

National History as a Contested Site: The Conquest of Istanbul and Islamist Negotiations of the Nation*

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On May 29, 1996, travelers visiting Istanbul witnessed a rather peculiar celebration. A group of burly men dressed in Ottoman military clothing, some wearing false moustaches, were dragging a decorated sailboat along the asphalt road toward the central Taksim Square. Although it was no easy task to drag the sailboat uphill under the hot sun and the curious gaze of tourists on this summer day, the laboring men nevertheless displayed a solemn attitude of resolve and austerity, as if to remind the observing public of the grave significance of the historical event they were commemorating.

Tourists were not the only people who turned a curious gaze toward this peculiar parade: some inhabitants of Istanbul were also equally puzzled, since May 29 was not an official holiday in Turkey. But others knew: this parade was a celebration of the Conquest of Istanbul Day, commemorating May 29, 1453, when the Ottoman ruler Fatih Sultan Mehmet (Mehmet II, the Conqueror) conquered Constantinople, bringing the Byzantine Empire to an end. Born to a Christian mother, Mehmet II was 21 years old when he led the Ottoman army that seized control of Constantinople after a successful military campaign, which won recognition for the young Sultan as a military genius. Realizing that the city was very well protected on the sides facing Bosphorus Strait and the Marmara Sea, Mehmet II had seventy ships of the Ottoman fleet moved on land, rolling them over oiled logs from a deeper point on the Strait (Beşiktaş), over the hill around Taksim, down to the Haliç Bay (the Golden Horn), and thereby gaining access to the unprotected northern walls of the city. This strategy won Mehmet II not only a definite victory, but also the title *Fatih* (Conqueror) and recognition as one of the most successful of Ottoman rulers. It was this conquest that the men with false moustaches were celebrating as they dragged the decorated boat through the city some 550 years later.

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In this paper, I examine the unofficial commemoration of the Conquest of Istanbul on May 29 by Islamist circles in Turkey, whose large-scale demonstrations and parades celebrate an alternative history that contests secular Turkish national history.¹ May 29 celebrations do not only glorify the Ottoman past, but also make a connection between the conquest of Istanbul and a prophecy made by the Muslim prophet Mohammed, thereby making the event a part of Islamic history as well. I argue that these Islamist performances of history serve to construct an alternative national identity which is Ottoman and Islamic, evoking a civilization centered in the city of Istanbul, as opposed to the secular, modern Turkish Republic centered in the capital city of Ankara. The unofficial celebration of May 29 emerges as a disruptive interjection in time, an event which forces public attention to think of its past in terms of centuries, instead of decades. Suddenly, the celebration of national time, which had exclusively concentrated on the two decades between 1919 and 1938, warps into the past and locates a national moment in the fifteenth century. The performance of this alternative national history serves to incorporate the Ottoman times into national memory, unsettling the secularist constructions of national history centered around the Kemalist/Republican era of the twentieth century. It undermines secularist conceptions of the modern nation-state, and calls into question the official date of the founding of the Turkish nation, set as October 29, 1923.

The commemoration of May 29 also addresses broader questions about the making and contestation of national identity through daily practices in public life. As I discuss below, such commemorative practices show how the making of national history involves a series of contested and negotiated interventions in public life.

THE FOUNDING MOMENT: INSERTING THE NATION INTO HISTORY

The writing of national history is an act by which a nation-state declares itself into being, locating itself as both the author and the agent of that history. The formation of a nation-state is marked by a beginning, a founding moment, often celebrated as a day of independence or a national liberation day. In Turkey, the advent of the modern nation-state is celebrated on October 29 as Republic Day, commemorating the day when the National Assembly announced the new Republic into being in 1923. Since the Ottoman period does not play a constitutive role in official national history, there are no official days of commemoration referring to incidents that took place under the Ottoman Empire. All official national commemoration days in Turkey are related to various events that took place under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk between May 19, 1919, when Atatürk first started organizing the resistance movement in Anatolia, and November 10, 1938, the day that Atatürk died, commemorated as the National Mourning Day.

“The Conquest of Istanbul Day” widely celebrated by Islamist circles on May 29 is not an official holiday. Although it is officially recognized as a day of historical importance, it is not evoked as a constitutive moment of national

history. Every year a small official ceremony is held, at which representatives from the military, the Municipality of Istanbul and the Governor's Office visit Fatih Sultan Mehmet's tomb and make short speeches to a group of soldiers gathered for the occasion. Public attendance is not usually encouraged during these ceremonies, and until 1994 the occasion did not attract any media attention. Until the Islamist celebrations became public, the secular media did not acknowledge May 29 as a day of national significance, and the date usually passed as just another ordinary day, with no particular visibility in the public sphere.

Since the Islamist city administration of Refah Party² came to power in Istanbul in 1994, May 29 has been celebrated publicly by Islamist circles every year, with parades, firecrackers, public concerts, symposia and a night full of festivities at the İnönü Stadium, hosting around thirty thousand people from all over Turkey. Although the form and style of these celebrations resemble national commemoration days in other parts of the world, the peculiar thing about the May 29 celebrations is that the state plays no role in their organization, since the date is not officially recognized as a national holiday. Since 1994, the festivities have been jointly organized by the city Administration of Istanbul and the National Youth Foundation (Milli Gençlik Vakfı), an Islamist non-governmental organization which has branches in almost every major city in Turkey. These celebrations are open to the public, and they do not target only an exclusively Islamic-communal audience, but a *national-public* audience, which is evident from the ways in which May 29 is evoked as a moment in national history. This fact is explicitly articulated in the demands of Islamist circles for the recognition of May 29 as an official national holiday, which are an expression of the ambition to give the Ottoman past a constitutive role in national history and identity.³

The status and place of the Ottoman Empire in the writing of Turkish national history have been two of the main controversies of Turkish national identity. While official national history has been built on carefully forged boundaries separating and distancing the Turkish national experience from its Ottoman predecessor, Islamist challenges to official national history have been proposing alternative national identities as essentially Ottoman and Islamic, thus raising demands to incorporate Ottoman history within national memory.

The formation and ongoing reproduction of identities, whether they are personal, communal or national, involve some sort of a making of history, be it diary-keeping in the construction of personal identities or the writing of official histories in the making of national ones. The construction of history serves to locate the national subject in time, which is ascribed a particular continuity. Within this continuum identity is consolidated around an essential quality that is claimed to manifest itself as a sameness over time, an integrity that transcends and endures the destabilizing effects of temporal change. In the construction of

national identities, this ascribed essential quality may be located in ethnicity, race, blood ties, language, culture or historical experience. Hence, the composition of national histories involves the creation of time frames in which such constitutive qualities can be instilled as traceable, continuous, and enduring features. Ana Maria Alonso reminds us that in the writing of history, “defined as specific sorts of performances or texts through a series of framing devices,” what may appear to be a historical truth is in fact an effect of ideologically-motivated reconstructions of time.⁴ Alonso notes that “the way such reconstructions are framed configures their truth value by bringing into play the ideologically constituted status of different forms of knowledge.” National histories involve the employment of such framing devices that restructure time, within which the nation can be inscribed as a historical truth.

It is particularly in the creation of national identities that history becomes highly controversial, a site where claims to the singularity, holism and the natural boundedness of national history are guarded with much higher stakes. If the writing of national history is a vitally constitutive act through which the national subject writes itself into being, then the conservation of that history as naturally bound, singular and factual is crucial for the ongoing reproduction of the national subject and one of its embodiments, the nation-state.⁵ In other words, it is the very existence of the nation-state that is at stake when the axioms of national history are opened up to contestation and negotiation. Since the nation-state is predicated upon the notion of a singular nation consolidated around a unitary state, the equation “one state = one nation = one history” has to be preserved at all costs. Therefore, the writing of national history inevitably involves the employment of various mechanisms and strategies to naturalize and objectify history, thereby rendering it uncontestable and non-negotiable. Drawing critical attention to the role of the national historian in objectifying history, Prasenjit Duara notes that, “what appears as the delineation of an evolution of a nation is a complex project of repressions and recreations, the sublimation of the other in the self. To us, in our subject positions as modern historians, the assumed transparency of linear History blinds us to its rhetorical strategies for containing these repressions, for preventing a rupture in the body of the nation.”⁶

One of the distinguishing marks of national identities is the inherent ambivalence that Homi Bhabha refers to as the “double-writing” or the “double-time” of the modern nation. The national subject that declares itself into being through the writing of history presents itself as having an eternal presence that is validated by its historicity and hoariness; at the same time, it also performs itself as new and modern. Hence the nation-state always faces the anxiety of producing itself in a double-time, in the past and in the present, being both old and new, eternal yet also novel. According to Bhabha, “the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of its irredeemably plural modern

space, bounded by different, even hostile nations, into a signifying space that is archaic and mythical, paradoxically representing the nation's modern territoriality, in the patriotic, atavistic temporality of Traditionalism."⁷

The anxiety that arises out of the double-writing of the nation is articulated not only in "signifying the people as an a priori historical presence,"⁸ but also in attempts to present the nation-state as new and modern. One of the vital mechanisms through which the effect of newness is produced involves the creation of a temporal rupture, a break from the immediate past which serves to mark the onset of the nation-state in a new beginning or a "founding moment." This intervention in time gives time a form, by creating a turning-point which marks the end of the old and the beginning of the new. It is at this moment of historical rupture that the nation-state inserts itself into being. As noted by John Gillis, ". . . people who have never seen or heard of one another, yet who regard themselves as having a common history. . . are bound together as much by forgetting as by remembering, for modern memory was born at a moment when Americans and Europeans launched a massive effort to reject the past and construct a radically new future."⁹

The inscription of a "founding moment" is crucial for the formation of the nation-state for two reasons. One, this inscription serves to structure time in such a way that it is reconstituted as linear, singular and national time, turning it into the one and only continuity which frames all events and moments in relation to the founding moment. From then on, time *becomes* national history. In other words, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of a past that is not national, or at least that does not exist in reference to national time. From then on, the histories of persons, associations, groups, practices or ideas take their place in time always in reference to linear time as oriented around the founding moment, thereby becoming a part of the nation. In her investigation of the centennial and bicentennial celebrations of the American Revolution, Lyn Spillman states that this "founding moment" is crucial in the constitution of American national identity, not only in that it serves as one of the key symbols of the American nation, but also in that it "became a central theme which could ease the introduction of other topics."¹⁰ Spillman illustrates how during the bicentennial celebrations newsletter writers would always construct their stories in reference to the founding moment even when their topic was something not directly relevant to the revolution, such as community history, or, say, Italian influences on the architecture of the period. As illustrated here, the founding moment serves to both homogenize and nationalize time in such a way that all particular histories are subsumed under it, becoming a part of the one and only time of the national community.

Second, this inscription serves to constitute the state as a *national subject* vested with the ability (agency) to intervene and inscribe the nation into time. The founding moments of nation-states often mark a triumphant war of independence, a civil war or a revolution. Nationalist discourses are laden with nar-

ratives of emancipation and liberation from colonialism, expansionism, traditionalism, feudalism, autocracy, despotism or fascism. In any case, there is always an enemy from which the “nation” is saved, at the “founding moment,” by the “founders,” for the “people.” The new nation-state is presented as a new beginning for the “people,” who have existed all along, but who were saved from the ruinous circumstances immediately preceding the founding moment. This is why the immediate past is often demonized, and the nation situated in the distant, ancient past, barely traceable by historical record. This is why the discourse of nationalism (of the modern nation-state) presents the nation as simultaneously modern and ancient. As noted by Duara, “while on the one hand, nationalist leaders and nation-states glorify the ancient or eternal character of the nation, they simultaneously seek to emphasize the unprecedented novelty of the nation-state, because it is only in this form that the people have been able to realize themselves as the subjects or masters of their history.”¹¹

In sum, the “founding moment” of the nation-state, often celebrated as an independence day, republic day, or day of liberation, serves to constitute the “people” as a national community living under one-time as one-nation; the immediate past as evil, threatening and destructive to the “people”; and the new state as the heroic national subject that assumes the agency to step in and save the “people” from their malefactors. The multiple functions of the founding moment are illustrated in the following excerpt. The first official book of Turkish national history, *The Outline of Turkish History*, which was prepared and published in 1930 by the Turkish History Committee, convened under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, concludes with the following sentences:

The sons of Osman [the Ottoman dynasty] had long lost the ability and the honor to rule the Turkish nation. During the Armistice the Turkish nation encountered the worst devastation that it had ever faced in its history, which is as old as the history of the whole world. Almost no one contemplated the possibility of overthrowing the enemy armies and establishing an independent national Turkish State. [But] knowing the heroism of the Turkish nation in battlefields, the hardships it is facing and its needs, *Mustafa Kemal* took on the leadership of the nation and initiated an opposition in Anatolia (1919). . . . *Mustafa Kemal*, who saved the Turks from the sons of Osman and the worthless Caliphate, formed the Republic (29 October 1923). The *Gazi* [Mustafa Kemal]¹², who was elected as the president of the Republic, engaged the Turkish nation on a path of true advancement and progress.¹³

Even in this paragraph alone, the writing of national history constitutes 1) the Turkish nation as having a history “as old as the world”; 2) the immediate past as the worst catastrophe that the nation ever faced; 3) the Ottoman dynasty and the Caliphate as the agents of this devastation; 4) Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as the embodiment of the nation-state and the heroic savior of the nation; and 5) the founding moment of October 29, 1923 as the historical rupture which marked the beginning of the new nation-state and the end of the preceding calamity.

This historical inscription is a good illustration of the “double-time” of the nation. National time as structured by the national historians locates the nation

in the ancient, so far back that it cannot be any older—“as old as the world” is as close as one can get to “eternal.” This is a rhetorical strategy which serves to present the nation as a naturally-bound, singular entity that has an existence above and beyond time, enduring temporal change, and preserving its incorruptible essence. It is thereby rendered uncontestable and non-negotiable. On the other hand, the political agent who inscribes the nation into and above time also sets the nation upon a new path of “advancement and progress,” thereby reconstituting it simultaneously as eternal and timeless and as novel and modern: i.e., in double-time.

In Turkish national history, the effect of novelty and modernity (engaging upon a path of “advancement and progress”) was achieved by the creation of a historical rupture, a break with the past marked by the founding of the Republic on October 29, 1923. In order to create a new beginning, an end had to be created as well, which required the distancing of the self from everything that marked the immediate past: i.e., the Ottoman rule and the Caliphate, as representatives of the Islamic legal-political system. Whatever Turkey was declared to be in 1923, it had to be something completely new and different from and better than what came before. This required the construction of the immediate past as worthless, corrupt, declining—as something which could not possibly be worth celebrating, but should only be forgotten and erased. This is why official Turkish national history deliberately pays only minor attention to the Ottoman period, which ranged from the early fourteenth century to the formation of the Republic. And that attention which the Ottoman period does receive is devoted to presenting it as marked by increasing incompetence and corruption. *The Outline of Turkish History*, which locates the beginnings of the Turkish nation in Central Asia sometime around 9000 B.C., traces its history up until the early twentieth century in 467 pages. Of this total, the section that covers Ottoman history takes up only twenty-six pages. In other words, the writing of official Turkish history covered the Ottoman period, which extended about six hundred years, in twenty-six pages (about five percent of the total). This book was later developed into the main compulsory textbook for history classes taught in all public high schools throughout the country.

Proliferating through official national discourse was the view that the Ottoman times were a part of the vague past, as if the Empire were a different country with a different people. The changing of the alphabet from Arabic to Roman letters in 1928 was a further and powerful reinforcement of this perception, which served to create the impression that the Ottomans spoke and wrote a different language, thereby inserting and enhancing a cultural and historical distance between the Turkish Republic and the Ottoman Empire.

The presentation of the nation-state as new and modern through the creation of a historical rupture seems to be a common element of most nationalisms. The construction of the French nation-state involved a similar break with the past. John Gillis draws attention to the ways in which French revolutionaries in-

vented the “‘Old Regime’ by exaggerating its backwardness as well as its injustices, in order to justify their claim that 1789 represented a remarkable leap forward.”¹⁴ In other cases, such as Britain, where the construction of historical memory was not built around a patriotic founding moment, various mechanisms are nevertheless employed in the making of national history to evoke certain historical periods (such as the industrial revolution) as points of historical rupture, breaks from the past and changes toward modernity.¹⁵

PERFORMING HISTORY IN THE PRESENT: NATIONAL COMMEMORATION DAYS

The construction of historical memory around a “founding moment” does not only involve the writing of official national histories and the preparation of textbooks for national education. More importantly, such founding moments are celebrated each year as Republic Days, Independence Days, Liberation Days and other forms of commemorative practice. In other words, the making of history takes place not only in writing but also in public performance and different forms of public visibility. Commemoration days are a means of performing national history in the present, thereby inscribing history into daily life and public memory. The celebration of commemoration days, official ceremonies, ritualistic dramatizations of historical events, parades and festivals are examples of such performance in the public sphere, whereby the public audience is interpellated as a *national subject* connected to the present as well as the past.¹⁶

Commemoration days, which are part of what Gillis refers to as “national memory practices”¹⁷ serve at least three crucial functions in the construction of national identities. First, they are among the main mechanisms through which national history is inscribed into public life, and are instrumental in the *construction of public memory*. Commemoration days are a much more entertaining and effective way to elicit public interest and instruct people in national history than, say, history classes in schools. The performance of national history in the public sphere serves not only to incorporate that history into present-day life, but also to interpellate the public as the national subject for which this performance is being displayed. In other words, commemoration days are crucial mechanisms through which the audience is nationalized.

Second, commemoration days serve to locate the nation in time, thereby *historicizing the nation*. Commemorative celebrations not only constitute the “people” as a national community in the present, but also as a community connected to the past. What were once arbitrary and irrelevant events and moments in the past suddenly become relevant, almost personal and constitutive parts of the national-self, imbued with new meaning and significance as constitutive of one’s national belonging. “History” now means something different: a temporal field which is opened up to the “people” so that they can locate themselves in time, far beyond their own life spans. In other words, people who have never seen or heard of one another are bound together as parts of the same nation-

al community, not only spatially but also temporally. Someone in the distant past—whether the mythical leader responsible for the founding moment or the anonymous hero or heroine who selflessly fought against the enemy decades or centuries ago—comes to feel as close to a person as their immediate neighbors. “Women who carried cannonballs on their shoulders” during the War of Independence in Turkey—a common national theme of various monuments and memorials across the country—can stir up personal sentiments and feelings of connectedness some seventy years later.

Third, commemoration days are also effective means through which *time is nationalized*. The commemoration of a historical moment on a specific day every year serves to structure public time on a yearly basis, such that public life comes to be arranged around such days, especially if they are legal holidays. Even if the public is not really sure what exactly is being celebrated, or they are not informed, or they do not care; nonetheless, their lives are still arranged around these dates. Participation in festivities or parades, watching fireworks, going on a family vacation, visiting the parents, or even staying home to avoid the crowd, all become means through which the public is implicated in the celebration of the commemoration day. Whatever sentiments they evoke, these days of national significance become constitutive elements in the routine of everyday life, and structure its time on a national basis.

Whether through written histories and textbooks or through commemorative practices, official national history invades public life with a substantial vigor. And yet, in spite of all the strategies and techniques administered to naturalize and objectify this history, it is always surrounded by contestations and negotiations, articulated in many forms. In fact, it is within this field of contestation and articulation of many histories, each interpellating a different national subject, that nationalism becomes possible. As noted by Duara, “nationalism is rarely the nationalism of the nation, but rather represents the site where very different views of the nation contest and negotiate with each other.”¹⁸ Indeed, whether it is the American Declaration of Independence, the French Revolution, the Independence of India or the formation of the Republic in Turkey, founding moments are always also moments of prevalence over contending nationalisms, which are all crucial in the constitution of the founding moment. As such, commemorations of founding moments are always accompanied by contestations, criticisms and challenges, often posed by contending nationalisms or social identities that have been underprivileged by official nationalism. These may turn into alternative celebrations and counter-commemorative practices. As I discuss below, the celebration of the Conquest of Istanbul is such an alternative to the official celebration of the formation of the secular Republic on October 29. While the May 29 celebration is performed as an Islamist alternative to the secular nationalist project, it serves to reproduce an Islamic nationalist discourse which constitutes nationalism as a performative site, much as the official nationalist discourse does. In other words, nationalism should be

understood as a field of performances of contending national identities, where the official discourse of the state has a privileged but not a final or uncontested status. In her study of the multiple articulations of Chinese nationalism, Ann Anagnost states that “the very impossibility of the nation as a unified subject means that this narrating activity is never final. For narrative exemplifies the performativity of language itself, disrupting the closure of any totalizing definition of the national community.”¹⁹

Contestation of official history does not necessarily involve confrontation of its validity; rather, it unsettles the assumed naturalness and singularity. In other words, national histories are always contestable and controversial not because they are illusions or misrepresentations of the past, but because they claim closure and totality.²⁰ In this respect it might be misleading to follow Ernest Gellner’s reasoning when he notes that “The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions. Any old shred or patch would have served as well.”²¹

Treating the constitutive elements of national history as random and arbitrary “shreds and patches” results in overlooking the fact that the choice of one historical moment over another has crucial strategic consequences for the construction and negotiation of national identities. For example, there are several days in Turkish national history which could also have qualified as “founding moments,” such as April 23, 1920, when the Grand National Assembly was formed and independence was declared (now celebrated officially as the “National Independence and Children’s Day”). And yet, the founders chose to locate the founding moment not on April 23, but three years later, on October 29, 1923, the day when the Grand National Assembly declared the Turkish state a republic, and elected its first president, Mustafa Kemal. One of the crucial differences between these two moments is that while the first National Assembly in 1920 consisted of elements from a much wider political spectrum, including Islamists, Ottomanists, and Kurdish nationalists as well as Bolsheviks, the second one in 1923 was much more homogeneously assembled around the principles of secularism and Turkish nationalism, under Atatürk’s unchallenged authority. Official national history presents the plurality and heterogeneity of the first National Assembly as a problem and impediment to the realization of Mustafa Kemal’s secularist and nationalist ideals, which were finally achieved and declared in 1923.²² This choice of the “founding moment” is obviously far from being random and arbitrary, and is still a crucial point of contention in Islamist, Kurdish and leftist challenges to official national history today.

In my analysis of the Islamist contestations of official nationalism, I examine different commemorative acts undertaken by Islamists, which have unsettling effects on the secularist constructions of national history. The celebration of May 29 by Islamist circles is not confined to the Islamic community, but is celebrated as a national day, open to the public, and accompanied by demands to make May 29 an official national holiday.

COMMEMORATING MAY 29: CONQUERING
AND RE-CONQUERING ISTANBUL

May 29 celebrations usually start with a daytime parade, where dozens of men dressed up as Ottoman soldiers drag a decorated sailboat, representing the Ottoman fleet, over the asphalt pavements of Istanbul's streets (Figure 1). The pa-



FIGURE 1. May 29 celebrations usually start with a daytime parade, where dozens of men dressed up as Ottoman soldiers drag a decorated sailboat, representing the Ottoman fleet, over the asphalt pavements of Istanbul's streets. *Milli Gazete*, 29 May 1996.



FIGURE 2. The Fatih-impersonator, during the May 29 celebrations. *Yeni Şafak*, 26 May 1997.

rade is accompanied by a mehter band (the military band of the Ottoman army), dressed up in traditional costume and playing Ottoman military marches. During the evening of May 29, parades and festivities resume at the İnönü Stadium, where several demonstrations are held depicting the victorious conquest of Istanbul. An official from the city administration, dressed up to represent Fatih Sultan Mehmet, rides a white horse around the stadium holding up his sword (or his thumb, as he did during the 1996 celebrations) (Figures 2, 3 and 4). The upheld thumb is the symbolic gesture of Refah Party, which was widely used during the election campaign in 1994 and later. A representation of the Byzantine city walls are put up, which are later toppled down by men dressed up as Ottoman soldiers and wearing false mustaches.

During the 1997 celebrations, following the surrender of the Byzantines, the Ottoman soldiers raised the Turkish flag on the walls of the city. After the city was thus “conquered,” a woman in white dress, representing the Byzantine city dwellers, approached the Fatih-impersonator, knelt down in front of him and presented a bouquet of flowers (Figure 5). These dramatic performances are followed by Mehter Band presentations, firecrackers and other entertaining festivities.

Another noteworthy part of the 1996 celebrations was that the evening call



FIGURE 3. The Fatih-impersonator, giving Refah Party's thumbs-up salute. *İstanbul*, no. 20, January 1997, 35.

for prayers was carried over the speakers in the stadium, after which the performers, organizers and set technicians, as well as some spectators, gathered on the field and collectively did their prayers.

The dramatization of the Conquest and the activities around it abundantly employ various symbolic representations that concertedly construct a national subject performed as Ottoman, Islamic and male. While the costumes, the impersonation of Fatih Sultan Mehmet, and the enactment of the conquest are performances of Ottoman identity, the raising of the current Turkish flag on the city walls as the declaration of victory is an unexpected mark that frames the whole performance as a *national* moment. By raising the Turkish flag instead of an Ottoman banner, the Ottoman historical moment that is being commemorated through the celebrations is evoked as part of Turkish national history. This simple inscription of the symbol of the nation upon an Ottoman past serves to incorporate the Ottoman experience under national memory.

Another means by which the celebrations interpellate a national subject is the main slogan of the night, "*Biz-Biz-Biz, Fatihin Nesliyiz!*," which translates as "we are the generation of the Conqueror," and also means "we are of Fatih's kin." This slogan, which was chanted throughout the celebrations and published the next day in most of the Islamic newspapers covering the May 29 celebrations,²³ evokes a community linked to the Ottoman Sultan through kinship ties. This is an interpellation of a national subject, invoked as the communal-self ("we"), in which Fatih Sultan Mehmet and the present chanters of the slogan



FIGURE 4. Refah Party's leader Necmettin Erbakan giving the "Refah salute" with his guests during May 29 celebrations. *Milli Gazete*, 31 May 1996.

are connected not only temporally (across the linear time of the nation) and spatially (as conquering the same city), but also through blood ties.

A further inscription upon the communal body of this national subject is Islam. Nothing constitutes this subject as Islamic more powerfully than the collective act of praying in the stadium, which interrupts the celebrations at prayer time. This interruption is an interjection of the time of Islam, which supercedes both the secular time of the nation and the performed time of Ottoman history, putting the latter two on hold until prayers can be practiced. The fact that the collective prayers are done in the field—the same field where Ottoman history and the seizure of Istanbul are performed—inevitably turns the act of pray-



FIGURE 5. A “Byzantine city dweller” who has just been conquered, presenting a bouquet of flowers to Mehmet the Conqueror. *Yeni Şafak*, 30 May 1997.

ing into a performance of identity. With the interjection of prayer, Islam dominates the field of performance, thereby emerging as the larger frame within which various other differences are united. The interjection of Islamic time also serves to suspend social boundaries such that the performers, the spectators, the top-ranking politicians and leaders of Refah Party, security personnel, the Fatih-impersonator, the Byzantine and Ottoman soldiers all gather together on the field to carry out their prayers (Figure 6). The only boundary not suspended is gender: women, who are already seated in a segregated section of the stadium, practice their prayers in designated prayer-rooms (*mescit*). In sum, the collective act of prayer inscribes Islam onto the performance of identities, un-



FIGURE 6. The performers, spectators, top-ranking politicians and leaders of Refah Party, security personnel, the Fatih-impersonator, the Byzantine and the Ottoman soldiers all gather together in the field to carry out their prayers during the May 29 celebrations. *Yeni Şafak*, 27 May 1997.

derwriting it as the unifying bottom-line around which various identities ranging from Ottoman and national to class and gender are connected.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN ISLAMIC NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE SECOND CONQUEST

The celebration of May 29, 1453 as a part of national history has unsettling effects on the official constructions of national identity. While the public has been taught for years that the history of the modern nation started in the 1920s with the emergence of Mustafa Kemal as the leader of Turkish independence, the celebration of May 29 inserts a rather out-of-date historical moment from 1453 as another constitutive moment of Turkish national history. This has disruptive effects on the public perceptions of national time. The disruption unsettles Turkish national identity not only because the scales of national time are thrown off by about half a millenium, but also because the celebrated moment is part of the Ottoman era, which has been evoked as the “other” against which modern Turkish national identity was constituted. This disruption subverts the mechanisms that present and maintain official national history as natural, objectively and almost fatalistically realized around the founding moment. By the interjection of

a date that is a part of the Ottoman experience, the forged and contestable nature of national history is revealed and the possibility that there may be multiple founding moments constituting multiple histories becomes credible.

The unsettling and disruptive effects of the Conquest of Istanbul celebrations are evident in the way in which the commemoration of May 29 constitutes a different national subject, one that stands in contrast to official national identity, defined around secularism and Turkish ethnicity. Even though both secularist and Islamist accounts of the conquest of Istanbul recognize it as one of the most important events of world history and honor Fatih Sultan Mehmet's genius, there is quite a significant disagreement as to exactly *whose* victory the conquest is. According to official national history, this was undoubtedly a *Turkish* victory, narrated as follows:

The seizure of Istanbul by the Turks brought an end to the East Roman Empire that had lasted around 1000 years. At that time, Istanbul's seizure by the Turks became a world-wide incident. It was acknowledged as an historical landmark ending the Middle Ages and bringing about a new era for civilization and humanity. . . . The conquest of Istanbul by the Turks was, at that time, understood as the defeat of all of Europe and the Christian world by the Ottoman Empire.²⁴

In this account, it was the Turks who conquered Istanbul and victoriously inscribed a turning-point in world history, and who are presented as agents of history capable of not only putting an end to a thousand-year-old empire, but also opening up a new path for humanity. This nationalist rhetorical strategy, which declares the Turks as inscribers of world history, not only locates the newly constituted Turkish national subject in fifteenth-century world history, but also vests it with a universal political agency.

In contrast, the Islamist account of the Conquest does not make any reference to the "Turk" whatsoever. In a booklet published and distributed by the Islamist City Administration of Istanbul on occasion of the 542nd anniversary of the Conquest, Sezai Karakoç, a leading Islamic writer and poet, constructs a different subject:

When Fatih Sultan Mehmet conquered Istanbul, the city of Kaisers, he connected his time, his community and his army both to the message of the Great Prophet [Mohammed, who] prophesized during the Battle of the Ditch [that Istanbul will be conquered one day] on the one hand, and to the bearer of hopes for which future generations will be in dire need, on the other. . . . Fatih brought a new time to Istanbul, whose time had corroded. He brought the time of Islam.²⁵

In a different article in the same book, Karakoç also writes,

No doubt, our army was heroic. And Fatih was a hero. . . . Fatih was no doubt a genius. But attempting to explain the conquest of Istanbul only with his genius, with the truly ingenious plan to move the ships over land, will not be a sufficient explanation for intellectuals who need to see things from a wider perspective. In reality, the conquest of Istanbul was an encounter between Islamic civilization and Western Civilization, in which the West was defeated.²⁶

As illustrated in these passages, in Islamist discourse the Conquest of Istanbul is presented primarily as an Islamic victory, achieved by the Ottomans. Neither in this text, nor in most other writings on May 29 celebrations, is there any mention of the “Turk” as the victor. As noted in the first of the two passages above, the conquest is presented as “connecting” the time and community of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II to the time and prophecy of the Prophet Muhammad. Islamist circles acknowledge that the Prophet had prophesied the conquest of Istanbul by a Muslim commander. Islamic writing on the conquest of Istanbul is full of references to this prophecy, which connects Mehmet II’s victory and the city of Istanbul not to a Turkic ethnic lineage, but to an Islamic and prophetic past. It should be noted, however, that the subject evoked in these passages is still a *national* subject, situated in the “us” implied in the statement “our army was heroic.” In contrast to the official nationalist discourse, this national subject is not ethnically constituted around the “Turk,” but culturally constituted around an “Islamic civilization.”

The construction of the victorious Islamic/Ottoman subject is common in the Islamist discourse of Refah Party. On its official website, the city administration had a special section titled “The Conquest and Istanbul,” where it was noted that “the conquest of Istanbul is the beginning point of the supremacy of Muslims over Europe, which will last for a long duration in subsequent years.”²⁷ By presenting the conquest as a Muslim victory, the city administration’s discourse constitutes an Islamic subject as the agent of history. Furthermore, this statement explicitly establishes the conquest of Istanbul as a “beginning point”: i.e., a *founding moment* which marks the beginning of this alternative national time. Similar rhetorical strategies proliferate through the Islamist discourse on history.

The passages quoted above illustrate the rhetoric of city administration, which simultaneously connects the conquest of Istanbul to the present time, to Islam and to the agency of Refah Party itself. While Islam is presented as the “bearer of hopes” for current generations, it is the Ottoman/Islamic subject—Mehmet the Conqueror—who has brought this hope to Istanbul, and it is Refah Party who is reviving and reclaiming this prophetic past in the present. In the discourse of Refah Party which proliferates through such performative interventions, the Party is presented as the one and only representative of the Ottoman/Islamic identity, centered in the city of Istanbul. This discourse conflates Islam, the Ottoman past and the city of Istanbul into a singular entity and presents it as the hope for the present generation, and the Party as the political agent who has brought all of these forces together under its domain, thereby itself becoming the “bearer of hopes.”

The links between the city of Istanbul and its conquest, Islam, Ottoman identity, Refah Party and national identity were carefully forged and mobilized quite effectively during election campaigns. During the local elections in 1994, this strategy won the mayoralty of Istanbul for Refah’s candidate, Recep Tayyip

Erdoğan. The campaign presented this young and dynamic candidate as “the new conqueror of Istanbul” and RP’s anticipated victory as the “re-conquest of Istanbul.”

The notions of “re-conquest” and the “second conquest of Istanbul” have been evoked quite frequently in the Islamic press and by the Islamist political elite on several occasions. May 29 celebrations are often reported by the Islamic media with the titles “Istanbul Has Been Conquered Again” or “The Re-conquest of Istanbul.”²⁸ In his opening speech delivered during the May 29, 1996 celebrations to an audience that included guests from various Muslim communities around the world, the leader of Refah, Necmettin Erbakan said that “we are on the eve of a new conquest, which merges with the incident that took place 543 years ago. . . . As the Islamic world, we will accomplish this with the help of Allah.”²⁹ Similarly, in a commentary that appeared in another Islamist newspaper, it is noted that “this *ümme* [Muslim community] which is brought together by an iron will and *tekbir* [the unity of Allah], will understand the real meaning of *Fetih* [conquest] and make Istanbul once again the capital city of Islam, as it was before.”³⁰

In these statements the idea of “conquest” is employed to describe an Islamic accomplishment, and thus serving to constitute “the Muslim community” as a transnational pan-Islamic identity. It has been argued that such appeals to pan-Islamic ideals, which seek to mobilize various Islamic movements around the globe toward a unified goal, are destined to fail, because the demands and constraints placed by nationalism and the nation-state system inevitably confine such movements within national boundaries.³¹ However, rather than contradicting the nationalist objectives of Refah Party, the formulation of the Islamic subject as a globally-constituted community actually *strengthens* the Islamist-nationalist discourse of Refah. The presentation of “conquest” as an accomplishment serving the needs of the Muslim community not only in Turkey, but throughout the globe, allows Refah Party to vest the Islamist movement in Turkey with both a national and a global mission. Within this discursive frame, the city of Istanbul gains further importance as the center of a global Islamic civilization, imbued with meaning and value that goes beyond the confines of national borders. The investment of Istanbul with global importance only strengthens the national significance of the city (as evoked in Islamist discourse) as the center of an “Ottoman-Islamic civilization.”

Within Islamist discourse, the promotion of the idea of an “Ottoman-Islamic civilization” does not contradict, but is in fact *constitutive* of national identity. The endorsement of the Ottoman Islamic identity as an alternative nationalism is explicitly illustrated in a speech given by the Mayor, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in his address during the third Traditional Youth Festival.

As the grandchildren of a nation that has always been at the forefront in the quest for civilization, you have to put an end to mimicry. If Turkey is to reach the heights of contemporary civilizations, it can only do so with its own civilization. The youth has to re-

turn to its true roots. The poet who wrote our National Anthem, Mehmet Akif Ersoy, did not write his poem in a disco or when he was drunk. He wrote it in *Tacetin Dergahı* [a dervish lodge], where he disciplined his soul.³²

The civilization that the Mayor refers to here as being Turkey's own is the Ottoman-Islamic civilization, which is presented as constituting the true source of Turkish national identity. The source is not to be found in Western influences and secularism (discos and alcohol), but in Islamic education and traditions (the dervish lodges). By drawing attention to the fact that the National Anthem of the Republic was written by a devout Muslim, the Mayor implies that Turkish nationalism was made possible by an Ottoman-Islamic culture, and not by a secularist-Westernist discourse.

According to Islamist discourse, if the source of true Turkish national identity is Ottoman-Islamic culture, then its true capital resides in Istanbul. On the municipal web site, it is noted that

Istanbul is the gem of Ottoman-Islamic civilization and its eternal Capital City. Because of this, Istanbul has a special place in all of our hearts. . . One of our priorities is to open up Istanbul's cultural riches to our people. As a result of the cultural crisis that we have been living for two centuries [with the onset of Westernization] our people have been torn away from these cultural riches. [Under these conditions] cultural life has become alien to its own people and history, and cultural activities have become a means to undermine our own cultural roots.³³

This narration evokes the "people" as the national subject, which has been alienated from "its own" history and culture by Westernizing and modernizing interventions. In contrast to official national discourse, which constructs the national subject as secular and ethnically Turkish and locates its center in Ankara, the alternative national identity evoked here is defined as culturally Islamic and Ottoman, and centered in the city of Istanbul.

In sum, the idea of the "second conquest" of Istanbul is an effective rhetorical strategy that serves to construct Refah Party as an Islamist political agent, imbued with a historical-prophetic mission to save Islamic civilization from the destructive effects of Westernism. By designating Istanbul as the locus of Islamic civilization, the "conquest" of the city becomes the only means through which this civilization can be saved. In other words, the construction of the Islamist subject as a heroic political agent is predicated upon the victimization of the city of Istanbul, proliferating through the "discourse of re-conquest."³⁴

THE VICTIMIZATION OF ISTANBUL AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF THE ISLAMIC SUBJECT

The victimization of the city of Istanbul is carried out in various publications and disseminations of the Islamist city administration and by Islamist writers. In this vein, a monthly Islamic journal, *Nehir*, prepared a special issue titled "Istanbul: The City in Search of Its Identity."³⁵ One article after another in this issue deals with the ways in which the city is devastated and demolished, as re-



FIGURE 7. “İstanbul: The City in Search of Its Identity.” *Nehir*, no. 18, March 1995.

flected in the titles “The Ravished Situation of Istanbul” and “İstanbul: The Lost City” (Figures 7 and 8). In these articles, İstanbul is depicted as an essentially “Ottoman-Islamic” city, which is threatened both by the modernizationist and Westernizationist interventions of the secular state, and by the degeneration brought by mass immigration.³⁶

In one article, the state’s Republican ideology is blamed for “trying to establish Western cultural institutions in İstanbul in order to make it look like a

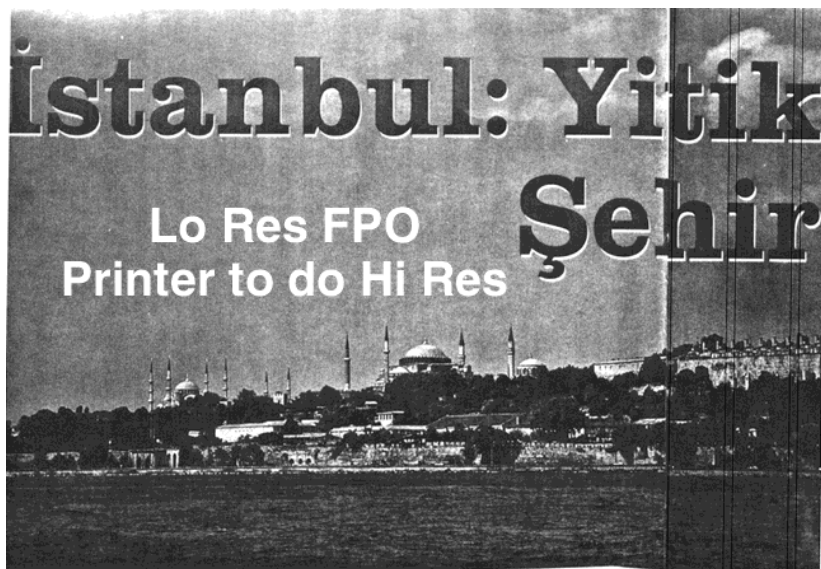


FIGURE 8. "Istanbul: The Lost City." *Nehir*, no. 18, March 1995, 16

European city."³⁷ As a result, notes the author, "Istanbul could not preserve its historical and cultural legacy, its distinctive identity." In another, the real threat to the Ottoman-Islamic subject is presented as what the author refers to as the "Fourth Istanbul."³⁸ According to Dursun, in addition to the ancient (Byzantine), the Ottoman-Islamic, and the modern-Westernized parts (identities) of the city, a new Istanbul came about as a result of intense migration from the country and Anatolian villages, constituting the "Provincial Istanbul." It is this Istanbul, where migrants fail to become Istanbulians but instead "provincialize" Istanbul, that is indicated as the source of the city's chronic problems. Dursun notes that

Today this "Provincial Istanbul" is overwhelming both the Byzantine and the Ottoman-Islamic Istanbuls. The most salient mark of the provincial is the lack of standards, rules, laws and aesthetics. And yet, the most important quality of the Ottoman-Islamic Istanbul was having standards, aesthetics, rules and superior values. These standards and aesthetic forms, which reflect on objects, structures, mosques, minarets, tombs, calligraphy, paintings, stones, palaces, everything in the surrounding does not mean anything for the "provincial." This is the main factor that threatens Istanbul today.³⁹

The strategy employed here is a classing technique that privileges the Ottoman-Islamic subject as upper class with urban "superior values" by marking the "provincial" as the other, lacking taste and aesthetic values. This association of Ottoman-Islamic culture with "superior values," positioned against the value-

lacking “provincial,” also serves to constitute the Refah-Islamist circles as the bearer of this privileged status. This classing of Istanbul is also evident in several other discursive media through which Istanbul is displayed by the city administration. In the official biweekly publication of the Administration, “Fourth Istanbul” is explicitly condemned as the main threat to the well-being of the city. In an article titled “The Southeast in Istanbul,” the author says,

We did not want them to come to the city, and we had taken our preventive measures. Then the system broke down, and they came to Ankara as parliamentarians. . . . After that their fellow countrymen started to come one by one. And then the barrier collapsed and the cities were flooded. . . . First we pretended not to see it. They brought their songs, we pretended not to hear it. We prohibited their singers to go into radio and television studios. . . . But then technology ruined everything and cassette-tapes started to circulate. Once the cassettes were shouting all over the streets, it was no longer possible to avoid hearing them. They brought their *lahmacun*,⁴⁰ which started to smell in every corner of the city. We were defeated.⁴¹

The classing strategy employed in this paragraph is rather complex, in that it engages several different markers of lower-class status, conveniently packaged into the constitution of the “provincial other” as the alien infesting the city. “Their music,” scorned as being too loud, is *Arabesk* music that was banned from television and radio stations until early 1990s, and “their food,” *lahmacun*, which is scorned as being too smelly, is a prominent marker of lower-class, provincial taste, with its heavy onion-garlic spicing. The “southeasterners” are depicted as acting en masse, and come as a “flood” infesting the city with their music and food, in huge numbers. The “system” that broke down, which marks the onset of this southeastern (Kurdish) migration is an implicit reference to the establishment of the Republic, when parliamentarians from all over Turkey, including the Kurdish regions, were invited to Ankara. Therefore, in an unusually implicit way, the building of the secular Republic is again held responsible for urban decay and the degeneration of Islamic-Ottoman high-culture.

Such images of Istanbul, depicting the city as suffering in the hands of corruption, alienation and degeneration, proliferate through various Islamic publications and performances. Istanbul is displayed as a place that is open to penetration and destruction, a place that is defenseless in the face of the modernizing and Westernizing influences of the secular state. It is also presented as the central mark of Turkish national identity, defined around an Ottoman-Islamic culture, which is presented as being in dire need of a heroic savior or “conqueror.” An Islamic scholar, who claimed that Prophet Muhammad had prophesied that Istanbul would be conquered not once but many times, notes that “Fatih Sultan Mehmet saved Istanbul by conquering it, who is going to save the people who are sleeping now? This will happen with the second conquest.”⁴² Here, the “new conqueror” is evoked as the savior of the victimized Istanbul. As such, the Islamic subject is endowed with agency and empowered to step in and save Istanbul. By assigning the city a central role in the constitu-

tion of national identity, saving Istanbul becomes an act of saving the nation.

In sum, May 29 celebrations play a crucial role in the construction of an Islamic national subject as the agent of an Ottoman-Islamic national identity and the maker of its history. The May 29 commemoration serves several crucial functions toward this end. First, as the public performance of an alternative national history, it represents the first conquest of Istanbul in 1453 as an essentially Islamic victory, thereby producing a history defined around an Islamic identity, rather than a Turkic-secular one. Second, it serves to define that Ottoman-Islamic identity in civilizational terms as being centered in the city of Istanbul. Third, it produces images of an Istanbul under siege, threatened by Westernization, modernization and urbanization, and in dire need of a savior. Fourth, it promotes the idea of “re-conquest” or “the second conquest of Istanbul” not only as a nationalist goal but also a prophetic mission. And finally, this discourse of re-conquest serves to establish the Islamist political elite organized around Refah Party as the new conqueror.

The public performance of Ottoman-Islamic national identity emerges as a contestation of official national history. The insertion of an alternative founding moment in May 29, 1453 contradicts the idea that official national history could have begun in 1923. What is constituted by official nationalism as *external* to national history, and belonging to an Ottoman past invoked as the “other,” is inserted into public memory as an alternative founding moment. Official national history and its founding moment are destabilized, thereby rendering secular national history visible, contestable and negotiable. However, while the performance of this alternative national identity serves to contest secular national history, it also reproduces and keeps intact the ideals of the modern nation-state. The May 29 commemoration emerges as the reproduction of an alternative national time that displaces official nationalism, but retains the main nationalist enterprise (one nation = one time = one state). As such, May 29 celebrations not only produce an Islamic identity in the public sphere, but they also serve to *nationalize Islamic discourse*.

As the Islamist celebrations of May 29 gained momentum in the years after 1994, the official May 29 ceremonies also started to gain more media attention. However, since the celebration of May 29 has become so closely associated with Islamism and Refah Party, the official ceremonies organized by the state were characterized by ambivalence and tension. While the secular state recognized May 29 as a day of historical significance, authorities became quite uneasy about being perceived as celebrating something which bore Islamic references. This tension was openly expressed during the official ceremony in 1997, which took place soon after the intervention of the National Security Council in February.⁴³ The ceremony on May 29 became the site of an explicit clash between Islamist and secularist discourses over the conquest. During the routine speeches, while the Islamist Mayor Erdoğan asked Allah for the recovery of the freedom of religion that was granted by Mehmet the Conqueror, the military

representative said “we are calling out to the whole world once again, that we are determined to protect the secular and democratic Turkish Republic, which Great Atatürk entrusted us, with our lives if necessary.”⁴⁴

In sum, May 29 is a crucial intervention not only in public space, but also into public time (i.e., national history). The effect of this intervention, very similar to others discussed earlier, is a contestation of the power of secularism—in this case, its power to dictate national history in secularist terms. This contestation does not terminate the authority of secularism, but it serves to render secular authority visible and negotiable. History emerges as a contested site rather than an established and natural singularity, and the secularist attempts to maintain it as uncontested and natural are revealed, themselves contested and opened up to negotiation. But at the same time, in emerging as an alternative national history, the Islamist interventions end up reproducing the “one nation = one state = one history” model of the modern nation state.

CONCLUSION

The making of the modern Turkish nation-state illustrates how time becomes a site from which the modernizing state constitutes the nation and the contestations of this official nationalism are carried out. The state intervenes in time by locating a “founding moment,” around which time is restructured and a national history is written. Such founding moments are the constitutive moments of the nation, which become the parameters of national history, and are inserted into public memory via commemorative practices such as national holidays; Republic, Independence or Liberation Days, and parades and festivals. By inscribing the nation into time through such strategies, the state acquires agency in the process, emerging as the political subject that not only hails the nation into being but also restructures time so as to create its history.

The Turkish Republic was founded on October 29, 1923, when the National Assembly led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk declared it into being. The designation of this date as the founding moment of the modern republic has not only served to constitute the national time in which the Turkish nation was inscribed, but also to establish the new Turkish state as the agent of this inscription and the author of this new history. The new national history, written around the founding moment, perpetuated itself in daily life and became a part of public memory through the annual celebration of Republic Day on October 29.

The unofficial celebration of the Conquest of Istanbul Day, which commemorates the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II in 1453, disrupts national time by locating a founding moment almost five centuries before the inception of the Republic. May 29 celebrations, which were widely celebrated by Islamist circles between 1994 and 1997 (until Refah Party was closed in 1998 following the February 1997 intervention) have been instrumental in the performance of an alternative national identity and the construction of an alternative national time that challenges official secular national

history. These Islamist performances of history serve to construct an Ottoman-Islamic identity, which is evoked as a civilization centered in the city of Istanbul. The performance of this alternative history serves to incorporate the Ottoman period into national memory, dislocating the secularist constructions fixed around the secular time of the Republic.

The performance of Islamist history also presents Istanbul as a city under siege, exposed to the destructive interventions of the Western-oriented secularist state. The proliferation of the image of Istanbul as a victimized city serves to present the Islamist subject (a role monopolized by Refah/Fazilet Party) as the heroic savior of the city and the imbedded Ottoman-Islamic civilization from the invasive clutches of secularism. The theme “re-conquering Istanbul” proliferates in Islamist discourse as a quest to save the vulnerable city and its eroding culture.

The May 29 commemoration serves to perform this alternative national history in the public sphere, thereby employing it in the construction of present-day political identities. These constructions contest secular national history by challenging its claims to objectivity and singularity. Since May 29 celebrations emerge as a performance of alternative national identity, they also serve to nationalize Islamist discourse.

ENDNOTES

1. I use the term “Islamist” to refer to political movements that base their ideology within an Islamic frame of reference. Based on this definition I refer to Turkey’s Refah Party (which became Fazilet Party in 1998) as an Islamist political party.

2. Refah Party is the main Islamist political party in Turkey and increased its support base geometrically over the last decade, a trend which brought the party to leadership of the government in 1996. After the military intervention in 1997, Refah Party was forced to move out of the government, and was closed down in 1998. It reemerged immediately after under a new name, Fazilet Party, and became the main opposition party in the parliament after the 1999 general elections. It should be noted that there are other Islamic groups in Turkey who do not follow Refah Party’s line and approach to Islam, and have substantially different views on modernity, secularism, Islamism and Westernism. In this respect, there is no monolithic Islamist movement in Turkey, and the arguments presented here only apply to the Islamism of Refah/Fazilet Party.

3. This demand is raised in several articles covering the May 29 celebrations. See, for example, *Milli Gazete*, 30 May 1995, or *Yeni Şafak*, 31 May 1996.

4. Ana Maria Alonso, “The Effects of Truth: Re-presentations of the Past and the Imagining of Community” *The Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1, 1, March 1988: 35.

5. The idea of “writing the nation into being” in the more general sense is implied by studies on the construction of national identities in national literatures, including Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983), and several articles in Homi Bhaba, ed. *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990). More specifically, Anne Norton draws attention to the American Constitution as “The Declaration [which] spoke the nation into being.” A. Norton, *Republic of Signs: Liberal Theory and American Popular Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 9. Likewise, drawing on the work of Michael Warner (*The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard Uni-

versity Press, 1990]), Prasenjit Duara draws attention to the written constitution as the objectifying document through which the “people” are written into being: P. Duara *Rescuing History From the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

6. Duara, *Rescuing History*, 33.
7. Homi K. Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation.” In Bhabha, ed. *Nation and Narration*, 300.
8. H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 147.
9. John R. Gillis, “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship.” In J. R. Gillis, ed. *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 7.
10. L. Spillman, *Nation and Commemoration: Creating National Identities in the United States and Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 113
11. Prasenjit Duara, “Historicizing National Identity, or Who Imagines What and When.” In Geoff Eley and R. G. Suny, eds. *Becoming National* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 159.
12. “Gazi” is an honorary military title.
13. Türk Tarihi Heyeti [Turkish History Committee], *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları [The Outline of Turkish History]* (İstanbul Devlet Matbaası, 1930; Reprinted by İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1996), 466–7. Emphasis in the original.
14. Gillis, “Memory and Identity,” 8.
15. Gillis, “Memory and Identity,” 8.
16. The Althusserian notion of interpellation refers to hailing as a speech act by which a subject is brought into existence. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 170–7. For a thorough account of interpellation as a speech act, see Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 24–28.
17. Gillis, “Memory and Identity,” 11.
18. Duara, “Historicizing National Identity,” 152.
19. Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 2.
20. Studies on nationalism which have highlighted the constructed nature of national identities, such as Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, Ernest Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), and Hobsbawm and Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1983) have been prone to interpretations which read “invention” as “fantasy,” “construction” as “forgery,” or “imagination” as “illusion.” However, these readings overlook a crucial component of nationalist discourse: namely, that its claims to homogeneity and singularity serve to mask not a made-up or false history, but rather the multiplicity and indefiniteness of history.
21. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 56.
22. Suna Kili, *Türk Devrim Tarihi*, 3rd ed. (İstanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 1982), 66–69.
23. For example, *Yeni Şafak*, 30 May 1997.
24. *The Outline of Turkish History*, 445.
25. Sezai Karakoç “Bir Fetih Günü” [A Day of Conquest] *Fatih ve Fetih* [The Conqueror and the Conquest], Metropolitan Municipality of Istanbul, Directorate of Cultural Affairs Publications, no. 17, 1995, 8.
26. Sezai Karakoç, “İstanbul’un Fethi” [The Conquest of Istanbul], *Fatih ve Fetih* [The Conqueror and the Conquest], Metropolitan Municipality of Istanbul, Directorate of Cultural Affairs Publications, no.17, 1995, 58
27. The official web-site of the Metropolitan Municipality of Istanbul included this

page, at the URL (<http://www.ibb.gov.tr/guzistanbul/tarihreh/fetihvelst/htm.>), until the mayor was removed from office in 1998. Unfortunately, nothing relevant can now be found at this address.

28. See, for example, *Akit*, 31 May 1995; *Milli Gazete*, 29 May 1996.

29. *Milli Gazete*, 31 May 1996.

30. *Akit*, 29 May 1996.

31. See Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, trans. C. Volk (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

32. *İstanbul Bülteni*, yr. 3, no. 62, 15 December 1996, 7.

33. "Kültür Hizmetleri," *The Official Web Site of the Greater Municipality of Istanbul*, <http://www.ibb.gov.tr/>.

34. Tanıl Bora "Fatih'in İstanbul'u: 'İslam Şehri' ile 'Dünya Şehri' arasında İslamcıların İstanbul Rüyası" [Fatih's Istanbul: The Istanbul Fantasy of Islamists Amidst the "Islamic City" and the "Global City"], *Birikim* 76, August 1995: 45.

35. *Nehir*, no. 18, March 1995.

36. Davut Dursun, "Hangi İstanbul" [Which Istanbul?], *Nehir*, Special Issue on Istanbul, no. 18, March 1995: 14–15; Akif Çankırılı, "İstanbul: Yitik Şehir" [Istanbul: The Lost City] *Nehir*, no. 18, March 1995: 16–17; Muharrem Es and Hamza Al, "Göç, İstanbul ve Kentleşme" [Migration, Istanbul and Urbanization], *Nehir*, no. 18, March 1995: 22–25.

37. Çankırılı, "İstanbul: Yitik Şehir," 17.

38. Dursun, "Hangi İstanbul."

39. *Ibid.*, 15.

40. A popular Turkish pizza-like meat pastry, which has Arab origins, as the name suggests.

41. "İstanbul'daki Güneydoğu," *İstanbul Bülteni*, vol. 2, iss. 32, 13 November 1995: 10. The "Southeast" referred to in the title of this paragraph is a politically correct (or rather, politically allowed) word to designate the Kurds. The official state discourse in Turkey, and especially the military, still refers to the Kurds as the "Southeasterners" and the Kurdish issue as the "Southeastern question." As evident in this paragraph, the urban lower-class is identified with recent migrants to the city from rural areas and smaller Anatolian cities. Over the last decade the rapid increase of Kurdish migrants resulted in the identification of "lower-class" with Kurds as well, thereby adding an ethnic dimension to class issues.

42. *Akit*, 31 May 1995.

43. On 28 February 1997, the National Security Council undertook a "mild intervention" by issuing a decree designating political Islam as the top national security concern in Turkey, and warned the government to take more radical measures against the rising threat of Islamic reactionism (*irtica*). In succeeding months, the military held meetings with various governmental, judicial and non-governmental organizations to brief them on the "Islamic threat" in Turkey. Several measures were taken against the rising influence of political Islam, which eventually lead to the closure of Refah Party, the removal from office of Istanbul's mayor Erdoğan, and banning of the top leaders of Refah Party from active politics for five years. The remainder of the party organization convened under a new Party, Fazilet (Virtue), which again won the mayoralty at the local elections in 1999 in Istanbul, but sharply diverted from its previous antagonistic stance toward secularism to take a compromising position and endorse the secularist principles of the Republic.

44. *Milliyet*, 30 May 1997.