

Understanding Inward-Looking Nationalism: An Instrumentalist Approach in Analyzing the Discourse of The People's Alliance in Turkey¹

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Abstract

Many theories, approaches, definitions have been laid down for the understanding of nationalism, which simultaneously produces many questions to answer later on. One of the recent debates is the 'inward looking' nature of nationalism. Whether it is the recent pandemic, Brexit, or alarming rates of Islamophobia in the West with an identitarian populist flavor, the issue pertains to *nationalism*, or for some, *nativism*. Contemporaneously with an 'inward looking' instrumentalist nature, it uncovers new debates arising out of the conflicts in today's nation-states. One of these appears to be the ruling coalition known as the 'People's Alliance' (de facto alliance between the Justice and Development party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) and the National Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*) in Turkey thanks to its nationalist rhetoric, yet with an 'inward looking' direction. The deepening of polarization is causing a mutual fear, mistrust, and antipathy among the people in Turkey. As the coalition aims to re-invigorate the nation, its opponents are claiming it is a dissemination of hatred. This political rift is deepening via the political discourse and atmosphere. The goal of this paper is to inquire into this via a critical discourse analysis. The study analyzes the discourse of the party leaders forming the People's Alliance. This discourse displays an inward-looking nationalist rhetoric, circling around three prominent issues: the proclamation of opponents as traitors via a blame shifting rhetoric; the protection of the fate of the coalition as the savior of the country; and finally, the determination of who adheres to the nation or not via the native and national (*yerli ve milli*) debate.

Keywords

Nationalism, Inward-Looking, Identity Politics, Instrumentalism, People's Alliance.

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Introduction

The main goal of this paper is to understand how party as well as leadership politics reconfigure and instrumentalize the modern phenomenon of nationalism via *inwardness* or by being *inward-looking*. Inward-looking nationalism is often associated with “economic nationalism” or “commercial nationalism” (Berend 2022) which is mostly about protectionism and state interventionism. However, in this study inwardness indicates something beyond economic interests, a reclaim and rescue of nationalism from the rivals within, and to utilize it for that matter. It is important to stress that a great number of scholars (Kedourie 1966; Hobsbawm 1992; Breuilly 1994; Calhoun 1997; Smith 1998; Gellner 2006) have attempted to define and re-define nationalism. Besides these valuable definitions and explanations, it has become an important issue to understand this modern construct via party politics. According to party leadership, the nation is evaluated as the mass that has the characteristics that will enable the party leader to come to power, and in the eyes of the leader the mass needs to be conditioned to express what the leader wants to hear (or otherwise any opposition or disagreement with the leadership becomes treason, as recently witnessed in Turkish politics). The instrumentalist nature of nationalism in electoral rhetoric is no new issue, but its presence outside of elections still requires examination. Since, the results, appears to de-stabilize politics, via polarizing the nation. As from the very beginning, the party and/or leadership starts dismantling the nation. At this point, the question comes to mind of how valuable it is to polarize the nation, to gain and regain power via the nationalist discourse. For Hobsbawm it is “... the product of a form of social engineering designed to divert people from their real interests” (1990, 9-11). For Brass, the answer is the “instrumentalist nature of nationalism”, for Delanty (1995) “when cultural ideas become part of political identity building processes, they can become ideologies (1991, 5). Or, for Gilman, “identities can also take on a pathological form when they are constructed against a category of otherness.” (1985, 5) All these assumptions are true in the name of constructing and re-constructing political identities via a re-configuration of nationalism. The states, in their actions, certainly require legitimizing ideologies and nationalism here becomes very handy. In the West, the issue circles around “the immigrant problem.” For instance, Brexit caused a serious rift among the parties in the UK, between the ones who wanted to leave as well as remain, evoking a “campaign mobilizing a different and less happy story of Britain” (Calhoun 2017, 61) finally leading to the break-up of the country from the EU. The inward-looking direction of nationalism (a clash between Scottish, Irish and English nationalisms) was fueled by Brexit, resulting in a blame-shift rhetoric among the parties. Furthermore, as Calhoun

stresses, "...between cultural definitions of a mainly English national whole and the legal unity of the UK is a further complication" (2017, 58). Besides Brexit, the immigrant problem is haunting the European states. Especially in Western Europe, there is a popular opinion of "immigrants are the source of all the problems" rhetoric leading to the debate what Betz calls "politics of selective exclusion" (2007, 34). Parallel to this opinion comes along an inward-looking questioning. This questioning leads to an issue of otherness capturing the inclusion vs. exclusion debate. However, in the case of Turkey, which is what this study attempts to understand, the situation differs. Since, there is no mistreatment towards the immigrants. Rather than ethnic or cultural, it is a political marginalization towards any political opponent. Similar to the above-mentioned countries, Turkey is also a country receiving intense immigration, however the People's Alliance's inward-looking nationalism is not aimed at those who are different, but at those who stand apart politically, which is the main reason why nationalism is instrumentalized in the first place. This leads to alienation not between the native and non-native, but alienation causing a deep polarization among the natives.

And, as the current polarization develops in Turkey, the issue becomes centered on the nationalist ideology. Recently, there is not one party but a coalition ruling the country; as a result, nationalism becomes an important ground for bringing these parties together. During the talks, before the coalition between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the National Movement Party (MHP), everyone thought that this would lead to the MHP to become more conservative, however the outcome was the opposite, it is the AKP, the one that focused on becoming a *state-centered* nationalist, with an instrumentalist agenda. Both the AKP and the MHP are rightist parties with a degree of conservatism, and this common ground brought them together, right after the coup attempt in 2016. But, more importantly, this alliance brought up new questions on the substance of nationalism. Since then, the political rhetoric has hardened thanks to the contribution of party leaders (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Devlet Bahçeli) of the People's Alliance. This raises the question of how politicians (re)-define the 'nation.' From a different point of view, in the eyes of the politician, the nation stems from the traits of the ones who enable them to come to power. This brings the debate to the instrumentalist nature of nationalism (Brass 1991). It is important here to stress that clearly the People's Alliance aims for political absorption as well as mobilization in Turkey, rather than cultural and/or ethnic discrimination or assimilation. Whether this is called "nationalism by choice" (Thuman 2020), "victimhood nationalism" (Lerner 2020), or "pragmatic nationalism" (Zhao 2005; Antunes 2010), they all encompass the instrumental nature of nationalism.

The main goal of this study is to reveal how the nationalist phenomenon is instrumentalized by the alliance for the sake of securing the continuity of the regime. The paper first inquiries into the work of Paul Brass, to understand how nationalism is instrumentalized via a theoretical discussion, and then moves on to understanding this via a critical discourse analysis, through the rhetoric of both parties forming the People's Alliance. This is because both the *instrumentalism of nationalism* and the *critical discourse analysis* (CDA) is related to *power*. The former is mostly about "politics and that politics is about power" (Breuilly 1994, 1) while the latter focuses on group power depending on whether they control the acts and minds of others (Van Dijk 2015) as well as how power is hidden in discourse. This political discourse is measured through "simplification, repetition and concreteness" (Breuilly 1982, 344), which are all important aspects on how nationalism is popularized as well as utilized via leadership rhetoric. Since political allegiance is quite strong in both of these parties, any attempt to question or criticize the party leadership from within or the outside will eventually turn into a target of this inward oriented configuration.

This study attempts to understand how nationalism is reclaimed from those who do not align themselves to the People's Alliance, which has an internal focus rather than external. Since, it is the two abovementioned party leaders dominating the political atmosphere in Turkey, it is vital to focus on the discourse of these two leaders to understand how they manage to grasp the masses via the polarization they create. The party programs, leaflets, or manifestos etc. are not included, and the focus is solely on the discourse of the party leaders. Since both of the leaders mobilize the masses via rallies (not all gatherings could be called a rally, however even a welcoming or opening ceremony has the potential of turning into one) where they find it easy to bond directly with the electorate.

The Elite Instrumentalism of Nationalism

There are a great number of theories attempting to explain nationalism. For instance, Frederick Hertz (1944, 21-4) argues that it is "a political ambition to secure the unity of the nation in relation to potentially disruptive forces within its own borders, and to establish its autonomy in relation to external rivals." Or for Znaniecki, it is "the notion of defense against common enemies" (1952, 8-10). All these arguments do shed light on how to evaluate the political motivation behind the People's Alliance. This brings the issue to what this present study aims to question via the political discourse displayed

by the People's alliance from its very beginning and the way the nationalist ideology is instrumentalized in the name of a power grab.

One of these theories belongs to Paul Brass and his inquiry into nationalism via elite competition in modern societies. Paul Brass argues "the study of ethnicity and nationalism ... the study of the process by which elites and counter elites within ethnic groups select aspects of the group's culture, attach new value and meaning to them, and use them as symbols to mobilize the group, to defend its interests, and to compete with other groups" (1991, 75). Social, cultural practices, values, myths, traditions all become political tools in the hands of the elites who compete for political and economic interests. All these become symbols used to create a political identity. In the Turkish case, with reference to the Peoples' alliance, the aim is to create a conservative Turkish nationalist identity for the sake of securing the power within the People's alliance. While the MHP mostly asserts nationalism, it is the AKP, who determines the content which brings us to the usefulness of *politics of other* for power maximization. Brass summarizes this process as "... an all-embracing and comprehensive system of thought, a programme for the future and a political doctrine for the mobilization of the masses" (1991, 5). Instead of "identity being defined by a sense of belongingness and solidarity arising out of shared life-worlds, it becomes focused on opposition to an *Other*" (1991, 5). Nationalism with its symbols, slogans and any other material used, makes it a simple way of creating political identity as well as the most risk-free political positioning. The general consensus is that it is treated as a common and untouchable political positioning and not a subject of direct criticism. All political parties must consider national sensitivities and priorities no matter whether they lean to the right or left. Nationalism being such a valuable source as well as armor makes it open for instrumentalizing.

Paul Brass' (1991) theoretical approach is based on three pillars, in his words *struggles*. The first is about ethnic identities and their variability, which mostly depends on the control of the resources in an ethnic group in the name of receiving and exerting power. The second pillar is based on the competition shaped by the political and economic environment, and this process occurs upon elite competition between different ethnic groups again for rights and privileges. Thirdly, the relationship between the ethnic groups and the state comes to fore; how ethnic groups define themselves within this competitive environment; how they dominate; how they maintain and extend their control as well as maximize wealth, safety, and power (1991, 247). Brass claims that "competition between political/economic/religious elites is what paves the way for the rise of nationalism and ethnic conflicts under certain circumstances,

which emanate from the wider political and economic environments”. It is important to stress that; Brass warns that “... the sets of struggles intersect in different ways at different times, but it is possible to specify particular patterns of elite competition within and between ethnic groups, the role of the state in each pattern, and the potential consequences of each pattern for ethnic identity formation and political mobilization” (1991, 247). At this point, it is important to stress that both political mobilization and political absorption in Turkey remains the main inquiry of this paper, for that matter, and how nationalism is instrumentalized. The *State* as an apparatus, shifts in both practices, strategies as well as policies due to the change in governments. It is clear, that the political elites both with coalitions or alliances come together in the name of ruling and controlling the state and the nation for that matter. And, if a political party seizes authority for quite some time, it starts to institutionalize, and disseminate its ideas to other institutions, whether this be the bureaucracy, the military, or even to the judiciary. With this type of institutionalization, the government starts imposing the political identity of the party upon masses whether in support of the party or not. In this process “identities become pathological once they take on the character of a dominant ideology and the individual can no longer chose his or her identity” (Delanty 1995, 5). At this point, the groups resisting, opposing, or even criticizing the party in power become the *Other*. The construction of identity is strengthened by opposing the Other, rather than by sharing and extending the ideology of the political party. The establishment of this type of identity, as argued in this study, is led by the People’s Alliance in Turkey. The leadership represents the national will, it believes it has the capacity for creating the common good and does not need to be questioned and/or criticized. Since Brass argues “... reification of the State is part of the process by which dominant groups in society establish either their right to rule or their right to compete for power and control over the institutions of legitimate authority. The state is said to express the persisting interests, goals, and values of the nation.” (Brass 1991, 271-2) And in de-legitimizing the opposition, and leaving very limited space for political action, the aim is to create new collaborations as well as to reward already existing ones. In his words “Elites who seek to gain control over the state or who have succeeded in doing so must either suppress or control alliances with other elites” (Brass 1991, 275). The case of the creation of the People’s Alliance developed in this way to secure the control of the state, right after the failed coup leading to internal turmoil in the state.

Groups in conflict that confine their struggles to control over the existing institutions rather than to their overthrow and replacement compete for the right to carry forward those interests, goals, and values or to articulate new

ones, but always for the benefit of the nation as a whole and in the interests of the State as the political form of the nation (Brass 1991, 271-2).

Brass argues that “only under certain conditions do cultural disparities between different ethnic groups transform into bases for political alienation.” For Smith “... the form of the state comes out of cultural incompatibility of its plural parts, this leads to the members of cultural groups finding it difficult acting as citizens in a common political enterprise, as a result the stronger group uses the state as an instrument of domination over the others” (1974, 86-8). This leads to the politics of other, in which certain groups become targets of the state, like an enemy within. This issue will be analyzed below under the title survival. However, it is important to stress how nationalism comes into play at this point; as it is not the different ethnic, or cultural backgrounds that matters in the current Turkish system, but the political (dis)loyalty that groups pursue. As Brass puts it “... government’s decision to collaborate with a particular leadership or elite may be made before any political mobilization takes place and may prevent it or channel it in ways that either preserve an existing sense of community among a group of people or forestall its development” (Brass 1991, 254). A great suspicion arises out of state institutions in order to silence and eliminate the divergencies. Brass summarizes this as “...which persons are rightfully members of the group are matters of frequent concern within it” (1991, 277). This argument developed by Brass is the main problematic. The deep polarization witnessed within the Turkish nation, is a result of the politics of ambivalence pursued by the People’s Alliance. Whether this polarization is embedded in a rhetoric such as “second independence war,” “economic independence war,” “speculation war,” or even a “bloodless war,” as a result of the unstable economic situation and the rise of inflation in Turkey, the issue becomes one of an internal ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ debate.

This brings the issue to another problem introduced by Smith (1974) as “cultural incompatibility.” Although not in the first years of ruling the country, the AKP has slowly projected social conservatism with a nationalist sentiment, interfering in the daily lives of people both in terms of social and cultural aspects, building this on a dichotomy of old vs. new Turkey. The Justice and Development Party has disseminated its political views not just to the masses, but also imposed them on the bureaucracy. This was mainly about imposing its conservative and religious principles not just to the party members, but to the ones working in bureaucracy, and silencing or removing the ones who object. Brass summarizes this as “Political parties as well as the leadership comes into play if they are in

government for quite some time. Since they start to develop their own bureaucracy and cadres which counterweight or replace the already existing civilian and military bureaucracy” (Brass 1991, 28). This has led to a “Cultural incompatibility” defined as “making it difficult for members of different cultural groups to act as citizens in a common political enterprise. As a result, the dominant group starts using the state as an instrument over the others” (Brass 1991, 252). Hereby, the ones exposed to such behavior either blend into the new system or avoid it, eventually becoming the new *Other*.

In the light of Brass’ theoretical inquiry, the study will proceed through the “processes of ideological package” (1982, 344) which John Breuilly breaks down into *simplification*, *repetition*, and *concreteness*. These steps help us understand the relation between the motivation as well as the mobilization of how discourse works in embracing the people, and to evaluate the mindset of the People’s Alliance. Critical discourse analysis helps here to understand the power-related rhetoric of the political leadership and the way nationalism contributes to their political agenda since the nationalist rhetoric is an important strategy for regimes to secure power.

The ‘Inwardness’ of the Nationalist Discourse of The People’s Alliance

The “inward-looking syndrome” (Daianu 2021) comes under different forms such as indigenization, exceptionalism or parochialism which occurs in different parts of the world. Some political circles are concerned by this, such as French President Emmanuel Macron calls it “inward-looking nationalist selfishness,” (April 17 2018) or ex-Prime Minister Gordon Brown downgrades it as “to be truly British is to be outward and not inward-looking” (May 13 2019) while other politicians are trying to gain power by utilizing it. One example is witnessed in Turkey, and for quite some time this inward-looking nationalist rhetoric is pursued by the People’s Alliance as a main strategy. President Erdoğan has ruled the country for nearly twenty years, first as a prime minister (2003) and then as a president (2014) and remains as the leading (for some charismatic) figure of recent Turkish political life. In the first years of the AKP’s reign, the party did reflect a liberal nationalist model. However, when it realized that it had instrumentally owned this label, it returned to its islamo-conservative background, recently even hardened via its alliance with the MHP, known as an idealist (*ülküçü*) movement. As Thumann puts it, “alliances with nationalists do not lead to the moderation of the nationalists but to a radicalization of their moderate allies” (2020, 8). In 2013, Erdoğan himself stated that “We are a government that has put

all kinds of nationalisms under our feet” (February 13 2013). Currently, this has become a forerunner in politics of indigenization. The common ground between AKP and MHP is Islamic civilizationism based on anti-western tendencies as well as rhetoric of the native and the national (*yerli ve milli*). In a speech delivered by Bahçeli, he clearly states that “what do you want from the beliefs of the Muslim Turkish Nation? We will not tolerate the hostility towards Islam under the cover of fighting fundamentalism.” (March 30 2021) As understood from the words of Bahçeli, the People’s Alliance sits on two pillars, namely religion and nationalism. Bahçeli has stated clearly “The Turkish nation has never been indifferent to those who are in trouble, those who are waiting for help, those who are looking for a solution, those who cry for help, we have opened our doors and arms wide to the Syrian refugees.” (April 19 2022). Similar speeches are delivered by President Erdoğan “It does not matter whether it is Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq or Iran, we are members of a culture that knows best what the situation to be an immigrant and ansar is.” [... Our door is open; we will continue to host them. We will not throw them into the hands of murderers” (May 9 2022). Realized from these speeches, the People’s Alliance approves those coming from outside, as Erdoğan stresses “We did not send back anyone who took refuge in our country. While countries with more resources than ours set quotas for refugees, expressed in numbers, we welcomed everyone without discrimination of race, religion, language or origin” (December 17, 2016). This discourse blurs the border between the insiders and outsiders. A political maneuver is pursued to integrate the outsiders into the nation, yet to some extent again with a political maneuver, to create political polarization which excludes the insiders. This is a prominent example of the instrumentalist nature of nationalism. One of the policies of the Alliance is to grant citizenship to the immigrants, expressed by Erdoğan “I believe that among our brothers (referring the Syrian refugees), there are those who want to become citizens of the Republic of Turkey. There are steps taken by our Ministry of Internal Affairs regarding this issue” (July 3, 2016). So far 237,995 people have been granted citizenship (Minister of Interior, November 9, 2023) making this an important debate in Turkish politics, mostly voiced by the opposition parties. However, it is interesting to see that the People’s Alliance never took ownership of the immigration issue and still defends its open-door policy. As understood by the above quotation of Erdoğan, the immigrants are evaluated as “brothers”; with the only common ground of religion. The refugees are excluded from the rhetoric of nativism and nationalism, and this is quite interesting for an Alliance that relates every issue with state-security, yet remains mostly silent on immigration.

It is the political atmosphere which changed immediately after the attempted coup d'état in 2016. This attempt started bringing both the AKP and MHP in forming a national front, later named the People's Alliance. There is clearly more to argue on this clustering. Since even before the alliance, the politics of both parties did overlap on certain occasions. The parties forming the People's Alliance came together right after the failed coup attempt. In order to take some precautionary measures towards internal and external threats, the parties agreed on announcing a state of emergency. After the failed coup attempt the parties in the Grand National Assembly agreed on holding a meeting named 'Democracy and Martyrs Rally,' although a great number of parties did attend the meeting, it was this rally that brought both AKP and MHP even closer. As this paper attempts to argue, the nationalist discourse of AKP and MHP became blended within one another with the operations of the Turkish army in Syria (Al Bab, Afrin etc.) and later followed by full support for military action led by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabagh. The People's Alliance started merging these wars within internal politics, as if these were not outside Turkish territory, but instead against Turkey itself, and the enemy lay within the country. In the words of President Erdoğan "as long as the nation continues its struggle with this faith, belief, determination and this sense, even though the seven heifers (powers) come together, with the mercy of Allah, will not be able to hold us back one step." (September 29, 2016) These kinds of statements delivered by both Erdoğan and Bahçeli indicate how language and discourse can be 'weaponized' in politics. This is because, when the speeches are analyzed in depth, they contain wordings like 'protection,' 'fight,' 'security,' 'overcome,' 'deceive' etc. These are certainly used for purpose, and this purpose is to set forth power via a nationalist agenda. The goal is to spread fear among the masses, which will afterwards be introduced to its cure, namely nationalism. The development of this rhetoric of the People's Alliance dates to its establishment back in 2017.

With the referendum in 2017, Turkey voted for a shift from parliamentary to a presidential system. As a result of the referendum the people voted 51.41 % 'Yes' for a presidential system. This meant alliances had to be built both for securing the presidential post and gaining a parliamentary majority within the parliament. This pushed AKP to form an alliance with the MHP. On the other hand, the Republican Party formed an alliance with the Good Party (İYİ Parti). This process pushed both alliances towards nationalist agendas with the questions of what is the programme to be followed? What are the ingredients of this nationalist package? How is it instrumentalized? First, the leaders of the Alliance aimed to convince the people to support the common goals of the Alliance altogether. The slogans used by the People's Alliance

are “National decision for survival, stability for the people,” “The People’s Alliance, the mind of the nation, the guarantee of national survival,” “A spirit of national reconciliation,” “Nation first, homeland first.” As clearly seen, the words selected by the Alliance seeks to establish a perception of themselves as a savior of the nation-state, the Alliance as the only protector of the national interest; as if the Alliance is the only representative of the silent majority and the national will.

This clearly leads to a deep polarization of the nation in the first place. To better understand this, it is important to analyze speeches delivered by the leaders of the People’s Alliance via a discourse analysis. The importance of using the CDA in this inquiry is that it helps understand how power is contextualized in discourse. T. Van Dijk summarizes this as “if controlling the contexts and structures of text and talk is a first major form of the exercise of power, controlling people’s minds through such discourse is an indirect but fundamental way to reproduce dominance and hegemony” (2015, 472). It is important to understand how the leadership of the two parties forming the alliance make use of nationalism to exaggerate their language. As mentioned earlier the study will proceed through a critical discourse analysis via the three steps of popularity of nationalism introduced by Breuilly (1982) as *simplification*, *repetition* and *concreteness*. These will help us understand how the People’s Alliance instrumentalizes nationalism via its rhetoric in a critical discourse analysis. Because, whether it be ‘national will,’ ‘national interest,’ or ‘national welfare’ the People’s alliance aims to meld all these into a brand value of nationalism with the aim of a market strategy in fulfilling the national interest.

Simplification rests on certain clichés and stereotypes, such as the process of labelling the masses as being either a patriot or traitor and issuing a blame-shifting rhetoric onto the ones who are believed to betray the nation. In political discourse, these people are labelled as either permanent enemies, or internal collaborators working in service of fulfilling foreign interests and goals. This leads to a process of demonization of out groups, whether they be minorities, migrants, opposition groups, NGOs, or parties. The referendum on April 16th 2017 for a presidential system was rallied by the Alliances and even deepened the polarization, when R.T. Erdoğan announced “the April 16 referendum will be a response to the July 15th coup, it will be a clear opposition to July 15 and, this has nothing to do with the right or left, the ones who say No to the referendum are clearly located next to July 15th.” (February 12, 2017) This is a clear sign of mistrust becoming an integral factor of Turkish politics. Erdoğan later accused the “citizens who would say No, in the referendum, of consent

to evil and consent to evil is evil,” he argued (April 15, 2017). Back then, the Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım made a similar debut: “Why do we say ‘Yes’? The PKK says ‘No’, that’s why we say ‘Yes’, FETÖ says ‘No’, we say ‘Yes’ for that matter, HDP says ‘No’, that’s why we say ‘Yes’.” (Yıldırım 2017) At this point, this is where the Alliance drives a strict polarization. This polarization deepens via “political sectarianism” or “political tribalism” losing ground for empathy. This is called an affective polarization in which different political segments are missing a “national conversation in which they live in echo-chambers where they listen to affirmative views and filter out other voices that may challenge their beliefs” (Erdoğan 2020). This has led to the People’s Alliance “trapping itself in a self-engineering echo chamber, where the same words are repeated for the attention of the nationalists” (Pierini 2017). For President Erdoğan, the problem stems from the opposition, as he stated “the biggest problem of this country is the opposition.” (March 6 2022) Evaluating the opposition as a ‘problem’ is to make them seem like internal enemies rather than political rivals. Erdoğan, in a speech back in 2017, summarizes the issue as “those who have a bad record of democracy due to their understanding of doing politics despite the nation in their past, have now taken the matter one step further and started to make politics against the nation.” (July 1 2017) As these examples reflect, the People’s Alliance embeds power in their discourse to show how capable they are in their fight against the evil.

Similar words carried out by Bahçeli reflect the views of the Alliance as “The People’s Alliance is based on the magnificent will of the Turkish nation. The People’s Alliance has been blended with the legacy of Turkish history. The 7th of August Yenikapı spirit has been covered with the *acquis*. It is consolidated with the victory of the April 16th referendum and strengthened by the June 24th elections. The People’s Alliance is a barrier against betrayal, resistance and occupation, it is a strong bulwark against domestic and foreign evil fronts” (April 20 2019). Mentioned earlier, this type of discourse helps to keep nationalist sentiments which constantly remind of an *Other* alive. Furthermore, to project the alliance as standing on firm ground against all kinds of enemies. A similar speech was delivered by Erdoğan in clashing the Nation Alliance, which for he labelled as ‘Malady’ (Zillet), meaning wicked, mean, and unworthy. In his words “the Nation Alliance aims to carry the components of terrorist organizations to the municipal councils” (February 27 2019). “...Muslim Turkish children will defeat children of the Byzantines at every front and level” (Bahçeli May 29 2020). Like Erdoğan, Bahçeli also calls the Nation Alliance as ‘Malady’. In his words, “People’s Alliance means survival, ‘Malady’ means trouble” (January 8 2019). As understood from these statements, both the AKP and MHP are willing to polarize the nation aiming

to legitimize their power and consolidate their electorate. In doing this, they are problematizing their opponents not as rivals, as would be in a normal democracy, but stereotyping them as internal enemies. Once the coding is accepted by the masses, it is carried out to be embraced via legitimization on the ground as forces to be defeated.

The repetition of certain acts depends on the how the survival narrative is constantly repeated at an aggressive level by the political elite both from AKP and MHP. In embracing the masses, the two partners of the Alliance, make great use of the survival of the nation rhetoric; that they are the only ones who can fight against all kinds of trouble. Their militaristic rhetoric stems from having the ability to eliminate all threats posed towards the nation. That is why nearly all the problems or risks the Turkish nation is confronting nowadays are a result of certain plots prepared by the west. The Alliance attempts to convince the masses that the only force to combat these threats remains the People's Alliance. The leaders of the Alliance believe that whether it be the de-valuation of the Turkish Lira, protection of the blue homeland, supporting Azerbaijan in its conflict with regards to the Nagorno-Karabakh, dealing with terrorist groups in and out of the State, decline of the moral and religious values, are all related to the issue of survival. However, the Alliance never mentions the migration issue in this context. According to the opposition parties, it is directly related with survival due to the demographic change the nation will undergo in the upcoming years. Although the opposition strictly criticizes uncontrolled migration into Turkey and denotes it as the biggest obstacle facing the nation, the People's Alliance hardly answers or questions these problems related with the wave of migration. For the People's Alliance, the issue of refugees is instrumentalized under two aspects. The first is to use the refugees as a threat against Europe. Secondly, to receive electoral support from these people, at least from the ones who have obtained citizenship. It is surprising to see that every issue somehow is related to survival apart from the refugees, in which the People's Alliance prefers silence, even at the expense of angering their own electorate.

Even during the local elections, the Alliance made great use of the issue of survival as Erdoğan argued "Even if they attack our borders, our flag, our azan (call for prayer), or our economy, they will not be able to bring this nation to its knees. That's why we say March 31 is the election of survival" (March 12 2019). In support of this rhetoric, similar statements were given by Bahçeli as well, for instance, "They are standing in front of us and pointing their fingers at our country. They are trying to drag us into chaos. We have two options. We will either perish or call to survival and confront the trouble" (March 12

2019). The leaders keep these issues alive, since the Alliance seeks to invoke them in the minds of the masses, and to store them in their consciousness. The representatives of the People's Alliance renew their arguments in a blame shifting rhetoric with a denial of guilt, whether this is in an interview, a public statement, at a rally, or even on social media. As stated clearly in the speeches of the leaders: "The People's Alliance is Turkey's only hope, its only guarantee against the world, our relationship with our president (speaking of Erdoğan) is so consistent, balanced, uncalculating, principled, and based on mutual respect that enemy heads cannot understand" (Bahçeli November 24 2020). Or a similar statement delivered by Erdoğan: "we didn't surrender to the coup makers, and stood against the tanks with our bare hands, we will not surrender to the economic hit man" or "with the help of Allah and the support of our nation, we will emerge from this economic war of independence with victory" (Erdoğan November 22 2021). When compared to Erdoğan, Bahçeli delivers sharper statements like "we are the heirs of a heroic past. Thank God, this spirit has resurrected and started to overthrow the scarecrows one by one. No crazy will be able to chain our national existence" (January 8 2022). Or playing the polarization card in society, Bahçeli states "Havas, that is, rotten people who consider themselves separate and superior to the people, are not behind today compared to yesterday, on the contrary, they are at the heart of every disgrace, every plot, every provocation, every conspiracy" (January 8 2022). In support of this statement, a similar statement comes from Erdoğan as "They want there to be a coup attempt and democracy to disappear. They want terrorist organizations to attack us, everywhere to be covered in fire and blood, and the peace of the nation to disappear. They want to use the conditions of the epidemic to force the people run out of patience..." (January 8 2022). As seen from these statements, the issue of survival is strictly underlined within the context of power, and that the only bloc to exert this power remains the People's Alliance.

Finally, concreteness remains as the backbone of all of what is argued up to this point. The existence of the People's Alliance is about concreteness in the first place, since it involves existence and the manifestation of power. This power is embedded for the project of what the People's Alliance calls 'new Turkey.' Making a clear-cut distinction of 'old vs. new' Turkey, the Alliance pushes its arguments towards creating native and national (*yerli ve milli*) manifestations. Developing a strong discourse to assert conservative Turkish nationalism, gathering the mass around a dominant faithful Muslim community. The Alliance aims to create a binary distinction between the old, negative, and undervalued past of Turkey with that of a new, positive and overvalued future for Turkey. However, must here state that, this "native-national" motto does

not include an exclusive type of ethnic nationalism projected onto those outside of Turkishness or Turkish identity. It is more of a political one, and one that is instrumentalized for the sake of securing the regime. The aim is to create a political identity evolving out of this political culture. Its constituents are to keep up solidarity within the Alliance by representing the interests of the nation, with a total sum of reflecting the national will and national interest. This type of discourse is based on recalling the past, praising the Alliance, and targeting certain groups or issues. Every statement made by the leaders of the Alliance includes the reference to “native-national” rhetoric. For instance, Erdoğan states “I hope we will establish native and national opposition as well” (December 24 2020). In another statement, hoping to pull the Good Party (*İYİ Parti*) to his side, Erdoğan mentions “for a party we view as native and national, it would not be appropriate to walk hand in hand with terror organizations” (August 7 2020). From politics to industry there are many examples in which Erdoğan speaks about creating native and national projects, native and national technology, native and national production, etc. The aim is to project the Alliance as national while labelling the rest as non-national, or anti-national. The aim is to create a binary between *us* who stands for the People’s Alliance, and *them* which stands for the rest. In one of his recent speeches, Bahçeli states, “Thank God, we are the Muslim Turkish Nation that unites these two germs with wisdom. We do not bring our Turkishness or our Muslimness to discussion. The road map of our national politics has been drawn with history, determined by national culture, embellished with reason, deepened by morality, and balanced with faith” (March 2, 2021). Clearly understood from this statement, both partners of the People’s alliance agree on a blend of religion and nationalism in defining who adheres to the Turkish national community. Islam is an important aspect for identity construction in Turkey, mostly displayed by AKP, although recently the same views are constantly shared by the MHP within the People’s Alliance, gradually making it inseparable from Turkishness. For Bahçeli, “after the national consciousness, which is the will and determination of the nation to exist, is alive and resilient, no separatist, no domestic or foreign enemy will be able to operate on us or achieve their malignant and treacherous goals. Assurance is our steered national unity and brotherhood.” (March 2 2021) As seen in the abovementioned statement delivered by Bahçeli, the People’s Alliance is the key to all problems confronted in recent Turkish politics. Whether it be from inside or out, the People’s Alliance is asserted as the only defender of the nation. Repeating and asserting once again that the power to stay strong and upright lies within the People’s Alliance. MHP is accused of being a fascist party by the opposition groups because of such statements. And, in confronting these

blames, Bahçeli has stated “he who calls the MHP fascist is the sworn enemy of Turkishness and Turkey” (March 24 2021). At certain times MHP does harden its rhetoric with such statements, but the goal in giving these speeches is to convince the masses that power is embedded in the MHP as well as in the People’s Alliance. For instance, another statement made by Bahçeli “Scavengers are not allowed. Those who expect a fight are not tolerated. Those who wait for a conflict, those who look for a conflict have no chance” (Bahçeli April 20 2019) has an outright message of projecting the protectionist side of the Alliance. Despite not wanting a conflictual environment, when analyzed, the language of the MHP leader usually includes a conflict-ridden rhetoric. A recent debate is on the statement made by the retired admirals on the Montreux Convention, which Bahçeli calls “a black stain in the history of the Turkish democracy” and evaluates the statement as “a weapon directed at the national will and, that Turkey is at risk of survival.” (Bahçeli April 6 2021) A similar statement was given by President Erdoğan condemning the admirals statement as “malevolent” and “coup implication.” (Erdoğan April 5 2021) Every critic, questioning or disagreement with the People’s Alliance, is evaluated as a challenge by the partners of the alliance. This challenge is repositioned as the Other for the alliance, an Other which must be eliminated for the sake of the regime.

Conclusion

As debated throughout the paper, discourse has become an important field of study in politics. And, with re-nationalization processes occurring all around the world, the discussion circles around the role of nationalism within this discourse. In the light of the arguments carried out in this study, the analysis of the People’s Alliance’s nationalist language rests on three prominent discourses. The first is the exertion of political intolerance towards the opposition. In following such a policy, the Alliance aims to eliminate all critics and questioning by projecting its power. This is simplified via the ordinary us vs. them dichotomy. Power resides in ‘us’ which is the People’s Alliance and must be asserted towards the ‘them.’ This exertion of power is masked by nationalist political rhetoric, where it is instrumentalized by associating every issue with nationalism, under the cover of ‘state-security.’ This prepares a solid ground for the People’s Alliance’s second discourse for developing moral superiority over the rest. The aim is to convince the electorate that the alliance is the sole and sincere reflection of the nation’s morality and will, while every other formation is an illusion. The purpose here is to develop an emotional attachment with the masses via moral codes, since the People’s Alliance is

born out of the people, not born from a group of elites. Furthermore, the discourse used by the members of the People's Alliance covers a certain degree of political distancing. In this discourse, the alliance seeks to consolidate its supporters, which, according to the polls, is in decline, to support the Alliance further. The distance is drawn from the debate of new vs. old Turkey. The building of the new Turkey depends on distancing Turkey from its past with special reference to the early years of the Republic, its rulers (whether it is civil or military), its routines of policymaking, etc. This is evaluated as the only solution for Turkey to leap forward under the People's Alliance.

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