratising and liberalising effect over Turkish politics by loosening its ultra-secularist and ultra-nationalist "red lines". These developments made many at home and abroad feel optimistic about Turkey's future trajectory for the first time in decades, so much so that AKP government was promoted as a model democracy for other Muslim countries and Erdoğan as 'the Nelson Mandela of Turkey's excluded majority' (Yavuz 2003, 259).

But during the same ‘golden years’ of AKP government also a worrying trend was going on. While the celebrations were still undergoing for the EU candidacy status, the party significantly broadened the definition of terrorism and expanded the power of security forces in direct contradiction to *acquis communautaire* (Patton 2007). Seven thousand people, including Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk and Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink, who was assassinated later in 2007, were charged with ‘defamation of Turkishness’. Once it thwarted the guardians’ offenses, the AKP also unleashed such a relentless counter-attack that its long-term ramifications have undone much of the progress the party brought about in terms of democratisation and liberalisation. Between 2007 and 2013, hundreds were sentenced for terrorism charges in sham trials based on fabricated evidence (Aydıntaşbaş 2016; Doğan & Rodrik 2010). Concomitant to these trials, the AKP also made scores of changes in the composition of high judiciary bodies that significantly curtailed their independence (Taş 2018; Ciddi 2011; Jenkins 2011; Kaboğlu 2010). Economic miracle narrative was equally weakened as the country was hit hard by the 2008 financial crisis, revealing that its structural deficiencies, such as political favouritism and patronage, were not just enduring but in fact worsening under the AKP (Gürakar 2016; Kutlay & Karaoğuz 2018).

It was only when it became impossible to ignore this second trend as it culminated in the course of the Gezi protest that the expert and scholarly depictions of Turkey in the mainstream made a U-turn and began to speak of a democratic backsliding (Tuğal 2016; Esen & Gümüşcü 2016; Berlinski 2017; Somer 2017). Once-unquestioning promoters of the Turkish model were united in their wrath against the AKP government. In numerous op-eds, talks, columns, articles and books, pundits in the mainstream Western media outlets, regional experts of global think-tanks and academics condemned Erdoğan as the new “sultan” of Turkey.

Navigating among the *intellectual discourses about the discourse of populism* as they are represented in the Western and Turkish mainstream political science scholarship, this dissertation first identified a strong current that has long been dragging the concept towards the shallow waters of radical/extreme right-wing politics, turning it slowly but steadily into an antinomy of democracy, fascism 2.0 of sorts. Pioneered by proponents of modernisation theory like Hofstadter (1955) and Shils (1956), sixty years on this current still runs strong enough to constitute the blueprint for the “new” mainstream both globally (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2017) and in Turkey (Kalaycıoğlu 2001; Sunar 2004; Eder 2004; Hale & Özbudun 2010; Aytaç & Ezgi 2019).

Much like their predecessors, these contemporary theoreticians of populism conceptualise it as an essentially inferior way of doing politics in comparison to a liberal democratic ideal where rationality and deliberation, rather than emotions and antagonism are the norm. But how about those archetypically populist forces whose politics take their queue from a distinctly progressive ethos such as Syriza, Podemos, and others? Do we have to throw the baby out with the bathwater, so to say? More crucially, these accounts are silent when it comes to the core question of “how the AKP could become populist overnight”? Thus, in chapter three this dissertation took another route that has proven to be much more beneficial: post-foundationalist discourse theoretical approach.

Having located populism at the ontological level of a discourse which constructs ‘the people’ as a disempowered majority whose legitimate demands are frustrated by an unjustifiably powerful ‘elite’ minority, my operationalisation of this approach has offered a neutral definition that cross-cuts different manifestations of populist politics in various times and places. With its emphasis on the radically contingent nature of social meanings and the political nature of any and all attempts to fixate them, it has also allowed and even compelled this dissertation to critically engage with the hegemonic scholarly accounts of populism, enabling it to reveal their epistemological and normative biases. Rather ironically, one of those biases turned out to be the one tacitly embraced by the Laclaudian account itself, which tends to underemphasise populist predisposition towards personalisation for the benefit of advancing an emancipatory definition that would prioritise its leftist instances.

As shown in chapters four and five, this has proven to be an especially productive endeavour in the case of mainstream scholarship on populism in Turkey where the concept seemed to be stuck in a contronym, meaning two polar opposites at once, i.e. *halkçılık* and *popülizm*. While *halkçılık* is taken as the midwife that had assisted the delivery of Turkish nation state during the course of a particularly difficult birth and thus got bonded with it forever, *popülizm* was understood as a reaction to that bond. Thus, scholarly discussions on *popülizm* have often taken place under an ominous shadow that is cast by *halkçılık*, narrowing down their epistemological horizons. In this sense, the most prominent intellectual framework informing nearly all the analyses on *popülizm*, centre-periphery model, has played the particularly devastating role of ‘patient zero’ that has infected the mainstream Turkish political scholarship with a pathological understanding of populism and an anti-antagonistic concept of democracy for the decades to come. An analysis of the early AKP’s discourse has further revealed that Mardin’s model constitutes the backbone of the party’s ‘conservative democratic’ identity as

well and, therefore, accounts for not only the remarkable popularity of the party among the mainstream scholarship in Turkey but also partially the latter's inability to identify the party as populist.

Operationalising a post-foundationalist theory of populism, chapter six offered a clear answer to the core question that has motivated this dissertation: The AKP did not "turn" populist overnight but instead has been a consistently populist force from the beginning and its subsequent ideological trajectory has been a gradual transformation into a radical right one. As the hegemonic actor of Turkish politics in the 21st century, the AKP's original populist discourse has transformed into an exclusivist and nationalist radical right one over the years, finally reaching at an extreme point of what Laclau unfortunately calls as *pure populism* in the form of Erdoğanism, whereby the "people-as-nation" is transformed into masses who totally identify with the name of the leader and the opposition is pushed to a corner where anti-Erdoğanism remains as the only way of survival, even though this amounts to being inevitably labelled as the "enemies of the nation" and paradoxically reproduces the Erdoğanist discourse.

For quite some time, Turkey has been stuck in such a position, where Erdoğanists and anti-Erdoğanists sustain their identities solely through their opposition to one another and occupy the entire political space. Any new cleavages or demands are instantly articulated into this singular antagonism, leaving no space for a third position – not in party politics, business life, neighbourhoods or even families. The fact that there seems to be no way out of this gridlock but a complete division of Turkey into two distinct peoples shall serve as reminder for the scholars of populism not to equate it with politics *tout court* as Laclau does. The analysis of the changing discourse of the AKP undertaken here stands witness to the fact that far from being a hypothetical concept, what Laclau calls "pure populism" is an actual, though rare, possibility. A radical condensation of populist movements under the singularity of the leader is an ever-present horizon, which can and does overtake and carry them beyond the limits of democratic, emancipatory politics. As this thesis sought to contribute to the post-foundationalist theory of populism by exploring the limits of Laclau's work especially with regards to its underlying radical democratic emancipatory apriorism, it has been an attempt to investigate what lies at that "beyond" of populism. I hope further empirical cases will be studied through the lenses developed here.

7.2. Limitations

As reiterated above, the findings of this dissertation have become apparent exclusively through the lenses of a post-foundationalist approach to populism, which potentially means that the very existence of these findings could be contested from the vantage point of a different ontology. There is truly very little one can do about this obvious limitation other than to welcome criticisms and engage in scholarly conversations to improve the analytical robustness of the approach taken while keeping a keen eye on constantly shifting epistemological limitations of one's own. Indeed, one of the most promising ways to carry a retrospective investigation into the AKP phenomenon in Turkish politics seems to be the one from the lenses of critical political economy, which pays special attention to the role neoliberal governmentality has played in determining the party's politics and its prolonged electoral success. Having been written from the outside of the field of political economy, this dissertation could not interact enough with that body of work, which would significantly widen its analytical span.

Though it has originally set out to be an inquiry which would focus almost solely on the case of the AKP, this dissertation has ended up dedicating considerably less space to that. There is indeed much more to be discussed about this fascinating phenomenon. Yet the pace with which the party in particular and Turkey and its surrounding region in general have been transforming for the last several years poses a formidable challenge for the development of a comprehensive account. Hence, this researcher had to make the difficult decision to "stop at some point" and, as the post-foundationalist account discussed throughout this dissertation would suggest, that decision would ultimately have to be a contingent one.

7.3. Avenues for Further Research

Perhaps one of the most interesting and promising ways in which the present discussion on Turkish populism could be expanded is the comparative dimension. On the one hand, the supposed novelty of the AKP in Turkey as a reformed party of ex-Islamists under the banner of conservative democracy, which claimed to be uniquely qualified to make the society "whole" again through a reinterpretation of Islamic values and beliefs in accordance with the global principles of liberal democracy and free-market economy, was in fact hardly a *sui generis* phenomenon. Malaysian brand of Islamism went through an almost identical discursive transformation during the same period as well, which was crystallised in the motto of

‘civilizational Islam’ [*Islam Hadhari*] introduced during the premiership of Ahmad Badawi in 2004-2009 (Liow 2007; Hoffstaedter 2009; Zook 2010; Hamid & Ismail 2014).

Promoting it as a ‘novel Islamic form of multiculturalism’ that was ‘all about overcoming the exclusionary models of Islamisation,’ the Badawi government recommended *Islam Hadhari* ‘as a model to be adopted’ by other Muslim countries that aspired to become ‘tolerant and democratic’ societies at the same time (Hoffstaedter 2009, 134; Hamid & Ismail 2014, 163). So much so that, demonstrating the world ‘a Muslim country can be modern, democratic, tolerant and economically competitive’ was declared as the *raison d’être* of Malay government (Albar 2006). Just like their Turkish ex-Islamist counterparts, those who formulated this Malay “novelty” within the ideological universe of post-9/11 era based it on a distinctly liberal ‘interpretation of Islam as a religion of rationality, inclusivity, moderation, and tolerance’ that was ‘intentionally counterpoised to the more traditional and conservative type of Islam’ embraced by its Islamist predecessors and competitors (Ali 2016, 211; Hamid & Ismail 2014, 159, 162; Liow 2007, 175-77). While it was expectedly praised in the Western hemisphere as a ‘powerful example’ for all Muslim nations to follow, at home Badawi’s *Islam Hadhari* discourse based on ‘consensus building’ was hailed most enthusiastically by liberal circles as a ‘welcome change’ from his Islamist predecessor Mahathir Mohamad’s ‘divisive’ rule that had been marred with ‘crude efforts to Islamise Malaysia’ (Gatsiounis 2006; Ali 2016, 220). Thus, a more thorough comparison between those cases is likely to be highly enlightening with respect to outlining a more comprehensive account of populism in predominantly Muslim societies.

On the other hand, there has been a dynamic emergence of studies in the field of post-foundationalist populism studies focusing on cases such as Chavismo in Venezuela (Salojärvi 2016) and Fidesz in Hungary (Palonen 2018) where initially populist discourses have gradually transformed into authoritarian regimes that have proven remarkably resilient. A comparative study to analyse the different intensities in which the AKP and those regimes keep the populist features of their discourses pronounced could also tell us a lot about the (de)legitimizing roles the populist dimension plays in politics.

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